

Tri-Cities teams ready for state football semifinals Saturday

BY JEFF MORROW
Special to the Herald

There's a big Saturday of high school football coming up with the WIAA state semifinals, and it involves three Mid-Columbia teams.

In Class 4A, Kamiakin (12-0) will take on Graham-Kapowsin (12-0) at 1 p.m. Saturday at Art Crate Field in Spanaway.

Later, Kennewick (11-1) meets Eastside Catholic (11-1) at 4 p.m. Saturday at Memorial Stadium in Seattle in the 3A semifinals.

Finally, Royal (12-0) meets King's (9-1) at 1 p.m. Saturday at David Nielson Stadium in Royal

City in a 1A semifinal.

A quick look at the three contests:

KAMIAKIN VS. GRAHAM-KAPOWSIN

Braves head coach Scott Biglin said he made sure his team savors these moments, because not too many teams get the chance to play this late in the fall.

"This is a special time, a special moment," said Biglin. "To make the state semifinals is no easy task. So I've told the guys to just enjoy the moment."

Kamiakin has been outstanding on offense all season, starting with quarterback Henry Mercado, who does a great job of distributing the ball to

plenty of weapons.

Guys like Payton Graham, Aidan Canada, Fabian Hernandez, E.J. Hawkins, Gabe Tahir and Luis Salgado.

And it seems every week, a different guy steps into the limelight.

"We talked about it back in the spring football season, we talked about COVID, and how everybody needs to be ready to go," said Biglin.

Salgado had talked earlier this season about how the bar is set in practices, and how everybody competes in those sessions.

Biglin agrees. "That's due to the makeup of our seniors," said Biglin. "They com-



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Kamiakin senior Luis Salgado dodges North Creek junior Brady Goff during the first round 4A state tournament game at Lampson Stadium in Kennewick.

pete in a good, positive way. And things are intense."

In Graham-Kapowsin, the Braves will see a pretty talented team.

The Eagles are led by quarterback Joshua Wood, running back Zach Lee, and linebacker Jalen Davenport.

"They are just a good, all-around football team with no weaknesses," said Biglin. "They have a num-

ber of Division I players. But I like our guys.

Whoever we play, we'll be ready. We need to match their physicality."

And while the Braves have an outstanding offense, the team's defensive unit is also pretty stout.

"Our coaches do a good job of coming up with a plan, grinding on film session,"

Biglin likes his team's

chances.

"These guys are up there with one of the best teams we've ever had," said Biglin. "We've got guys who absolutely love to play. They're smart. Super smart. The things we put in with these guys, they pick up quickly. They watch a lot of film."

At this point, state football teams are all physical. This is where the mentality can be the difference.

"This is a super smart group. Their football IQ is high," Biglin said of his Braves.

KENNEWICK VS. EASTSIDE CATHOLIC

This is Kennewick head coach Randy Affholter's sixth career trip to the state semifinals — the second time with the Lions, and the previous four times with Ellensburg.

But what makes this game even more historic is the Lions' football history.

"Coach (Jason) Slagle said this will be the

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1,000th football game in Kennewick High history," said Affholter.

That 999th game last week against O'Dea — a 27-21 Kennewick win — was impressive.

"I thought up front against O'Dea we played well," said Affholter. "We got 137 yards rushing from Myles (Mayovsky). We were able to run the football, control the football. And defensively, we gave up 170 yards rushing. There was one long run of 60 yards, so it was a good defensive effort."

In comparison, the week before, O'Dea had over 400 yards of rushing in a playoff win over Kelso.

Affholter said it has to be the same philosophy this weekend against Eastside Catholic.

"This time of year, you have to run the football," he said. "Eastside Catholic has a strong running game, but they can also put the ball in the air."

Quarterback Brady McKelheer and running back Chase Hamdan lead the way for the Crusaders on offense.

Kennewick linebacker Bronson Childs and the Lions defensive unit must find ways to neutralize the Crusaders on offense.

The key for Kennewick will be to keep the ball out of EC's offensive hands and move that ball against their defense.

"I think they have a good defensive front seven," said Affholter.

"We've got to control the football, win those third downs, chew the clock up, move the football."

EC has a big front line. But Kennewick has the size to match up.

And Kennewick quarterback Dayton Davis has run the offense better and better each week.

When he's not giving the ball to Mayovsky or running it himself, he's finding Austin Stoddard and Simeon Howard with sharp passes — all while doing it behind a big, strong and talented line.

"Davis has played well. Up front, we've played well," Affholter said.

On Saturday, Affholter expects everyone to play well.

KING'S VS. ROYAL

Wiley Allred seems to put together a standout Royal football team every year now.

This year's team is no different.

Quarterback Derek Bergeson and his twin brother, wide receiver Luke, have been dominant all season.

Running back Avery Ellis has powered through defenses all season.

More impressively, these guys seem to get all of their work done in the first half. Every game this season, Royal has gotten so far ahead (especially in the first half) that the running clock gets activated.

So while Royal's stats may not look as impressive as other teams, because they pull the starters early, they've no team come close to them.

Many of these players were on the Knights squad back in the spring, when they beat 4A schools easily, such as Wenatchee, Eastmont and Moses Lake.

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