

# Kamiakin outguns Kennewick in second half for key MCC win

BY JEFF MORROW  
Special to the Herald

For years since they were little kids, players from both Kennewick and Kamiakin high schools have grown up together on the football field.

"There has to be close to 60 of us who played together (or against each other) in Grid Kids," said Kamiakin senior Payton Graham. "We're all friends."

And on Friday night, some of those friends had to lose, as Kamiakin pulled away in the second half for a 34-20 Mid-Columbia Conference victory at Lampson Stadium.

The win gives the Braves a perfect 6-0 record — both in MCC and overall play.

Kennewick, meanwhile, drops to 4-1 in MCC play, and 5-1 overall.

The difference in Friday's game was the Kamiakin defense shutting out the Lions in the second half.

Coming out of intermission tied at 20-20, the Braves did a good job adjusting to the Lions' offensive attack.

"We knew this was going to be the biggest fight, like a Rocky movie," said Kamiakin coach Scott Biglin.

And the Braves had to go without four starters in the second half. Gabe

Tahir, a wide receiver and defensive back, was limping on the sideline with his right knee packed in ice.

Linebacker/receiver E.J. Hawkins was on crutches. Two other linemen were ejected for throwing punches on separate plays.

Still, the mantra at Kamiakin this season has always been Next Man Up.

Case in point: running backs Charlie Munn and Makram Althahir stepped in for an exhausted Luis Salgado early in the fourth quarter, with Althahir (a sophomore) scoring on a 3-yard run to give the Braves the lead for good at 26-20.

Next case in point: se-

nior Cade Hansen, having never snapped the ball in a competitive game, stepped in at center to keep things moving for Kamiakin.

And Kennewick coach Randy Affholter made it clear after the game that the Braves' best defense in the second half may have been their offense.

"In the second half, our offense did sputter," said Affholter. "But Kamiakin's offense just took control."

Indeed, The Braves offense had the football for 16 minutes and 46 seconds of the 24 minutes in the second-half.

Kamiakin senior Aaron Tano led the Braves defense with three quarterback sacks.

"Last spring I was co-

Lineman of the Year with (Kennewick's) Ayden Knapik," said Tano. "Tonight, I came out with a lot of energy. I felt I had a breakout game."

And when Kennewick did move the ball, Graham stopped things twice with interceptions.

It was Graham — who is headed to Gonzaga University next year to pitched for the baseball team — who also scored the final touchdown to give Kamiakin the breathing room it needed.

Graham, lined up on the left side, ran a perfect route to the left corner, where quarterback Henry Mercado laid it perfectly into his arms for a 9-yard TD play.

"We've been practicing that route all year, but that's the first time we've used it," said Graham, who finished with 7 catches for 75 yards. "It was just a goal line fade."

The game was tied three different times, and the lead changed hands three more times, in a game that featured a wild first half.

Salgado scored twice for the Braves in the first half, on a 6-yard run, and a 5-yard TD reception. He would finish the game rushing 26 times for 130 yards.

Mercado would finish with 261 yards passing and three more touchdown strikes.

Kennewick countered with a Dayton Davis TD pass and a 34-yard touchdown scamper; and Myles Mayovsky returned a kickoff 94 yards for a score.

"I'm glad I don't have to see Myles again," said Biglin of the Lions senior,

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a four-year starter.

It's true. Since Kamiakin is Class 4A and Kennewick is 3A, the two rivals will go their separate ways come postseason.

Meanwhile, Biglin must continue finding new guys to step up when others go down.

"That's why we give our 1, 2 and 3 guys a lot of reps in practice," said Biglin.

It's the key, said Salgado.

"We are so competitive with each other in practice," he said. "We're not very nice to each other. Practices are pretty intense."

Notes: Mercado completed passes to eight different receivers. ... Tano led Kamiakin with 5

tackles (one for loss) and those three quarterback sacks. Aidan Canada had two tackles, two covers, and recovered the opening kickoff loose ball. ... Angel Salgado added 5 tackles, while Kale Crawford had four tackles (one for a loss). ... The Lions had plenty of standouts on defense, led by senior Bronson Childs' 10 tackles. Simeon Howard added 9 tackles (one for loss), while Mayovsky, at linebacker, had 8 tackles and a pass breakup. ... Kamiakin travels to Pasco next Friday, while Kennewick plays host to Hermiston the same night. The Lions then play at Chiawana, and host Richland the next few Fridays.

### SCORES AND HIGHLIGHTS

**CHIAWANA 48, WALLA WALLA 14:** JP Zamora, who committed this weekend to a preferred walk-on deal at UCLA, passed for 251 yards and four touchdowns to lead Chiawana over visiting Walla Walla.

Kade Smith caught three passes from Zamora, all of which were TDs.

Isaac Hoag added 3 catches for 95 yards, while Marco Elizondo added 3 catches for 73 yards.

Drew Humphrey led the Blue Devils with 4 catches for 90 yards and a score, while Jake Humphrey added 23 carries for 90 yards rushing.

**PASCO 31, HANFORD 28 (OT):** Jael Valle's field goal in overtime gave the visiting Bulldogs the MCC win.

Pasco's Jamie Towns-

end II had another big game, rushing 27 times for 191 yards and a touchdown. Townsend also had a kickoff return for a score, and caught 2 passes for 37 yards.

Bulldogs QB Kaden Watanabe passed for 166 yards and two TDs, and Alex Ramirez caught 4 passes for 48 yards and a score.

Rafael Vargas added 5 catches for 49 yards, and Paxton Hermès added a 9-yard receiving touchdown, as well as 4.5 sacks on defense.

For Hanford, Cole Mullins passed for 150 yards and two touchdowns, Kevin Hester rushed for 114 yards and two touchdowns, and Gannon Mosley caught 3 passes for 84 yards and two scores.

**RICHLAND 14, MEAD 12:** Elijah Rodriguez had touchdown runs

of 51 and 30, as the Bombers won the non-league game in Spokane.

Rodriguez finished the game with 106 yards rushing on just 14 carries.

Isaya Gálvez led Richland's defense with 13 tackles.

**SOUTHBRIDGE 27, HERMISTON 14:** Lucien Cone had a monster game for the visiting Suns, catching 5 passes for 113 yards and a touchdowns, and rushing 11 times for 67 yards and a score.

Max Martin added 154 yards passing, and Jame Rush ran for 57 yards on 13 carries.

Chase Elliott led Hermiston, throwing for 223 yards.

### MCC FOOTBALL STANDINGS

Kamiakin 6-0 MCC, 6-0 overall  
Kennewick 4-1, 5-1

Richland 4-1, 5-1  
Chiawana 3-2, 3-3  
Southridge 2-3, 3-3  
Pasco 2-3, 2-4  
Walla Walla 2-4, 2-4  
Hanford 1-5, 1-5  
Hermiston 0-6, 0-6  
**Friday, Oct. 8**  
Chiawana 48, Walla Walla 14  
Kamiakin 34, Kennewick 20  
Pasco 31, Hanford 28 (OT)  
Richland 14, Mead 12  
Southridge 27, Hermiston 14  
**Thursday, Oct. 14**  
All kickoffs at 7 p.m.  
Hermiston at Kennewick  
**Friday, Oct. 15**  
Chiawana at Southridge  
Eastmont at Hanford  
Kamiakin at Pasco  
Richland at Walla Walla

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