

Bombers hit stride in win over Falcons

BEN REYNOLDS

SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Zach Whitby admitted he was rattled. This is a senior quarterback who has played varsity for four years. He has played in big games before. But there is just something about rivalry games that tends to get to coaches and players.

Friday night was no different.

But even a little out of sorts, Whitby and his Richland teammates had more than enough, on their way to a 28-7 Mid-Columbia Conference win over the Hanford Falcons at Fran Rish Stadium.

"Our timing was off a little tonight," he said. "I don't know what it was; it was a rivalry game."

With the win and Walla Walla's loss to Chiawana, Richland (7-1, 5-1) clinches a playoff spot with one game left in the regular season. The Bombers will play either Gonzaga Prep or Central Valley in a crossover game.

The win also atoned for the Bombers' first and only loss ever to its intracity rival Hanford last season. The Falcons beat the Bombers 31-14.

"That was last year," said Richland coach Mike Neidhold. "We are focused on this year and we are worrying about Richland. This game was one step closer in getting a playoff spot secured for us."

Despite the loss, Hanford (2-6, 1-4) is not out of the playoff picture with one game remaining against Southridge next Friday.

The Bombers, whose only hiccup on the schedule this season was a 42-7 loss to Chiawana, jumped out early

to a 14-0 lead and the game appeared it was going to be a runaway.

But let's not forget it was a rivalry game.

Hanford clawed its way back in with a 15-yard touchdown run by Will Bishop with 8:21 left in the first half to cut the margin to 14-7. It looked it was going to stay that way at half. But the Bombers and their hurry-up offense ran their two-minute drill to perfection.

Richland marched down the field 70 yards in less than 2 minutes to grab a 21-7 lead right before halftime. The touchdown came on a fourth-down and 20 from the Hanford 27-yard line. Whitby connected with Gibson McGeorge over the middle. He managed to stay on his feet after colliding with two Hanford defenders and marched into the endzone.

"That was big for us," Whitby said. "He made a great catch; it gave us momentum."

The lone touchdown in the second half came on a 48-yard catch by Garrett March from Whitby with 3:59 remaining in the third quarter.

The Bombers defense took over in the second half. Hanford crept inside the Richland 30-yard line just once and could not get any sort of consistency on offense either running or throwing.

Quarterback Aaron Enderlin threw the ball 36 times completing just 11 of them for 109 yards and one interception.

Hanford rushed the ball 31 times and managed just 106 yards.

"This is a good win," Neidhold said. "Give credit to Hanford, their kids came out and played hard.

"It was a battle."