

# Kamiakin at Chiawana the top prep football game of the week

BY JEFF MORROW  
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With just two weeks left in the regular season for high school football, there are still many key games that could determine post-season playoff berths.

For instance, the Hanford Falcons just need to keep winning and they're in as the Mid-Columbia Conference's No. 2 Class 4A seed.

A year ago, things were a lot tighter. As many as six teams still had a shot at winning the MCC title. Now, there are only three teams that have that chance: Chiawana, Kennewick and Kamiakin.

In the Big Nine, Eastmont, Sunnyside and Wenatchee are in a tight battle for two Class 4A state berths.

And in the 1A SCAC East, only Royal and Connell are guaranteed a regional playoff berth at this moment.

## HERE'S A LOOK AT THE TOP WEEKEND GAMES:

**Kamiakin (5-1 MCC, 6-1 overall) at Chiawana (6-0, 6-1), Edgar Brown Stadium, 7 p.m., Friday.**

The visiting Braves could really scramble the standings with a win. That would have Kamiakin, Chiawana and Kennewick all beating each other and — providing the Lions would beat Richland on Friday — leave all three teams with 6-1 MCC records with a week to go.

Kamiakin enters the game as the top offense in the MCC, facing the top-rated MCC defense in Chiawana.

The Braves' top weapon is junior running back Tuna Altahir, who is the top MCC rusher with 1,179 yards.

Sophomore QB Henry Mercado has used that to his advantage. When he's not handing the ball off to Altahir, he's passing to him or to a number of talented receivers — including Kelen Rutz (32 catches, 582 yards) and Woodley Downard (34-549).

Mercado himself has 1,718 yards passing (second in the MCC), and 20 TD passes against 10 interceptions.

Meanwhile, the Riverhawks have found an able substitute at running back in Marvell Cooks Jr., who has stepped in to rush for over 400 yards in the last few weeks as normal starter Gabe Schilz (601 yards rushing) has been recuperating from a foot injury at Union last month.

Chiawana sophomore QB JP Zamora is ranked fifth in the MCC in passing with 1,265 yards, 15 TD's and 6 interceptions.

**Royal (4-0 SCAC East, 7-0 overall) at River View (3-1, 6-1), 7 p.m. Friday.**

The host Panthers have been a pleasant surprise this season with their senior-dominated squad.

And it's been two guys, Tre Sakota and Robert Nunez, who have led the way.

Sakota, a junior quarterback, has passed for 1,464 yards, 24 touchdowns and thrown just seven interceptions.

Nunez, a senior receiver, has caught 30 of Sakota's passes for 456 yards, and 11 TDs. Nunez has also rushed for two more touchdowns, returned an interception for another, and returned a punt for another one.

The Panthers will need to do two things on offense to be successful:

keep the ball for long stretches of time that chews up clock and away from Royal QB Caleb Christensen's hands and don't turn the ball over.

The visiting Knights have one of the best defenses in the state, shutting out opponents in five of their seven games so far. In fact, no one in the SCAC East has scored on the Knights yet.

The Royal formula is usually jump on teams early and quickly on offense, then get a pick-6 or a kick return for a score, putting opponents in a deep hole and early.

There is a reason the Knights are ranked No. 1 in the state 1A poll.

**Sunnyside (3-0 Big Nine, 5-2 overall) at Wenatchee (4-0, 6-1), Apple Bowl, 7 p.m., Friday.**

This game involves the Big Nine's top two offenses (Wenatchee No. 1, Sunnyside No. 1).

So it could be high scoring.

The Panthers depend on Nathan Blauman, who is the top Big Nine rusher with 1,119 yards and 16 TDs.

But Wenatchee QB Camden Sirmon is also effective, throwing for 1,306 yards.

Grizzlies coach John Lobbestael has the league's top QB in Logan Rodriguez (1,789 yards passing), and one of the top receivers in speedy Mike Rivera (51 catches for 844 yards).

But in recent weeks, he's used running back Arturo Fernandez a lot.

