



NOELLE HARO-GOMEZ Tri-City Herald

Richland's Ben Fewel, left, Sam Stanfield, Harrison Westover, AJ Storms and Ryan Johnson are ready to help lead the Bombers to victory.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Richland Bombers have plans to move to top of conference

BY KEVIN ANTHONY
Special to the Herald

Most high school football teams should be so lucky as to have a “down” year when they go 6-2 in conference and 7-3 overall.

But boil it down for the Richland Bombers and the 2018 season just didn't last long enough.

“We're just used to something a little different,” said coach Mike Neidhold, who guided the Bombers to the state championship in 2017 and a runner-up finish in 2016. “We're a little spoiled. I certainly expect to play a couple games in November, and our kids do too.”

Up against that measuring stick, perhaps the Bombers came up short last season. And Neidhold didn't have to search long to figure out why.

“I think we took our eye off the ball last year, and it's completely my fault,” he said. “We spent the whole off-season (after 2017) looking at ourselves, looking at our ring, going to

basketball games and feeling pretty good about ourselves.”

On the cusp of a new season, Neidhold sees a completely different attitude with this year's squad.

“It's going great, because our kids went back to work,” he said. “We told the guys, ‘Guys, we're going back to work.’ And that's what they did, and it's been awesome.”

“From the first day of spring football, you could tell things were different. The work ethic — running between drills, just how the kids conduct themselves at practice. They listen. It's not, ‘Yeah, I know ...’ They look you in the eye and say, ‘Thanks, let's get back to work,’ and they do.”

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

1. New faces: With only a handful of starters coming back, there will be a lot of new names to learn. However, that doesn't mean the roster is filled with varsity rookies.

Neidhold has always stressed rotating a lot of kids, and not just at the back end of a blow-out. He wants them to get real

game experience in pressure situations.

He said it keeps them sharp in practices throughout the week. Players who know they will see the field work harder and are mindful of their assignments. And in a year like this year, when there aren't a lot of starters returning, the kids who are playing have already played on Friday nights

“We'll put your fanny in the game as junior or sophomore,” Neidhold said. “We put you in so when it's your turn to run out there with the (starters), it's not that big a deal.”

2. Defense ahead of the curve: Perhaps the most recognizable names lining up on defense are senior tackle Sam Stanfield, a second-team all-conference pick as a junior, and junior safety Ben Fewel, a stand-out baseball player with head-turning speed.

“He's probably the fastest kid in five counties,” Neidhold said of Fewel. “He had an unbelievable spring.”

But at the heart of the defense will be junior linebacker Ryan Johnson and senior AJ Storms.

Neidhold said they helped set the tone for the entire team over the summer.

“They worked out at 5 a.m. (on their own), then came in and worked out with the guys,” he said.

Joining Johnson and Storms at linebacker will be Grady Krisovich and Titus Gipson.

Richland's four-man front has senior Josh White and junior Nathan Pospical at end, with junior Caden James heading a committee of players that will line up with Stanfield at tackle.

Fewel will be joined by seniors Marshaun Davis Copeland and Jordan Ly at cornerback and senior Ben Kostorowski at the other safety spot, with Matt Robinson, Peter Sinclair and Tate Webb seeing time as well.

3. The new QB1: Nearly all of the Bombers' yards and touchdowns are gone from last season, and junior QB Harrison Westover hasn't taken a snap in a varsity game.

Neidhold can't wait to see what he does under the lights.

“He put the work in this winter,” the coach said. “He's one of those guys — he got cut from

the basketball team, and he figured out he'd have to throw in the winter, and lift weights and do all that stuff. And he did.

“He came out throwing this spring, and we noticed way over-the-top arm strength from last year.”

And with quarterback guru Tom Moore on Richland's sideline, Westover looks poised to have a big year.

He'll have plenty of targets, as the Bombers figure to run a lot of players through their different personnel packages.

At running back, look for junior Kainoa Steward, Stanfield, Davis Copeland, senior Kade Brons, junior Cameron Ball and sophomore Elijah Rodriguez to provide a never-ending rotation of fresh legs.

“We'll have four or five guys with 300 yards rushing apiece,” Neidhold said.

Same in the passing game, with receivers Fewel, Sinclair, Dawson Palm and tight ends Pospical, Johnson and Storms among an extensive list of targets for Westover.”

4. Plowing the road: As a former lineman and O-line coach, Neidhold takes special interest in the front five. He likes what he sees, particularly from junior center Jacob Kump, who has shown a real head for the game.

“If you're going to play O-line for us, you've got to think and understand concepts,” Neidhold said. “All our O-line guys are really savvy dudes.”

Junior guard Mason Williamson has the most returning experience, and he's joined by senior Nathan Swanson on the interior, with Ian Ritchie figuring into the rotation.

A couple of familiar names are manning the tackle spots as younger brothers step up — junior Ian Davison (younger brother of Eric Davison) and senior Emmit Whitby (younger brother of Brigham Whitby).

“Brigham shamed his little brother into playing football,” Neidhold joked, “and little brother is a lot better than he thought.”

5. Starting strong: Richland won't waste any time getting into the meat of its season, opening with MCC 4A rival Chiawana on Sept. 6.

Neidhold wouldn't want it any other way.

“For us, I want to schedule the best game possible Week 1,” he said. “... We want the best guys early to make us better and expose us. You can think you're pretty good playing (against) your JV this time of year, but until you get out there on a Friday night against a program that will give it back to you, you just don't know.”

Between them, the Bombers and Riverhawks have won the past six MCC titles — splitting them evenly. (Kennewick, Kamiakin and Hanford tied atop the league standings in 2012).