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Kamiakin senior Henry Mercado hands off to Luis Salgado during Saturday's first-round 4A state tournament game at Lampson Stadium in Kennewick. The Braves beat North Creek 56-21.

## Kamiakin routs North Creek to advance to 4A quarterfinals

BY JEFF MORROW  
Special to the Herald

It's never planned, but Kamiakin quarterback Henry Mercado has a habit of finding the right receiver at the right time — never focusing on just one guy.

On Saturday night, Mercado tossed six touchdown passes to lead his Braves to a 56-21 first-round 4A state tournament victory over North Creek at Lampson Stadium.

That's right. Six touchdown passes.

And four of them went to E.J. Hawkins. In fact, all four were consecutive TD passes — 34, 25, 5 and 18 yards — with the first one snapping a 14-14 tie.

By the time Hawkins caught that final TD pass, it made the score 42-14, and the Braves were advancing to the state quarterfinals.

Kamiakin will play host next weekend to Camas. But Saturday's connection between Mercado and Hawkins wasn't planned. It just worked out that way.

"Henry has a good combination with all of his receivers," said Kamiakin coach Scott Biglin. "He's done a great job of distributing the ball this season."

That's a point of pride for Mercado, who finished going 16-for-25 for 311 yards, and eight carries for 33 yards rushing.

"Every other week it's someone else," said Mer-

cado. "Last week, Fabian (Hernandez) had three touchdowns."

Tonight, said Hawkins, "was my turn."

Besides Hawkins' four TD catches, Mercado also found Hernandez for a 27-yard score, and Aidan Canada for a 15-yard TD pass.

The Braves, now 11-0, were a little nervous about facing the Jaguars, who were 6-4 in the Kingco league but had some weapons.

Namely, quarterback Kennedy McGill was a force this season. He passed for over 2,000 yards this season — almost as many as Mercado.

"I spent a lot of nights trying to figure out how to stop him," said Biglin.

"We did a lot of film study this week. In fact, we almost got to the point that we watched too much film."

Hawkins said the team spent as much time watching film as it did practicing on the field.

McGill finished with 206 yards passing and two TD passes, as well as a 46-yard TD run late in the game. And he finished with 108 yards rushing on 15 carries.

But Kamiakin just had too many offensive weapons for the Jaguars to keep up.

And when the Braves offense wasn't doing the damage, Payton Graham was with a 40-yard punt return for a score.

In the end, it was a solid showing for a Ka-

miakin team that was seeded fourth into the 4A state playoffs.

"We had a good game plan tonight," said Biglin.

It was the first of four steps toward a goal of winning the state title.

"Our freshman year, we sat down and said to each other, 'We could really do this.' Simple as that," said Mercado.

### NOTES

Kamiakin running back Luis Salgado had over 100 yards of total offense — seven carries for 64 yards rushing, 2 catches for 41 yards. At line-backer, Salgado led the Braves defense with 10 tackles. ... Hawkins ended the night with 5 catches for 96 yards, while Graham caught five passes for 95 yards. ... LB Kale Crawford added 7 tackles, a forced fumble and a pressure for the Braves.

Jeff Morrow is a former sports editor for the Tri-Cities.