

Playing for another Monday

A win over Federal Way will keep season going for Richland coach Neidhold and the Bombers

JACK MILLIKIN

HERALD STAFF WRITER

Richland football coach Mike Neidhold admits to being a little selfish these days.

When it comes time to spending time with his team, he cherishes every waking moment — from morning texts to players to afternoon film sessions to evening practices and team dinners.

He loves them all. In fact, he's dreading even the thought of this season — or any season, for that matter — coming to an end.

"Excited isn't the word," Neidhold said when asked about the Bombers' latest playoff run, which will take them to Federal Way's Memorial Stadium at 7 p.m. today to play a 9-2 Eagles team that has won seven of its last eight games after finishing third in the South Puget Sound League.

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"I'm grateful," he said. "To go this far in the playoffs in late November means you've had some success. But it also means you get more time with your kids. We're not playing for a state title. I told the kids, 'I'm being selfish. I just want another Monday.'"

Neidhold and his crew of green and gold warriors have the chance to extend their deepest playoff run since Richland won the Class 4A state championship in 1999. To do that, they'll have to find a way to beat a dangerous Federal Way squad that averages 259 yards a game on the ground alone.

The Eagles also are coming off a 26-20 upset win over two-time defending 4A state champion Skyline.

"They have athletes everywhere," Neidhold said. "They're big and fast, and they play a helter-skelter-type defense. They're good enough to get out of position and still make plays.

"We haven't played anybody like this."

Neidhold is hoping, however, that Federal Way hasn't seen anybody like Richland either. The Bombers, which finished second in the Mid-Columbia Conference behind third-ranked Chiawana. They feature one of the most balanced offenses on the east side of the state, with four running backs that have combined for over 1,500 yards and 25 touchdowns, and a passing attack that led the MCC.

It hasn't been an easy road for Richland, which had to endure a 42-7 loss to Chiawana in



Paul T. Erickson | perickson@tricityherald.com

Richland's Payton Radliff (15) celebrates with teammate Hunter Chambers (21) following a touchdown against Southridge on Sept. 6 at Fran Rish Stadium in Richland.

Week 4 that helped the players and coaches refocus their efforts.

"To lose that bad, we had to rethink. We have a saying here. Are you committed or are you

just interested?" Neidhold said. "It would have been easy to yell and scream and throw a fit, but

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it was almost hushed tones. I told them, 'You're playing for Richland High School. You have an obligation to play better. That's what our community expects. When you came to Richland, you came with the promise to do that.'

Neidhold's biggest weapon, however, has been team unity.

"Last year we had a lot of junior starters, because a lot of seniors got injured," said Garrett March, one of three Richland receivers who caught at least 25 passes. "We all hung out together. I think that's what it is, too. You get to know each other better, you play better."

A little luck along the way doesn't hurt, either.

"We had no catastrophic injuries, and sometimes you get the right call at the right time," Neidhold said, referring to a Skyview interception that got returned for a touchdown before being negated by a pass interference call. "But any team that gets this far is going to be good.

"We didn't buy our way in."

But MCC coaches certainly didn't do the Bombers any favors in the all-league voting. While Chiawana put 15 players on the first team, and Kamiakin — the top Class 3A team out of the MCC — had six first-teamers, Richland got just three first-team nods in defensive back Jesse Malone, offensive lineman Will Fisher and receiver Payton Radliff.

"The all-conference awards are individual awards. These guys are a team. I don't think they care about individual glory. They just want to win," Neidhold said. "Whoever gets a TD gets a TD. It doesn't matter who as long as we get a whole bunch of them."

Pride is a big part of the team concept at Richland, and players have bought in all the way.

"Throughout history, Richland has always had a powerful defense with the ability to stop people," said Bombers senior Gibson McGeorge who starts at defensive back as well as contributing 25 catches and seven touchdown receptions on offense. "I'm just playing to be a part of that history."

Richland is hoping to write a few more chapters before this season is done.

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