

Tri-City Herald



RICHLAND FLIES BY CHIAWANA 28-7

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PREP FOOTBALL

BOMBERS PREVAIL



Bob Brawdy Tri-City Herald

Richland's Taiton Gillespie (42) makes a diving interception in front of his teammate Ryan Piper (20) during Friday night's game against Chiawana at Fran Rish Stadium in Richland. [See a gallery at tricityherald.com](#)

Wills leads Richland to 28-7 victory over Chiawana

JACK MILLIKIN
TRI-CITY HERALD

The excitable fans at Fran Rish Stadium got to see what makes Lakota Wills one of the state's top football recruits during Richland's 28-7 Mid-Columbia Conference win over Chiawana.

But Wills decided long before this game began that the Bombers wouldn't end up on the losing end of another Riverhawks matchup.

At least not on his watch.

"I was so excited today. I was walking through school, and everybody's like, 'Are you guys going to get blown out?' Wills said. "I was like, 'No, we're not. We're going to beat Chiawana.'"

Wills was a big part of that, recording two quarterback sacks, several quarter-

back hurries, a tackle for loss and a forced fumble that Richland recovered to set up their second touchdown.

"This means the world. My sophomore and junior year we got beat bad. I just wanted to come out and beat them fair and square, and that's what we did. I'm so proud of my team," said Wills, a 6-foot-3, 225-pound linebacker and tight end who recently committed to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Lately, though, he's been paying dividends for Richland at running back. He didn't run for a lot of yardage Friday night — just 14 yards on five carries — but he capped two scoring drives with touchdown runs that helped the Bombers seal just their second win over Chiawana in the last six seasons.

"That's Lakota Wills. That's how he plays. There's no bottom to him. He goes 100 miles an hour all the time," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "He's a great kid, a great leader and we love him."

The game started as a tug-of-war, with both teams trading fruitless possessions up until the final 5 minutes of the second quarter.

Wills sacked Riverhawks quarterback for a 7-yard loss on first down with 4:20 left in the half. Chiawana was forced to punt, and — after a nice return by Griffey March — Richland took the next 1:09 to mount a 7-play, 49-yard scoring drive.

Bombers quarterback Paxton Stevens hit Rhett Levin on a 15-yard curl to

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BOMBERS | Vargas rushes for 232 yards, TD for Riverhawks

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put them at the Riverhawks' 9-yard line. Stevens ran it in from there to make it 7-0.

But Richland took advantage of an Andrew Vargas fumble, setting the Bombers up at the Riverhawks 13. Two plays later, Wills ran it in from 5 yards to make it 14-0 at halftime.

"Our defense kept us in it. When your defense keeps forcing three-and-outs. ... The better your defense plays, the better your offense gets," Neidhold said. "We got a couple of lucky breaks down there, and that paid off for us."

Richland extended its lead to 21-0 on its second drive of the third quarter, going on a five-play, 66-yard drive on the Bombers' only passing touchdown of the day. Paxton Stevens found Alex Chapman behind the Chiawana defense and hit him for a 47-yard strike.

Stevens didn't have his best day, going 10-for-20 with three interceptions and 156 yards, but fortunately, his offensive line gave Richland a lot of room to run.

"I'm definitely proud of my linemen. They don't get enough credit," Wills said. "They blocked that zone perfect, and I could just run free. I loved it."

Chiawana running back Andrew Vargas carried the Riverhawks offense for most of the night, rushing for 232



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Richland's Alex Chapman (8) seems to have a certain touchdown in front of Chiawana defender Trent Simpkins (2) but mishandles the catch on this play Friday night at Fran Rish Stadium.

yards and a touchdown on 37 carries. But he fumbled the ball away twice, the last time at the Bombers' 2-yard line on Chiawana's final drive.

"We've had our trouble the last couple years against Chiawana and coach (Steve) Graff and his kids. As you saw, there's no quit in them. They are a proud program, and we were fortunate to win it," Neidhold said.

Play of the day

There weren't a lot of long plays on the day, but certainly one of the prettiest was Paxton's 47-yard touchdown pass to Chapman, who only had to stay in bounds and catch the

beautifully thrown ball for the Bombers third TD.

Turning point

The teams were still scoreless near the end of the first half, and another Richland drive looked like it might end without a score after Paxton threw three consecutive incompletions. But on fourth-and-10 from the Riverhawks' 35, Stevens used his legs to get a first down, scrambling around left end for a first down at the Chiawana 24.

Defensive stars

RICHLAND: LB Taiton Gillespie (interception); LB Kyle

Whitby (fumble recovery).

CHIAWANA: DB Roman Ruiz (interception); DB Bell (interception); DB Trent Simpkins (interception)

Chiawana	0	0	7	0	- 7
Richland	0	14	7	7	- 28

SCORING PLAYS
R — Paxton Stevens 9 run (Ryan Wolski kick)
R — Lakota Wills 5 run (Wolski kick)
R — Alex Chapman 47 pass from Stevens (Wolski kick)
C — Andrew Vargas 23 run (Matt Winn kick)
R — Wills 4 run (Wolski kick)

STATISTICS
RUSHING — C, Vargas 37-232, Troy Simpkins 5-5, Corey Bell 4-19, Josh Wilson 2-4, R, Wills 5-14, Stevens 5-22, Kyle Whitby 3-6, McClain Elgin 18-60.
PASSING — C, Tro, Simpkins 8-20-148, R, Stevens 10-20-3-156.
RECEIVING — C, Vargas 1-6, Roman Ruiz 1-11, Bell 2-6, Wilson 1-2, Trent Simpkins 3-23, R, Griffey March 4-39, Wills 1-33, Rhett Levin 4-37, Chapman 1-47.

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