



Bob Brawdy

Josh Fonner, left, and Drew Daves are both strong candidates for the quarterback position this year with the Richland Bombers. Watch a video at tricityherald.com/video.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Richland Bombers aim to reload as it pursues state title defense

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RICHLAND, WA

Gone are the big-game guys like Adam Weissenfels, Cade Jensen, Josh Mendoza, Ryan Piper and Jax Lee — the core that led the Richland Bombers to a Class 4A state title and a 14-0 record last season.

Have no fear, there is another crop of athletes who waited, learned from last year's group and is ready to ignite another football season at Richland.

"It's a special opportunity to

watch the guys before you," said senior receiver Drew Daves.

"We have a strong tradition here with the culture we have built. Guys graduate, but we still bring the culture.

"We reload, not rebuild."

Coach Mike Neidhold, in his 11th season as the Bombers' head coach, has a habit of playing a lot of guys throughout the season, which helps prepare the next wave of players.

"Things will be different because those kids are gone," Neidhold said.

"But we aren't starting over. We are going to have eight re-

ceivers who can start on any team in the league. We will have issues on the O-line, but we will be fine.

"When we lose seniors, we have guys who can step in. When it's their turn, they have game experience because we put them in."

QUARTERBACK QUANDARY

With Jensen graduating, Daves (6-foot, 165 pounds) and fellow senior Josh Fonner (6-3, 170) were sharing duties throughout the spring and fall practice. Fonner has risen to the forefront and will start Friday

against Chiawana in the Bombers' season opener.

"There are no egos here," Neidhold said. "Competition is healthy and vital to our program."

Fonner transferred to Richland from Hanford last year but did not play football.

"I broke my foot my sophomore season and played eight games on it because we didn't know it was broken," Fonner said.

"I had to have surgery and sat out last season. It was a good decision."

Fonner got together with some of the receivers in the offseason, and come spring he picked up the schemes and learned the offense.

"Drew had the advantage of being in the system before," Fonner said. "He is a really good athlete and a great receiver."

For Daves, he's OK with Fonner taking the quarterback job. Though if the job would have fallen to him, that would have been OK too.

"I think we are in good hands

either way," Daves said. "Josh has done a good job coming in and being a leader. He has a good arm. It's a luxury we didn't know we were going to have."

NAMES TO REMEMBER

Aric Davison, a 6-3, 275-pound senior, anchors the offensive line. He already has verbally committed to Utah State. Senior Geoffrey Robinson (6-0, 235) also returns. The rest of the line isn't quite as large, but Neidhold is optimistic it will get the job done.

"I spent 20 years as an O-line coach," Neidhold said. "You can never have too many O-line guys. We are mindful of what we have. In high school football, you can get away with being a little undersized if you play with a big heart."

Richland will have a solid corps of linebackers with seniors Trent Brown (5-8, 185) and Brice Weaver (5-6, 185), who both have enlisted in the military. They will be joined by juniors Josh White (6-1, 185) and newcomer Dawson Palm (6-0, 185).

"Dawson showed up from the lacrosse team," Neidhold said. "He fit right in. Coach (DJ) Search really likes these guys."

LOOKING AT THE MCC

Nothing ever stays the same in high school sports, and Neidhold, for one, is excited to see what this season brings.

The MCC expanded to nine teams with the addition of Hermiston, and Pasco is under the leadership of first-year coach Leon Wright-Jackson. MCC teams will have just one non-league game — the Bombers will play at Sunnyside in Week 3.

"I know that Hermiston will bring something new to the table," he said.

"Pasco will be different — we hope they are good. Graff always has something good over there (Chiawana). Eric (Hisaw) runs a tight program at Walla Walla, and Hanford will be competitive from what our guys said coming out of camp.

"Kamiakin will be there on the 3A side, and Southridge is in its second year with (Aaron) Sonnichsen and his system. There doesn't seem to be a weak link."

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