In Sunnyside's big 29-28 win over last week over Eastmont, Fernandez carried the ball 47 times to chew clock up and keep the ball out of the Wildcat offense's hands.

Could happen again this Friday.

## OTHER GAMES

All kickoffs at 7 p.m. Friday, unless otherwise noted

● **Brewster (2-5 overall)** at Tri-Cities Prep (6-1), Chiawana High School. Last Prep non-league game. Offensively, Jags QB Dante Maiuri has 2,197 yards passing. Defensively, Landon Amato leads Prep with 10 interceptions.

● **Cashmere (5-2 overall)** at College Place (2-5), 6 p.m., Friday. Can struggling Hawks defense stop visiting Bulldogs QB Sam Phillips, who leads his team in passing (969 yards) and rushing (400)?

● **Connell (3-1 SCAC East, 4-3 overall)** at Kiona-Benton (3-1, 5-2). This is a key battle for the second SCAC East crossover regional berth and the home game that goes with it. Both have come off of beatings handed to them by Royal in the last two weeks. Who recovers quicker?

● **Dayton-Waitsburg (0-4 EWAC, 0-7 overall)** at Columbia-Burbank (4-0, 6-1). Great bounce-back game for the host Coyotes, who suffered their first loss of the season last Saturday at Tonasket.

● **Grandview (1-2 CWAC South, 1-6 overall)** at Selah (1-2, 2-5). It's simple: whichever team wins this game earns the South's No. 3 playoff spot and a chance to play Othello on Nov. 2.

● **Hanford (3-3 MCC, 4-3 overall)** at Hermiston (1-5, 1-6). For the visiting Falcons, just keep winning

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baby, and you're in the playoffs. Al Davis would be proud. Kamari Durmas has been outstanding on offense for Hanford, scoring five touchdowns last Friday against Pasco.

● **Kennewick (5-1 MCC, 6-1 overall)** at Richland (2-4, 3-4). The visiting Lions keep taking care of business. They'll just keep handing the ball off to Myles Mayovsky — who runs behind that incredible offensive line — and dare the Bombers defense to stop him.

● **Liberty Christian (2-2 EWAC, 3-4 overall)** at White Swan (3-1, 4-2). A win by the visiting Patriots, who started the season off very slowly, would give them a better regional crossover draw than the host Cougars.

● **Mabton (1-4 EWAC, 3-4 overall)** at Kittitas/Thorp (1-3, 1-5). Both teams will likely make the 2B regional crossover playoffs. The winner likely avoids a matchup with powerful Columbia-Burbank.

● **Moses Lake (0-7 overall)** at Southridge (0-7), Lampson Stadium. A key game for two teams not making the postseason. Someone is getting a taste of success for the first time this season with a victory.

● **Pasco (3-3 MCC, 3-4 overall)** at Walla Walla (3-4, 3-4), Borleske Stadium. Visiting Bulldogs have lost three straight. Whoever wins this battle has an outside shot at the post-season, provided Hanford can't win in the final two weeks.

● **Pullman (5-2 overall)** at Othello (4-3). The finish to a tough non-league schedule for host Huskies, who are already locked into one of the CWAC playoff games. The irony is, it's possible these two teams could meet again in a few weeks for a state play-in game.

● **Wapato (0-3 CWAC South, 1-6 overall)** at Prosser (3-0, 5-2), Fiker Stadium. Struggling Wolves are out of the playoff race. Mustangs, who will play for the CWAC title on Nov. 2, should empty the bench as everybody should get some playing time.

● **Warden (1-3 SCAC East, 3-4 overall)** at Wahluke (1-4, 3-4). Visiting Cougars have an outside shot of regional playoff berth if they can beat Warriors, then stop Ki-Be the next week (if Bears happen to lose to Connell on Friday night). In fact, there is still a possibility that three teams could be tied for the SCAC East's final two playoff spots.

Jeff Morrow is former sports editor for the Tri-City Herald.