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Richland's Jacob Scalise (61), Will Fisher (78) and Hunter Grade (77) make up three-fifths of the Bombers' offensive line along with Tyson Childs and Dante Tyler. The unit has been a strength for the Bombers this season, who open Class 4A state play today against visiting Skyview.

BAND OF BROTHERS

Bombers O-line is a tight group that paved the road to state

KEVIN ANTHONY
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Here is all you need to know about what it takes to play on the offensive line.

Richland center Jake Scalise injured his shoulder early in the season and missed a couple games before coming back and playing with a piece of bone still piercing the muscle. Asked if it bothers him, he replied it only hurts when he gets hit in the shoulder.

When he gets hit in the *shoulder!*? He's a center for cryin' out loud. He gets hit in the shoulder with every snap of the ball.

"It hurts me, but you just push it to the side," he said, rather matter-of-factly.

Welcome to the trenches, that section of dirt or turf where quarterbacks fear to tread and running backs just try to get through as quickly as possible. It's where guys like Scalise and his Richland linemates make their football living.

There is little glory and almost no attention ... until you flinch on a hard snap count or get flagged for holding. Then everyone knows who you are.

You don't get your name in the paper for all the touchdowns or yards that your team piles up ... you just pave the way.

For Scalise, guards Will Fisher and Tyson

Childs, and tackles Hunter Grade and Dante Tyler, they wouldn't have it any other way.

"I love it to death," said Fisher, a junior who earned his second selection to the Mid-Columbia Conference first team earlier this week. "When I was a kid, I didn't like catching it because I knew I'd get hit. I like hitting people."

They all seem to, and it is one of the reasons the Richland Bombers were one of the top offenses in the MCC, averaging more than 400 yards a game with equally effective passing and rushing attacks.

That offense will need to be at its season best as Richland (9-1) opens the Class 4A state playoffs tonight against Skyview (6-4) of Vancouver.

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BROTHERS | Richland O-line has only allowed 2 sacks since Week 3

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Kickoff is 7 p.m. at Fran Rish Stadium.

Richland head coach Mike Neidhold has a fondness for offensive linemen. He coached them for 20 years before taking over the head coaching job six years ago. Still, he often finds himself wandering over while O-line coach Josh Jelinek is running position drills.

"They're a pretty good group," Neidhold said, the pride glowing in his voice. "They just work well together. They are the heart and soul of our team. We have skilled athletes everywhere, but we have good offensive linemen."

It didn't all happen by accident, nor did it come easy.

Jelinek said the Bombers have run nine different players through the starting spots since spring ball, and they replaced the right side of the line with Childs and Tyler after the season started. A big key has been not having to touch the left side at all since the first day of practice in August.

"Grade (pronounced Grady) and Will Fisher have been anchors," Jelinek said. "They've taken every meaningful snap all year. Health-wise, performance-wise, dependability-wise, they've been the rock."

For Grade, who is playing his first year on the varsity, this has been a tremendous

SKYVIEW STORM VS. RICHLAND BOMBERS

7 p.m. today, Fran Rish Stadium

Records: Skyview 6-4, Richland 9-1

Last week: Skyview 38, Curtis 10; Richland 35, Ferris 7

Players to watch: Skyview, WR Jacob Dennis (63-1,050, 13 TDs); QB Zac Shomler (89-177-1,648, 20 TDs); RB Michael Knox (147 yards, 2 TDs last week). Richland, QB Zach Whitby, sr. (122-209-1,908, 22 TD, 8 INT), WR Payton Radliff, sr. (30-598, 9 TDs, 19.9 avg); OL Will Fisher, jr.; DB Jesse Malone, sr.

Best playoff finish: Skyview second 2011 (Skyline 38, Skyview 7); Richland - first 1999 (Richland 21, Kentwood 18) and 1981 (Richland 7, Kentridge 6).

Weather: 41 degrees, 40 percent chance rain

Notes: Yes, this is that Skyview team from that blocked field-goal play that was on SportsCenter. In fact, both parties are in the Tri-Cities this weekend with Columbia River

playing Kamiakin on Saturday in the 3A playoffs. ... Don't be fooled by the Storm's average-looking record. Two of those losses are to top-ranked Camas and No. 6 Union in the very tough Great St. Helen's League, and a third was on that fluke play. ... Dennis has been a big-time threat, coming off a 10-catch, 200-yard day against Curtis. He is shifty and quick, known to take short passes and turn them into long plays. ... Knox filled in admirably for injured all-league RB Nate Arriola last week. ... Richland has won seven in a row and is coming off perhaps its best performance of the year. The Bombers have outscored opponents a combined 274-48 in six of those games, and the seventh was a 56-49 4OT win over Kamiakin. ... Whitby-to-Radliff is a big-play combination, and the Bombers use a stable of four RBs for their ground-and-pound game.

Prediction: Richland 27, Skyview 19.

- Kevin Anthon, Herald staff writer

learning experience after playing on the freshman team last season.

"What I was hoping for was to get in the rotation, get in some plays and get some field time," he said, adding that the first day of practice when they split up in 1s vs. 2s, and he was with the 1s, "It was a great moment. It felt right."

The Bombers head into their state game on a tear, having won seven consecu-

tive games after losing to Chiawana 42-7 back in Week 3. Along the way, they've averaged 47 points a game, including a 56-49 win over Kamiakin in four overtimes in Week 5 that really got the team fired up.

"That's the game that showed me I could play," Tyler said. "We've only allowed two sacks since Chiawana."

A big part of their success started last winter after a

miserable offensive day in a season-ending 17-0 loss to Mead in the regional crossover, one game short of state.

Neidhold said the coaches did some brutal self evaluations on everything, and something in particular came up in play calling: The Bombers were practicing a number of plays that they rarely used in games.

They shortened the playbook and concentrated on the plays they used the most and used best. The results speak volumes.

"Simplified things, and it helped a lot," Fisher said.

"You stop overthinking things and go out and play and win battles."

After last year's disappointing loss to Mead, the Bombers are thrilled to be back at state for the first time since 2010, before any of these linemen were playing varsity.

"It feels good, feels exciting to get to the postseason," Childs said.

But that doesn't mean they have a "just happy to be there" attitude. They are way too competitive for that, like how they chased Chiawana all season for the MCC's top spot in offense, only to finish in second.

"We take a lot of pride in it," Fisher said. "We don't like being in second position to anyone."

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BEST BETS

Prep football playoffs

7 p.m.

Venture out of the living room and into the stadiums for some postseason grid action. Richland hosts Skyview at Fran Rish, while Connell takes on Okanogan at home in a Class 1A game.