

# Sports



NOELLE HARO-GOMEZ Tri-City Herald

## CLASS 4A FOOTBALL

# Chiawana's defense rules the day in opener's battle of heavyweights

BY JEFF MORROW  
Special to the Herald

AJ Vongphachanh is a big play-making athlete who has the talent to turn the momentum quickly in any contest.

The Chiawana senior made one such play Friday night at Edgar Brown Stadium, helping lead the host Riverhawks to a

19-0 shutout win over defending Class 4A state football champion Richland in the Mid-Columbia Conference opener for both teams.

The play happened about midway through the first quarter of a game.

Bombers quarterback Josh Fonner rolled to his right on a play, looking for a receiver.

Vongphachanh, playing line-

backer, dropped back in coverage, but then realized Fonner could run for yards.

"I saw him roll out, and that meant I had to force the ball (back inside)," said Vongphachanh, who finished unofficially with five tackles, two hurries, one quarterback sack and another tackle for loss.

The Chiawana standout then took the angle on the QB, who was concentrating on finding a receiver. Fonner, however, is a left-hander, and he turned to throw the ball across his body.

Vongphachanh met him at that time, laying him out with a massive but clean hit. The pass fell incomplete, but Fonner was knocked woozy and couldn't get

SEE CHIAWANA, 4D

Richland quarterback Josh Fonner gets off a pass before being hit by Chiawana linebacker AJ Vongphachanh (90) during Friday's Mid-Columbia Conference game at Edgar Brown Stadium in Pasco. The pass fell incomplete and Fonner was knocked from the game.

FROM PAGE 1D

## CHIAWANA

to his feet.

"He smacked him," said Chiawana head coach Steve Graff, who beat his best friend, Richland coach Mike Neidhold, for the first time in four seasons. "The kids up front played really well to-night."

Fonner left the game for concussion protocol, and it changed the way both teams played.

Drew Daves, another lefty, had to step in to play quarterback for Richland, but the Bombers were out of sync the rest of the night.

"When we lost our quarterback and that hurt," said Neidhold, whose team suffered its first MCC loss since 2014.

"This is not Drew Daves' fault. Drew didn't have a lot of reps at quarterback. He's a receiver, but he's the next best quarterback we have."

Chiawana's defense just pinned its ears back and went after Daves at every opportunity, including sophomore linebacker Cameron Breier, who chased Daves from the right side all night long.

"(AJ's hit) really opened up everyone's eyes," said Breier. "You see someone like AJ, who is 235 pounds, and he runs that hard and so far to make that hit. It makes you realize you can do that too."

The Riverhawks got all of the scoring they needed in the first quarter, when junior quarterback Preston Vine found wideout Sesay West on a slant pattern for

### CHIAWANA 19, RICHLAND 0

Richland 0 0 0 0 - 0  
Chiawana 7 6 6 0 - 19  
SCORING PLAYS  
C - Sisay West 12 pass from Preston Vine (Ryan Lowry kick)  
C - FG 37 Lowry  
C - FG 37 Lowry  
C - Gabe Schilz 1 run (kick failed)  
INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS  
RUSHING - Rich, Dhuanye Guice 10-44, Nate Mitchell 8-23, San Stanfield 1-5, Josh Fonner 1-1, Team 1-minus 23, Drew Daves 10-minus 47, Total 30-26. Chia, Schilz 10-70, Vine 12-64, AJ Vongphachanh 9-51, Marvell Cooks 1-9, Seth Wilz 1-7, JP Zamora 3-minus 4, Total 36-197.  
PASSING - Rich, Daves 12-24-1-87, Fonner 1-3-0-10. Chia, Vine 13-24-1-104, Zamora 1-2-0-6.  
RECEIVING - Rich, Ryan Kriskovich 5-57, Cody Sanderson 5-27, Marshaun Davis-Copeland 1-7, Guice 2-6. Chia, Aarloh Valdovinos 4-31, West 4-29, Caleb Alvarez 3-24, Schilz 1-10, Cooks 1-8, Dion Lee 1-8.  
FIRST DOWNS - Rich 9, Chia 20. PENALTIES-YARDS - Rich 12-63, Chia 9-89.  
FUMBLES-LOST - Rich 1-0, Chia 4-1.

a 12-yard touchdown pass on the ensuing offensive series.

Chiawana kicker Ryan Lowry would later add two 37-yard field goals, and Gabe Schilz scored on a 1-yard TD run in the third quarter to complete the scoring.

But it was the Chiawana defense that everyone at Edgar Brown would remember.

Besides Vongphachanh, Breier had six tackles, including two sacks and another three for loss. DB Aarloh Valdovinos added five tackles (one for loss) and a pass defended.

"I told our guys that they lost a lot of seniors, but they've always got good players," said Vongphachanh. "This win is huge for us as seniors. For me, it's the first time I beat Richland since I was a freshman (playing on

the freshman team)."

Neidhold was blunt about the loss afterward.

"This is good for us," he said. "It's one game. It's good we came back down to earth. I still think there's a good chance our teams could meet again."

That would be the play-offs.

Meanwhile, Graff will take the win against his best friend.

"It's always good to beat the Bombers," said Graff. "That was a good test for our first game."

**NOTES:** Neidhold said he wouldn't use it as an excuse, but the Bombers were missing a couple of starting linemen due to not enough practices. One of those missing was senior Aric Davison, who has already committed to Utah State. ... Chiawana also lost its starting quarterback. Vine separated his non-throwing shoulder on a running play. And although training staff popped the shoulder back in, Graff believes Vine could be out a couple weeks. ... Neidhold said Fonner begins a five-day concussion protocol, and if things go well, he could be ready to practice Thursday and play Friday. "I'm leaving this to the medical staff." ... Richland LB Brice Weaver led the Bombers defense with eight tackles. ... Chiawana visits Kennewick next Thursday, while Richland hosts Hermiston on Friday.