



BOB BRAWDY Tri-City Herald

Kiamiakin quarterback Henry Mercado threw four touchdown passes against Richland in Week 3 action. He's shown here Sept. 9 against Chiawana High School.

# Week 3: Kamiakin rolls over Richland to take lead atop MCC

BY JEFF MORROW  
Special to the Herald

Henry Mercado was being cautious on Friday night.

The Kamiakin quarterback tossed four touchdown passes to lead the visiting Braves over the Richland Bombers 43-15 in Mid-Columbia Conference play.

"This is just Week 3," said Mercado, a senior. "It's a big game. But we've still got six games to go."

Well, yes. That takes care of the regular season. But then there are the playoffs. And by the looks of what the Braves are doing, they should be a force to reckon with in the postseason.

This contest was billed as a major MCC showdown, with both Kamiakin and Richland coming in at 2-0.

The Braves were coming off a 46-24 rout of Chiawana last week, while the Bombers had two shutouts — 51-0 over Pasco, and 56-0 over Hanford — entering Friday's contest.

And it was over after 12 minutes.

One quarter was all it took for Kamiakin to run away, scoring 28 unanswered points.

Mercado had three TD passes — 11 yards to E.J. Hawkins, 13 yards to Luis Salgado and 27 yards to Aidan Canada. Salgado added a 44-yard TD romp as time expired in the first quarter.

And the whispers are

getting louder that maybe this team is better than last year's version that had Tuna Altahir, Woodley Downard and Messiah Jones sign with Eastern Washington University.

"We didn't know how good we'd be," said Kamiakin head coach Scott Biglin. "We lost the Big 3, but we knew we had a lot of good talent back. We started working out with them this summer, and some of us coaches started looking at each other and saying, 'These guys are really good.' We have a lot of fun coaching them, and they love coming to practice."

For the second consecutive week, Kamiakin also found a defensive standout to become an offensive star. Two weeks ago, it was cornerback Gabe Tahir, who added wide receiver to his resume and caught four passes for 140 yards and a score.

On Friday, Hawkins the linebacker — who ended up blocking a Bombers punt out of the end zone for a safety — spent more time at wideout and ended up catching five of Mercado's passes for 99 yards, two of them all-out dives for 38 yards and then 34 yards, and with a Richland defensive back draped all over him both times.

"I've been trying to say look my way," said Hawkins with a laugh. "Me and Henry, we've been working a lot together."

Salgado scored three touchdowns, and rushed for 113 yards on 13 carries to keep the Richland defense honest. Canada

added a second TD catch from Mercado for 7 yards.

Yet everyone agrees it all starts with Mercado, who is in his third season as a starter.

"His composure is perfect," said Hawkins. "He knows when to be patient back there in the pocket. He and (Chiawana's) JP Zamora are pretty comparable."

Biglin, who believes Mercado is the best quarterback in the MCC, agrees.

"Henry does a great job of distributing the ball," said Biglin. "He really understands the offense. He's also got better at running the football."

Mercado, in fact, set up the first touchdown with a 39-yard scamper.

"I definitely think I've gotten better this year on the ground and with my reads," said Mercado, who finished 13 for 18 from 219 yards, with one interception and four TD passes.

"I trust my guys, and I trust my line. Every day, after practice, we get some routes in. Everybody on this offense is a weapon."

He doesn't have to convince Richland head coach Mike Neidhold, who spent a good 20 minutes on the field after the game with his coaching staff, talking through things.

"Two things are gonna happen here," said Neidhold, who won his 100<sup>th</sup> game as Richland head coach the previous week over Hanford. "We're either going to get better, and go on a tear. Or we'll implode."

"I told the guys after the game that this was on me," added Neidhold. "I'll own this for you. My job was to get you ready, and we came out too slow."

And before anyone realized it, that was too late.

