

Stealth-mode Bombers

Richland likes it when team receives underdog label

By PAUL VALENCIA
Columbian staff writer

The 2016 football season started for the Richland Bombers on about Nov. 29, 2015.

That was the day after they lost in the Class 4A state semifinals to eventual champion Gonzaga Prep.

"A lot of the kids who are playing now played in that game and had substantial roles in that game," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "I feel like they felt they had something left in the tank. They committed themselves to not letting that happen again."

No loss in the semifinals this season. Richland beat Skyview 35-7, advancing to play Camas in the championship game Saturday night in the Tacoma Dome.

It is a battle of two 13-0 teams. While Richland reached the final four last year and Camas did not, Neidhold said he believes just about everyone else around the state considers Camas the favorite.

Not that he minds. "We always feel that way. Nobody's going to give us

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SARAH GORDON/Tri-City Herald

Richland's Alex Chapman (8) intercepts a pass intended for Skyview's Jeremiah Wright (21) Saturday.

Next game

■ 4A state title game: Camas vs. Richland, 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Tacoma Dome. TV: ROOT Sports.



Richland

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any credit," Neidhold said. "You only get recognition if you win. We haven't been over there for a while. Of course, no one is going to give us a chance."

The Bombers won the 1999 state title but last year was as far as the program had been since then.

Neidhold said his team's philosophy is simple: "Go ahead, sleep on us, see what happens. We've been the underdog. We're fine, just being us."

Not that he thinks Camas will overlook his squad.

The Papermakers might not have reached the semifinals last season, but Camas has been one of the strongest programs in the state for some time now. This is the team's fourth trip to the semifinals, second to the championship game — all since 2011. The Papermakers are still searching for that first championship, though.

"They're just really good," Neidhold said of the Papermakers. "If you're counting on them to screw up, you're in trouble, because they're not going to."

He noted the offense. The defense. The special teams. He said he did not see any flaws.

"It appears they like to play football. It's a dangerous mix," he said. "They seem to enjoy what they're doing."

"We know we're up against a great team. We have to play a 48-minute game to have a chance at it. We're excited for the opportunity."

But again, the Bombers believe they are pretty good, too.

They had no trouble topping Skyview, holding the Storm to one touchdown. Skyview had scored at least 34 points in five consecutive games.

Brigham Whitby is the real deal, the offensive lineman of the year as well as the defensive player of the year for the Mid-Columbia Conference.

A week ago, the Bombers did most of their damage on the ground, rushing for more than 200 yards. Ben Stanfield had 124 yards and a touchdown, and Parker McCary had two rushing TDs.

However, they can unleash a passing attack, too. Quarterback Paxton Stevens has thrown for more than 2,700 yards and has 36 TD passes.

The Bombers, like the Papermakers, also feel tested. Besides getting through a playoff field, Richland also beat Skyline of Sammamish in the first week of the season.

"That kind of got some momentum going. We started believing in each other," Neidhold said.

On the field, sure, but the Bombers really started this process last November, into December.

"That morphed into winter weights, spring sports, morphed into spring football," the coach said.

The Bombers had "two great weeks" in town, then spent a week at Boise State this summer, competing against other powers from the West, including Bishop Gorman of Las Vegas.

"We developed a sense of toughness," Neidhold said.

The Bombers got the win over Skyline ... and they just kept winning.

"Everybody's excited," Neidhold said. "Our school is used to being in big games. Been a while for us in football (to be in title game). Everybody's excited to go to the game, enjoy the atmosphere of the Tacoma Dome and see a great event for high school kids."

Don't miss: WIAA 4A football championship



7:30 p.m., ROOT — The Camas Papermakers take on the Richland Bombers at the Tacoma Dome for the Class 4A state title.

