



BOB BRAWDY Tri-City Herald

Richland running back/defensive end Lakota Wills (45) is the Tri-City Herald All-Area Player of the Year after leading the Bombers to their first trip to the state semifinals since 1999.

PREP FOOTBALL

# Wills tops All-Area list

Air-Force-bound senior led elite Bombers' defense

Wills also scored 12 TDs, led MCC with 8.2 yards per carry

Prosser's Ingvalson named coach of the year

BY JACK MILLIKIN

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Imagine the ideal football player.

Of course he's strong and he's fast with good size to boot, but he also possesses an aggressiveness that mix-

es well with a bit of a mean streak on the field. He combines those attributes with a rare agility and grace — enough that you trust him to handle the ball for you as well as hunt for it on defense.

He's a natural leader too,

and people are proud to follow him. Division I colleges keep a keen eye on him. They want him to represent their program — not just on the football field, but in the classroom as well.

Meet Lakota Wills, who fit all those attributes and more for the Richland Bombers this season. Wills, a three-time all-Mid-Columbia-Conference selection and this year's MCC Most Valuable Player, set a high standard for himself as well as the Richland football pro-

gram. The Bombers had their best season in 16 years, going all the way to the Class 4A state semifinals before losing to eventual champion Gonzaga Prep. And the 6-foot-3, 240-pound running back/defensive end made it crystal clear why he was the best football player in the Mid-Columbia and a clear-cut choice for the Tri-City Herald Player of the Year.

"It means I've got great coaches, great teammates and great teammates," Wills said upon learning of the honor. "I feel like we did our city proud by getting as far as we did."

It began with a push for stronger leadership, and it started at the end of the 2014 season, when Richland was preparing for its final game — a meaningless crossover against Ferris. As a salute to his outgoing seniors, Bombers coach Mike Neidhold had them walk across the field at Fran Rish Stadium one final time.

"He came up to me and said, 'I don't want this to ever happen again.' I said, 'It won't,'" Wills said. "He said, 'I know it won't.'"

Neidhold had every confidence that the program would be in good hands with Wills and fellow captains Brecken Galliher, Hunter Grade and Kyle Whitby.

"I think (Wills) saw leadership in the past that didn't really fit the culture of our program. He stepped up and wanted to make it right," Neidhold said. "He leads by example, and there's nothing he won't do. He will fold towels. He'll be the first guy on the conditioning line in practice and the last guy off."

"He's not afraid to work, and there's no job that's too small for him."

Wills certainly put on the hard hat in 2015. After earning first-team all-MCC honors as a junior outside linebacker, he moved to defensive end to bolster the Bombers' pass rush. He also got a crack at running back and paid immediate dividends,

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## ALL-AREA

rushing for nine touchdowns in his first five games. He finished the season as the MCC leader with 8.2 yards per carry, was second in rushing touchdowns (12) and tied for third in scoring (72 points).

But the real payoff was on defense, where Wills was an integral part of Richland's strongest defense in years and its first league title since 2008. The Bombers led the MCC in allowing the fewest points (9.6 per game) and yards (219.9) during the regular season.

"On a scale of 10, I'd rate (this season) a 10. That's about as good as it gets. We played with some resolve, and our defense really stepped up," said Wills, who accepted an appointment to the Air Force Academy, where he will begin his academy training on July 13.

Prosser coach Corey Ingvalson did something no other first-year coach in the history of the program had done — he won a state title. With the Mustangs' 22-15 win over previously unbeaten Tumwater, Ingvalson also became the first Prosser coach to win state titles as a player, an assistant coach and a head coach.

Ingvalson, who edged Neidhold for coach of the year honors, said it was all a

matter of tradition.

"I'm just happy for our seniors. That's what we play for, that pride. To see that Mustang on the water tower — that's pretty iconic. When we step out there, we're representing a whole community," Ingvalson said. "It's cool to see guys playing for more than themselves. The community gives us so much, we try to honor that."

Five players made repeat appearances on the All-Area first team. From Kamiakin, offensive lineman Korbin Sorenson and defensive back Darreon Moore were named, along with Chiawana offensive lineman Kameron Silvers and Richland's Griffey March, who was selected as a receiver and a defensive back.