**GAME NOTES**

Notes: Richland running back Elijah Rodriguez finished with 85 yards rushing on 13 carries. ... The Bombers scored two fourth-quarter touchdowns, but it was against the Kamiakin backups. ... Richland also had 126 yards on 12 penalties. ... Kamiakin's defense forced four turnovers. DB Angel Salgado led the Braves with 4 tackles (1 for loss), an interception and a pass breakup. DL Ethan Buraker added 2 tackles (1 for loss) and a fumble recovery, while Tahir had 2 tackles — and in a rare instance that someone threw his way, he intercepted a pass. ... Bombers defensive end Lex Luther was Superman on defense, with 7 tackles (1 for loss) and two quarterback sacks. LB Bradley Rew added 5 tackles (2 for loss). ... Richland travels to Hermiston next Friday, while Kamiakin will play host to Walla Walla that same night.

**MCC GAMES**

**CHIAWANA 41, HERMISTON 12:** JP Zamora passed for 256 yards and five TD passes to lead the host Riverhawks over the Bulldogs in MCC play.

Four of Zamora's scoring strikes went to Kade

Smith, who finished the night with 8 catches for 130 yards. Chiawana teammate Ian Mohl rushed 11 times for 119 yards.

Chase Elliott led Hermiston with 135 yards passing, and 78 yards rushing.

**KENNEWICK 34, WEST VALLEY-YAKIMA 20:** Myles Mayovsky carried the football 32 times, rushing for 288 yards and scoring three TDs to lead the Lions to a win in the non-league game in Yakima. Mayovsky also intercepted a pass.

Teammate Dayton Davis added 87 yards rushing and 106 yards passing.

It was West Valley's first game of the season. The Rams lost their opener due to COVID restrictions, then lost last week's game to smoke.

**SOUTHRIDGE 36, PASCO 7:** Lucien Cone had consecutive touchdown receptions of 11 and 74 yards in the second quarter, as the host Suns pulled away from the Bulldogs in an MCC game.

Cone finished with 6 catches for 113 yards, while teammate James Rush added 19 carries for 106 yards rushing. Southridge QB Max Martin passed for 186 yards and the two TD passes to Cone.

Quarterback Justice Huels passed for 188 yards to lead the Bulldogs, while Alex Ramirez had 6 catches for 80 yards.

**WALLA WALLA 55, HANFORD 0:** Jake Humphrey rushed 16 times for 136 yards and scored three touchdowns, while Josh Nelson added 88 yards on seven carries and a score, as the host Blue Devils beat the Falcons.

Wa-Hi head coach Greg Lupfer left the game during the first half for the hospital after experiencing dizziness. Lupfer told the Walla Wall Union-Bulletin that he was OK, and it was a case of vertigo.

**SKYVIEW 38, SUNNYSIDE 35:** The visiting Grizzlies lost in a shootout to the Storm on Saturday in a non-league game at the Kiggins Bowl in Vancouver.

The lead changed six times during the game that was delayed 30 minutes because of lightning.

Sunnyside quarterback Logan Rodriguez passed for 325 yards and four touchdowns, while teammate Myles Newhouse scored three times.

**MCC STANDINGS**

Kamiakin 3-0 MCC, 3-0 overall  
Kennewick 2-0, 3-0  
Chiawana 2-1, 2-1  
Richland 2-1, 2-1  
Southridge 1-1, 2-1  
Pasco 1-2, 1-2  
Walla Walla 1-2, 1-2  
Hermiston 0-2, 0-3  
Hanford 0-3, 0-3  
**Thursday, Sept. 23**  
Union at Chiawana, Edgar Brown Stadium, 7 p.m.  
**Friday, Sept. 24**  
Kennewick at Pasco, Edgar Brown Stadium, 7 p.m.  
Richland at Hermiston, 7 p.m. Southridge at Hanford, Fran Rish Stadium, 7 p.m.  
Walla Walla at Kamiakin, Lampson Stadium, 7 p.m.

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