

# SHIFTING GEARS

Sophomore Josh Phillips gave Bombers' running game a kick last week

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Josh Phillips doesn't say much.

The Richland High sophomore is known for being reserved and quite shy.

Get him on a football field, though, and his entire demeanor changes.

"I'm loud on the football field," Phillips said.

Ask the Walla Walla High defense, and Wa-Hi's defenders probably agree.

Phillips made his first career start at running back last week and ripped the Blue Devils for 179 yards on 28 carries and scored two touchdowns during Richland's 26-20 victory.

One of the keys to his success is his vision on the field. He's not the biggest kid — he stands 5-foot-9 and weighs 165 pounds — but he has that rare ability to find holes, and then has the speed to get through them.

"Josh found those seams and stuck his nose in there," said Richland coach Mike Neidhold. "To his credit, he just kept working upstream and did good things for us."

Phillips' vision and willingness to fight through tackles has his teammates' attention as well.

"He's fast, and he's got a lot of fight," center Derek Matheson said. "He won't give up on a play, and you'll have to drag him down."

Phillips will lead the Bombers (1-1 overall, 1-1 Mid-Columbia Conference) against rival Chiawana High at 7 p.m. today at Fran Rish Stadium.

He will be fighting for time with senior Cam Simpson, who had a strong junior year in the backfield, and senior Mason Baird, who also has experience.

"They are all good," Matheson said. "Cam was good last year, one of the best rushers in the league. Josh showed he can be good in this league and is an up-and-comer. And Mason provides veteran leadership and hit the holes hard."

Phillips got the start because the Bombers struggled running the ball in the opener against Southridge High. The coaching staff



Richland sophomore Josh Phillips was thrust into a prominent role after early-season offensive troubles by the Bombers, and he rushed for 179 yards and two touchdowns against Walla Walla last week.

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saw some vertical seams on the game film and thought, with Phillips' vision, he could exploit them. That strategy paid off against Walla Walla.

"We expected a big rushing game," said left tackle Clayton Simundson. "We don't care who is behind us, we just hope for the best. If it is Josh Phillips, it's awesome."

While Neidhold and the rest of the team didn't know what to expect, Phillips was confident he could succeed. And he knows he can play well again tonight.

"I want to try to have another game like last week," he said, "but to top it — set higher standards."

His breakout game has given Richland lots of options in the backfield, as the Bombers came into the season expecting all three running backs to receive carries. Now, though, they have options.

"If you would've told me a few weeks ago that we would have one back with 28 carries, I would've said no way," Neidhold said. "Josh had the hot hand, and we stayed with him. We will just go with whoever has the hot hand. (Tonight) it might be Cameron. We're just trying to take some pressure off our passing game."

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