

## COMMENTARY

# 2 unbeatens to duke it out in Mid-Columbia football showdown

BY JEFF MORROW  
Special to the Herald



There are a couple of big high school events this weekend that deserve our attention.

The first one involves football, and the second one is cross country.

The battle for the Mid-Columbia Conference football title this year goes through Lampson Stadium, where the Kamiakin Braves play host to the Kennewick Lions. Kickoff is 7 p.m. Friday.

The game features the only two remaining unbeaten teams in the MCC. Kamiakin is 5-0 in MCC play, and 5-0 overall. Kennewick is 4-0 in MCC, 5-0 overall.

There are a few things to watch in this contest:

● Can Kennewick's vaunted defense figure out a way to stop Kamiakin

quarterback Henry Mercado and his numerous weapons?

The high-powered Braves offense all starts with Mercado, who is calm in the pocket, can hand-off or throw to Luis Salgado, or toss it to a number of guys like E.J. Hawkins, Aidan Canada, Fabian Hernandez, Gabe Tahir, etc.

Or Mercado could just tuck it and run.

The Lions — led by Brandon Childs and Ayden Knapik — have to figure out what to do on defense.

● Can Kamiakin's defense stop Myles Mayovsky and company?

Mayovsky gets better with each carry. But even if the Braves can overcome that huge Lions offensive line and maybe slow Mayovsky down, Kennewick quarterback Dayton Davis can find ways to beat you with his arm.

● The Graham factor.

Perhaps we don't talk enough about Payton Graham. He's been called a Swiss Army Knife, because he has so many



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Kamiakin High's defense will be looking to stop Kennewick's Myles Mayovsky.

functions: he runs, catches and throws on offense. He can hit over intercept passes from the secondary. He kicks off, kicks extra points, and punts. And he returns punts — to me, his most dangerous position. Graham can devastate an opponent

with one of his long returns, and has done it a few times already.

How Kennewick tries to neutralize him will be key.

What's interesting is both teams will head their own ways in the postseason. Remember, Kamiakin is a Class 4A school, while

Kennewick is 3A.

In the latest RPI rankings, Kamiakin is seventh in the state 4A list, while Kennewick is eighth in 3A.

## CROSS COUNTRY

The 52<sup>nd</sup> annual Max Jensen Richland Invitational is Saturday at Car-

michael Middle School in Richland with about 1,000 cross country runners expected to compete in a number of different races.

Middle school races start things up at 9:30 a.m., with the big Division 1 races for boys and girls starting at 2:30 p.m.

To me, the Richland Invite is always the meet that reminds us the WIAA state cross country meet is just around the corner ... and it is, set for Nov. 6 at Sun Willows Golf Course in Pasco.

● The Kamiakin boys dominated last weekend's Yakima Sunfair event, easily taking the team title.

Sunfair is run differently, with each of a team's seven runners punt in their own heat against other teams' similar position runners. For instance, all No. 7 runners compete against each other, as do 6's, 5's, all the way to No. 1's.

In Kamiakin's case, the Braves had runners win four of the seven heats: Isaac Teeplees won the No. 1's race in 15:03.18; Grayson Wilcott was the No. 2's champ, while Tanner Mills to the No. 5 runners race, and Jackson Farris the No. 6 runners race.

● Teeplees has the state's third-best 5K race this season, running a 14:55 at the Bellevue Invitational

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# FOOTBALL

on Sept. 25. Olympia's Ethan Coleman and Riverside's Jamar Distel are the only two boys in the state with better performances so far.

● Kennewick's Macy Marquardt ran a 17:06.9 on Oct. 2 to win the Battle for the 509 event in Medical Lake. That gives her the second-best performance in the entire state for girls. Only Bellarmine Prep's Ella Borsheim has run better.

● Pasco senior Emma Pitzer won the girls title at the Pasco Big Cross Invite on Oct. 2, finishing in 20:43.5.

## MCC GIRLS SOCCER

Justin Almquist's Richland girls soccer team continues to roll through Mid-Columbia Conference play.

After a 6-0 win over Wa-Hi on Tuesday, the Bombers are a perfect 11-0.

When you take a look at Richland's roster, that record should come as no surprise.

With McKenna Martinez having graduated last June and then headed to play at Oregon State Uni-

versity this fall, senior Hayden Crowley has picked up the scoring slack.

Crowley has already committed to playing next fall for the University of Washington.

But Crowley is surrounded by some very talented teammates, including junior midfielders Kelsey Fulton and Sorrel Stratford, and senior defenders Kaylie Pearson and Maggie Perryman.

All four of those players made the MCC all-conference team this past spring.

The Bombers are being chased by Kamiakin (9-1) and Chiawana (9-2), and those three teams sit atop the MCC standings.

Here are the standings, as of games through Tuesday, Oct. 5: 1. Richland 11-0; 2. Kamiakin 9-1; 3. Chiawana 9-2; 4 (tie). Hanford 6-5, Southridge 6-5; 6. Walla Walla 3-7; 7. Hermiston 2-8; 8. Pasco 1-8; 9. Kennewick 0-10.

Key upcoming games: Oct. 14, Richland at Chiawana, 7 p.m.; Oct. 19, Kamiakin at Richland, 7 p.m.; Oct. 21, Kamiakin at Chiawana, 7 p.m.

## MCC VOLLEYBALL

Meanwhile, there looks to be a new sheriff in town in the MCC volleyball standings. OK, maybe two.

Through matches of Oct. 5, both Kamiakin and Walla Walla sit atop the conference standings with 7-1 records.

For the first time in years, the Richland volleyball team is not on top of the standings. That doesn't mean the Bombers couldn't be on top by the time the regular season ends. But right now, Richland sits in a tie for third with Chiawana in the MCC standings with 6-3 records.

That includes a 3-1 Richland loss to Walla Walla on Tuesday night — the second time the Blue Devils have beaten the Bombers this season.

Wa-Hi coach Christine Dove has three returning MCC all-stars from the spring, all seniors: outside hitter Jade Ilaoa, setter Becky Merca, and libero Mya Wood.

Kamiakin coach Morgan Schauble boasts a couple of standout outside hitters in senior Taryn Vrieling and sophomore Peyton Arland, as well as impressive sophomore setter Rylie Dolven.

Richland's coach, Bob

Raidl, has just four seniors on his team, and his top player is junior middle hitter Kenzie Nealon.

There is still plenty of season left to make a mark, but here are the MCC standings through games of Oct. 5: 1 (tie).

Kamiakin 7-1, Walla Walla 7-1; 3 (tie). Chiawana 6-3, Richland 6-3; 5. Kennewick 5-4; 6. Hanford 4-5; 7 (tie). Hermiston 2-7, Southridge 2-7; 9. Pasco 0-8.

Key matches remaining: Oct. 7, Kamiakin at Rich-

land, 7 p.m.; Oct. 28, Walla Walla at Kamiakin, 7 p.m.

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