

Bombers eye return to MCC heavyweight

Strong defense will makes Richland tough contender

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TRI-CITY HERALD

The Richland Bombers are anything but a new kid on the block.

Richland football is one of the most storied programs around with 16 state playoff appearances and two state titles since 1975.

Still, the Bombers are approaching this year as a chance to be recognized again as a championship contender.

“Last year we definitely under-achieved as a team,” Richland senior tight end/linebacker Brecken Galliher said. “People don’t really look at us as a contender in this league. We’re looking to prove them wrong.”

If the Bombers are to contend for the Mid-Columbia Conference title, it most likely will be defense that gets them there.

“I think our defense will be better than in the past. We have 11 guys back that played a lot on defense,” Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. “We weren’t very good last year, and around here that doesn’t work. So we just had to get better. We retooled a little, made it simpler for the kids to run and easier for us to call.”

Alex Chapman, a junior cornerback, tied for second in the MCC last year with four interceptions and pairs with senior Griffey March as a

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Prep football previews

The Herald will run preview stories daily for the upcoming high school football season followed by a preview for Week 1 on Sept. 4.

- Aug. 23 | Oregon
- Aug. 24 | Class 2B/1B
- Aug. 25 | SCAC East
- Aug. 26 | CWAC
- Aug. 27 | Southridge
- Aug. 28 | Kamiakin
- Aug. 29 | Walla Walla
- Aug. 30 | Pasco
- Aug. 31 | Kennewick
- Today | Richland
- Sept. 2 | Chiawana
- Sept. 3 | Hanford



Andrew Jansen Tri-City Herald

Richland linebacker Lakota Wills (45) is one of the top college prospects in the area and a critical part of the Bombers’ postseason hopes.

BOMBERS | March was tops among MCC receivers last year

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top-tier cover tandem.

KEY RETURNERS: March, a first-team All-MCC receiver, led the league with 67 catches and 721 yards receiving last year. He’s just one player in a strong receiving corps that includes Rhett Levin (35 catches, 345 yards, 3 TDs) and a pair of talented tight ends in Galliher and Lakota Wills. Both Galliher and Wills were also all-MCC linebackers.

“I like that this team is really hungry, tough, aggressive and ready to go at all time,” said Wills, who is rated by vype.com as one of the top 200 players in the Northwest. “We just want to get better every day. We want to get better than the day before and win every game.”

Hunter Grade will anchor both lines in the trenches,

and Dontae Powell returns on the offensive line.

“There has been a lot more bonding this year, a lot more holding each other accountable,” Grade said. “If something goes wrong, we try to pick each other up. Last year, there was a lot of blaming.”

ROLE PLAYERS: Richland has always been known for its running game, and this year will be no exception. Neidhold has been impressed with three players — McKlane Elgin, Nico Salinas

and [Click to zoom out. Drag mouse to move document.](#) ssary. could all make a difference on Friday nights.

“Elgin we call ‘Squid.’ He’s kind of a scat back, and he has to be because he weighs about 10 pounds, but he’s tough,” Neidhold said. “Salinas is the fastest of the three, and Whitby (a familiar name to football fans around the Tri-Cities) is just a tough

kid.”

Whitby and Tate Gillespie will start at linebacker, giving the Bombers one of the best backing crews in the MCC.

KEYS TO SUCCESS: A critical part of Richland’s destiny this year will be the performance of quarterback Paxton Stevens, who won the starting job after a tough spring battle against Jared Whitby and Kade Jensen.

Stevens possesses a strong arm and good poise in the pocket with the ability to

“We charted everything and kept meticulous records. We scripted everything since June 1 in Boise (football camp),” Neidhold said. “They’re three quality kids, but Paxton has done the job.”

BIG GAMES: Richland may have the most favorable schedule in the MCC, getting home games against expect-

ed MCC contenders Chiawana (Sept. 18) and Kamiakin (Oct. 23). In fact, the Bombers get a chance to avenge all but one of their 2014 regular-season losses at Fran Rish Stadium. They’ll open the season with a home game against Gonzaga Prep on Sept. 4 and get a chance for some payback against Walla Walla (Oct. 2), which embarrassed them 34-0 at Borleske Stadium last year.

“There have been no excuses. They started this process in December, after we finished the season against Ferris, and got right to work,” Neidhold said. “We just want Mondays. If we can have a lot of Mondays in November, who knows? Maybe we can make a run to the tournament.”

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