



Gonzaga Prep's Ryan Gross catches a touchdown pass in front of Richland defender Adam Weissenfels during Saturday's state 4A semifinal playoff game at Edgar Brown Stadium in Pasco.

## Gonzaga Prep overcomes Richland in semifinals to earn berth in State 4A title game

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PASCO – The Gonzaga Prep defense had done all it could Saturday afternoon.

It was time for the Bullpups' offense to step up.

After Richland took a 17-15 lead not quite midway in the fourth quarter – the Bombers' first and only lead – the Bullpups scored twice in a span of 6:13 as Gonzaga Prep prevailed 31-17 in a State 4A semifinal football game in frigid conditions at Edgar Brown Stadium.

The Bullpups (13-0) are headed back to the championship final for the first time at the Tacoma Dome and first time since 1987 – the last visit in a three-year stretch that saw G-Prep win a title in 1986.

G-Prep takes on either Skyline (12-1), which overcame No. 2-ranked Lake Stevens (12-1) 37-34 in the other semifinal on Saturday.

After taking a 15-9 lead with 1:18 to go before halftime, the G-Prep offense went dormant until its final two possessions.

Richland's defense had much to do with the struggles of the G-Prep offense.

And if anyone was losing hope on the G-Prep sideline, well, there wasn't a hint of panic.

"Our whole team is based on trust," said junior defensive lineman Matthew Simpson, who had arguably his best game of the season. "We always count on each other to pick each other up. We had faith in the offense the whole time. It just took a little bit to get going."

G-Prep had three punts and allowed a safety before Richland began its go-ahead drive.

The Bombers (11-2) moved 56 yards on seven plays before Kyle Whitby scored from 2 yards out to put Richland ahead 17-15 with 7:56 remaining.

If G-Prep ever needed an answer – and perhaps it was the best answer all season – it got one moments later.

Quarterback Liam Bell hit receiver Devin Culp for a 34-yard gain to Richland's 9. Three plays later, Evan Weaver plunged in from the 2. The Bullpups needed just 2:19 to reclaim the lead at 23-17 with 5:37 to go.

On its next possession, Richland moved to the G-Prep 49. But three straight incomplete passes, including on fourth-and-12, gave the ball back to the Bullpups.

For final measure, the Bullpups' offense, with Weaver carrying on five of the six plays, scored on a Weaver 2-yard run with 1:43 remaining.

It was a game that required patience and another good measure of resilience from G-Prep.

"Our kids responded," G-Prep coach Dave McKenna said. "When we talk about adversity, the key is how do you respond to it. Steve Gleason (former G-Prep and New Orleans Saints player who has MLS) has been an example to our program and we've learned from him. For our kids there was no doubt in their minds nor in mine."

Every yard for both teams was hard earned.

Weaver led G-Prep with 95 yards on 17 carries.

Simpson, Josh Condon, Taj Hoard and Michael Chan had six tackles each for the Bullpups.

Weaver made his 6-foot-3, 245-pound presence felt on the game's third play when he forced a fumble from quarterback Paxton Stevens. Richland recovered it in the end zone, giving the Bullpups a safety and two points.

That held until early in the second quarter when Nick Johnson scored on a 2-yard run for a 9-0 lead.

Richland evened things at 9-9 on a touchdown and a field goal before Ryan Gross made a diving 7-yard catch in the end zone to give the Bullpups a 15-9 lead going into halftime.

It was apparent that the Bombers were ready in the second half.

"We made some adjustments on defense, changed some responsibilities inside," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "We just couldn't run the ball. At this stage you have to do that."

Weaver, who has been unstoppable on both sides of the ball, praised his teammates for playing with composure. Especially the offense late in the game.

"They really wanted it and it started with the (offensive line)," Weaver said. "They buckled down, they got their pad level down and started making some blocks in the fourth quarter and we got it done."

## Gonzaga Prep 31, Richland 17

1 p.m., Nov. 28, 2015 Edgar Brown Stadium, Pasco

### SCORING SUMMARY

	1	2	3	4	Final
Gonzaga Prep (13-0, 5-0)	2	13	0	16	31
Richland (3-2, 0-0)	0	9	8	0	17

#### Scoring

GP--Safety

GP--Johnson 2 run (Kutsch kick)

Rich--Wolski 32 FG

Rich--Whitby 1 run (Kick failed)

GP--Gross 7 pass from Bell (Kick failed)

Rich--Safety

Rich--Whitby 2 run (Kick failed)

GP--Weaver 2 run (Johnson run)

GP--Weaver 2 run (Gross pass from Bell)

First Downs: GP 16, Rich 14

Rushes-yards: GP 52-253, Rich 33-58

Passing: GP 77, Rich 152

Comp-Att-Int: GP 3-7-0, Rich, 16-29-0

Fumbles-lost: GP 3-2, Rich 3-1

Penalties-yards: GP 3-40, Rich 6-63

RUSHING — GP, Weaver 17-95, Plese 14-55, Johnson 7-36, Gross 3-28, Bell 8-21, Tucker 3-18. Rich, Whitby 11-51, Wills 14-48, Mahoney 1-2, Team 1-(-14), Stevens 6-(29).

PASSING — GP, Bell 3-7-0-77. Rich, Stevens 16-29-0-152.

RECEIVING — GP, Johnson 1-36, Culp 1-34, Gross 1-12. Rich, Chapman 6-57, Levin 4-41, March 3-35, Wolski 2-20, Whitby 1-(1)