

RICHLAND'S DEFENSE IS IN ...

THE LINE OF FIRE



RICHLAND DB'S TO FACE TEST

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Bombers will be tested against Shadle Park's record-setting QB

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TRI-CITY HERALD

The last time the Richland Bombers football team faced a high-profile player from Spokane, they got the better of him.

Bishop Sankey, now a running back with the Tennessee Titans, visited Fran Rish Stadium with Gonzaga Prep on Nov. 5, 2010, in the Class 4A regional crossover playoffs.

The Bombers shut him down — at least as much as you can shut down a player of that quality — holding him to a season-low 153 yards and one touchdown as Richland advanced to the Class 4A state playoffs.

This time, Brett Rypien, Shadle Park's highly talented, Boise State-bound quarterback, might not be so easy to contain. The Bombers (0-1) will play host to the Highlanders (1-0) at 7 p.m. today at Fran Rish Stadium.

"We've never had a quarterback with this much hype coming in," Richland junior cornerback Griffey March said. "Normally, teams are more about the run than the pass."

The 6-foot-2, 185-pound Rypien lived up to the hype last season, shattering the Greater Spokane League's career marks for passing yardage and touchdowns. This season, he's off to a magnificent start, passing for 428 yards and eight touchdowns in a 63-14 win over Fife.

"We've got our hands full," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "Against Sankey, we loaded up the box because (Gonzaga Prep) couldn't pass. ... With Brett, he can throw it from anywhere, but he can run it too."

That's a bit of a scary proposition for a Bombers' secondary that's young, untested and undersized. Richland's starters

— March, Hunter Leonard-Baird, Ryan Wolski and Jared Kraus — average 5-8, 165 pounds across the board, and none of them are returning starters.

Neidhold, who instills a "respect all, fear none" motto from the get-go, doesn't think that will be a problem.

"You know, our guys are little guys, and little guys tend to play with a chip on their shoulder. But I'll take 'em. They're dirty dogs, too. They won't back down from a challenge," Neidhold said. "They're excited to play a good team. Plus, it's our home opener. There are other things we're excited about as well, but we might not see a kid like this again."

Part of the Bombers' plan is to put pressure on Rypien, nephew of former NFL quarterback Mark Rypien, to take him out of his comfort zone.

"Ultimately, it's what we do with their front seven," High-

landers coach Jim Mace said. "If we're able to block, we might be able to take advantage of any weakness in the secondary."

Richland hopes there won't be time to look for a weakness.

"The best way to stop him is to hit him. I'm telling my fellow linemen and linebackers — even if he doesn't have the ball — keep him thinking, give him something," Bombers senior defensive end Mason Jackson said. "Because I've seen him pick teams apart. I don't want to be the team that gets picked apart by Brett Rypien."

Yet, that's a familiar scenario that has been repeated to a vast array of Shadle Park opponents. There is no way to stop Rypien, but you can limit

the damage he can do.

"I feel like they're more dangerous against the zones," senior running back and linebacker Josh Phillips said. "In the middle of the field, they have their receivers go out and have the guy sink into the flat. They also run a lot of screens."

"We're going to play back in our zones and let them throw the little bubble (screens). Then we'll rally to the bubbles."



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Richland's defense — from left, linebacker Josh Phillips, safety Ryan Wolski, defensive end Mason Jackson, safety Jared Kraus, defensive back Hunter Leonard-Baird and defensive back Griffey March — face a stiff challenge tonight from Shadle Park star QB Brett Rypien.