

Sports



BOB BRAWDY Tri-City Herald

Richland and Kamiakin faced each other in a Mid-Columbia Conference regular-season showdown Oct. 7 at Lampson Stadium, with the Bombers winning 21-20 in overtime. Eight weeks later, both teams will play for state titles in Tacoma.

3A/4A STATE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Braves, Bombers relish title shots

Kamiakin and Richland will try to bring state football championships back to the Tri-Cities. The Braves play O'Dea on Friday, and the Bombers face Camas on Saturday.

BY ANNIE FOWLER
AND DUSTIN BRENNAN
Tri-City Herald

Welcome to Tacoma. What's your dream? When it's the first weekend in December, the answer is a state football title.

For the Kamiakin Braves (11-2), who will take on O'Dea (13-0) at 7:30 p.m. Friday night in the Class 3A title game at the Tacoma Dome, it has been a long

journey to get to this point. "When you start the summer, this is what your goal is; this is what your dream is," Braves coach Scott Biglin said of the championship game. "These guys have been talking about it since they were young — winning a state championship — and here they are. The seniors get to end their careers at the Tacoma Dome, which is every man's dream if you are a high school football player." Many of the players have

been together since Grid Kids, and Friday will be their last game together. They want to make sure they do it right.

"I'd do anything for a win," senior wide receiver Isaiah Brimmer said. "As a team, we knew this was possible. This is the best moment of my entire life."

Senior offensive lineman Wyatt Musser was a little more sentimental.

"It's weird," Musser said. "It's been four years with these guys, and it's hard to believe it's over. We want to go win this and put Tri-Cities on the map."

Quarterback Zach Borisch

ONLINE

For live updates on this weekend's state football action, go to www.tricityherald.com/sports.

tugged a bit more on the heartstrings.

"Those emotions aren't going to hit until after the game," Borisch said of his last march downfield with his teammates. "This is coach (Kevin) McAfee's last year, and (defensive coach Tim) Maher has been here forever. It would be nice to win one for them."

Biglin knows he has a special group of seniors.

"We are such a close group, and they have fun with each other," Biglin said. "I never knew it until the beginning of the year when I had the seniors over for a barbecue. They are quirky guys. They were having fun with my kids and joking around with them, teasing each other. You

SEE STATE, 5B

FROM PAGE 4B

STATE

knew they were a special group when they can tease each other like brothers and get out on the field and they have each other's back out there. A very special group. I have been having a lot of fun with these guys. I wish we could have a couple extra weeks. It has been such a fun journey. Hopefully we can end it with a victory."

The Braves opened the state playoffs with a 45-0 win over Gig Harbor. They followed that up with a 37-10 victory over Bonney Lake to wind up in the semifinals against two-time defending champion Eastside Catholic.

Kamiakin held on for a 30-27 win over the Crusaders to reach the championship game for the first time since 2010.

"We are really excited, but we aren't just happy to be here," Biglin said. "We want to go win it all. We want to make history here for our school and our community."

The Braves have never won a state football title, and they are bucking school to be the first Kennewick school to bring the trophy home.

"It's always hard when you start a season," Biglin said. "You want to win a state championship. That is just so

far away, and there are so many good teams at the 3A level. You don't know how far you will go. It was probably after the Richland game. We sat down as coaches and said, 'We have something going here.' We lost that Richland game (21-20 in overtime), but we saw a lot of fight in our team that we hadn't seen in previous games. Ever since then, they have been rolling. Here we are. Anything can happen."

ONE LAST MONDAY

When the Richland football team opened practice this summer, the Bombers didn't necessarily set out to make it to the state championship game. They just wanted to have as many Mondays as possible.

The Bombers (13-0) ended up with 14 Mondays.

"We set out to get as many Mondays as we could, and we got all of them, all 14 of 'em," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "You're grateful that you have one more week with these kids, and the culmination of it all is in Tacoma at the Tacoma Dome in front of thousands of people, playing for the state title. What a great way to go out."

Richland achieved that goal with a 35-7 win over Skyview — the team that knocked off Mid-Columbia Conference foe Chiawana in the first round of state — in the semifinals last week,

setting up a meeting with Camas (13-0) in the 4A state championship game at 7:30 p.m. Saturday. It's the first state championship game appearance for the Bombers since 1999.

While the weight of such a game might add pressure for some teams, many Richland players are feeling looser this week at practice, with the goal of playing into December already accomplished.

"I've been a little bit nervous for a couple of the last playoff games," junior Adam Weissenfels said. "But there's not really a nerve in my body going into this week. It might just be knowing that this is it, so I've got to give it everything that I have. I can't save anything for the next week, because there is no next week."

Any ill effects of those nerves certainly haven't shown for Weissenfels, who leads the team in receiving (34 catches, 502 yards) and interceptions (seven). He's also 51 of 62 (82 percent) on extra points and has made some key special teams plays for the Bombers, including the game-winning extra point block in the Bombers' Week 6 overtime victory over Kamiakin.

Players and coaches have differing opinions on whether it was that gutsy win over the Braves or the extremely physical, MCC title-clinching, 21-14 victory over Chiawana that signified the

Bombers having a shot at a state championship run. But quarterback Paxton Stevens said the team's destiny was clear to him much earlier in the season.

"When we played Skyline (in the season opener), you know last year they got second in state, and so we got an opportunity to play them and showed we're capable of beating anyone who gets in our way," said Stevens, who led the Bombers to a 38-27 victory over the Spartans. "Just from Day One, I was proud of our team and confident that we could go all the way."

FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

This is the first time two Tri-City teams have played in the 3A and 4A football championship games in the same season, a feat that Neidhold said proves just how tough it is to win in the MCC.

"We have a pretty good league down here, and no one gives us any credit," Neidhold said. "Maybe with the both of us being over there, hopefully we can put on a good show and Kamiakin can do what they're capable of, and we can do what we're capable of, and maybe we can get a couple titles back here in the Tri-Cities and really put some light on us."

Both games will be televised on ROOT.