

PREP FOOTBALL

Kamiakin in driver's seat in Mid-Col

Every game has a level of importance

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Here is an interesting take on the Mid-Columbia Conference.

Five weeks into the season and no one has been eliminated from playoff contention, nor has anyone clinched.

That statement will hold true into next week as well.

Even though only two Mid-Col teams each from Class 3A and 4A advance to the regional playoffs against the Greater Spokane League, it still is anybody's game.

"It's a down-home dogfight," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "But I see it as something more important than that. Playing in this Tri-City league, you win every game or you have a long winter with the teams that beat you. It's bigger than just the playoffs. There is so much school pride, school spirit that goes with these games. Our game with Kamiakin last week, the student body section was just packed, and we felt as though we owe something to the student body to do well. That puts a little more pressure than the playoffs.

"When you got students in your third-period class and they're asking you why you're not winning games, it's uncomfortable."

Kamiakin (3-0) is the lone league unbeaten. However, with the top four teams in the league coming from the 3A ranks — and all within one game of each other — the Braves could have a late-season swoon and see Hanford, Southridge or Kennewick pass them by.

Of course, with wins over the Falcons, Suns and Richland Bombers in its pocket, Kamiakin would have to hit a serious skid against Chiawana, Pasco and Walla Walla (combined league record: 1-9) before facing rival Kennewick in Week 9.

On the flip side, the Riverhawks, Bulldogs and Blue Devils still have time to turn around their slow starts and catch the Bombers, who with a win Friday against Kennewick can lock up a tie for the second 4A berth.

KAMIAKIN | QB Robertson top dog

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The Lions and Bombers are one of three Mid-Col games on the docket Friday, with Chiawana playing Kamiakin at Lampson Stadium, and Walla Walla and Pasco kicking off at Edgar Brown.

Tonight has two nonleaguers on tap, with Southridge hosting Hermiston and Hanford going to the west side to play Life Christian of Tacoma.

All games kick off at 7 p.m.

Kennewick (3-1-1, 2-1 MCC) at Richland (2-2, 2-2): Devven Ramos' 303-yard, three-touch-down effort (four scores overall) against Wa-Hi last week left an impression on Neidhold.

"Their running back is a load," Richland's coach said. "That kid is good, and he's got some O-line guys that are just fussy."

Fussy?

"They just scrap and play to the whistle, always competing, always battling. They're punching and shoving like they should be. They play O-line and D-line like they should."

Neidhold said his group must match the Lions' physical play, especially when things are going against it.

"When the other team does something good, we have to not panic," he said. "Last week, we were great when we were winning, when we had the lead and everything was great. But as soon as Kamiakin had a great play and did something good — they had the ball at the 1-foot line and drove 99 yards, and they made three or four great plays during that drive — it caused us to panic a little bit."

The Bombers' strength on offense has been their balance — 127 rushing, 144.5 passing. However, their 17 points a game are near the bottom. RB Josh Phillips ranks third among regular Mid-Col runners with his 6.1 yards per carry.

Chiawana (2-3, 1-3) at Kamiakin (4-1, 3-0): The Riverhawks, who rank near the bottom in offense, could use a big shot in the arm. Sophomore RB Clifton Lozano has been busy since

taking over the starting spot, with 85 carries for 378 yards and three TDs in the last three weeks.

But that could be tough sledding against a Kamiakin defense ranked second in the MCC and allowing 132 rushing yards per game.

The Braves have the only bona fide passing game in the league, with QB Kylan Robertson the runaway leader in yards (1,131), completions (71), TDs (12) and — fortunately for Chiawana — interceptions (8).

Still, Kamiakin's big-play ability can make up for a lot of mistakes.

Walla Walla (2-3, 0-3) at Pasco (0-5, 0-3): Wa-Hi, which is last in defense, gave up 305 yards rushing and 527 total last week to Kennewick.

Step right up, Luis Murillo, whose 745 yards rushing and receiving make up 61 percent of Pasco's offense.

While the key to slowing down the Blue Devils is RB Jonah Hoe (757 yards, 9 TDs rushing, 993 all-purpose), QB Dakota Turner (47-82, 630, 3 TDs, 3 INTs) is completing 57 percent of his throws, tops in the league among regular passers.

Tonight

HERMISTON (2-2) AT SOUTHRIDGE (4-1): After opening the season with four league games and a nonleaguer against Sunnyside that had potential playoff implications, the Suns finally get a game with zero influence on their post-season.

However, they are not likely to ease up coming off last week's 40-0 win over Pasco.

RB Kadin Diaz is fifth in the league in rushing (593) and all-purpose yards (746). This also could be a chance for more season for QB Conner Grigg, who threw for 104 yards and two TDs in his first start last week, completing 64 percent of his passes.

HANFORD (4-1) AT LIFE CHRISTIAN (0-4): The Falcons are not likely to get much of a fight from the 1A Eagles, who have been outscored 161-54. Just how much RB Jalen DeVine (829 yards, 6 TDs) extends his lead in the league rushing race probably depends on how long the starters stay in the game.

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