Another two-time first-team pick, Liberty Christian quarterback/linebacker John Lesser, easily earned his spot as the first team, rushing for three national 8-man records — career rushing yards (9,019 yards), all-purpose touchdowns (147) and career scoring (1,076 points).

Joining Wills and March on the first team were six Bomber teammates: offensive lineman Grade, linebackers Galliher and Tait Gillespie, defensive lineman John Hardy, defensive back

Alex Chapman and kicker Ryan Wolski.

From Kamiakin, wide receiver and Montana commit Gavin Crow, running back Jethro Questad and defensive end Austin Crawford earned first-team spots.

Prosser and Royal, who both won state championships this season, each earned three premier selections.

The Mustangs put wide receiver Kason Blair, offensive lineman Riley Lusk and linebacker David Ledesma on the first team, while the Knights' premier spots went to running back/defensive back Joe Lang, quarterback Kaden Jenks and defensive back Sam Christensen.

Two Hanford players — linebacker Austin Dreyer and punter Garrett Werner — earned spots after leading the Falcons to a 4-6 season after a winless campaign in 2014.

Chiawana running back Andrew Vargas was a no-brainer after leading the MCC in rushing (2,145 yards), scoring (150 points) and total offense (2,161 yards).

Two trench warfare specialists — Kennewick offensive lineman D.J. Dyer and Connell defensive lineman Mathew Davidson — rounded out the first team.



MVP/DL Lakota Wills, sr., Richland



Coach Corey Ingvalson, Prosser



QB Kaden Jenks, jr., Royal



RB Andrew Vargas, jr., Chiawana



RB Jethro Questad, jr., Kamiakin



WR Kason Blair, sr., Prosser



WR Gavin Crow, sr., Kamiakin



WR/DB Griffey March, sr., Richland



OL D.J. Dyer, sr., Kennewick



OL Hunter Grade, sr., Richland



OL Kameron Silvers, sr., Chiawana



OL Korbin Sorenson, sr., Kamiakin

SECOND TEAM

OFFENSE: QB: Paxton Stevens, jr., Richland; RB: Kaleb Ash, sr., Pasco; Michael Kernan, jr., Prosser; WR: Sam Christensen, sr., Royal; Blake Loftus, jr., Kennewick; Roman Ruiz, sr., Chiawana. OL: Josh Alvarez, soph., Chiawana; Mathew Davidson, sr., Connell; Nick Little, sr., Kamiakin; Blake Thomas, sr., Southridge; Brenden Villaseñor, jr., Kennewick. AP: Sam Hoe, jr., Walla Walla; Javier Diaz, sr., Prosser. DEFENSE: DL: Hunter Grade, sr., Richland; Hayden Larson, jr., Kamiakin; Riley Lusk, sr., Prosser; Tre Neal, sr., Hermiston. LB: Alex Bayuk, jr., Kamiakin; Rogelio Guizar, sr., Kennewick; Thomas Neimeyer, sr., Prosser; Dallas Rodriguez, sr., Connell. DB: Kason Blair, sr., Prosser; Devyn Edward, sr., Kennewick; Vainavete Ena, jr., Hermiston; Derrick Gillespie, jr., Southridge. P: Jaxx Whitby, jr., Connell. K: Jose Ponce, sr., Royal.



OL Riley Lusk, Prosser



AP John Lesser, sr., Liberty Chr.



AP Joe Lang, jr., Royal



K Ryan Wolski, sr., Richland



DL Mathew Davidson, sr., Connell



LB Austin Dreyer, sr., Hanford



DL Austin Crawford, sr., Kamiakin



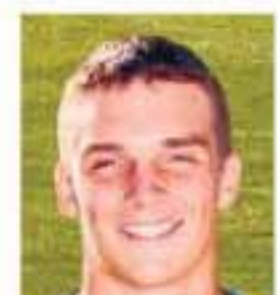
DL John Hardy, sr., Richland



LB Brecken Galliher, sr., Richland



LB David Ledesma, sr., Prosser



LB Tait Gillespie, sr., Richland



DB Alex Chapman, jr., Richland

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DB Darreon Moore, jr., Kamiakin



DB Sam Christensen, sr., Royal



P Garrett Werner, jr., Hanford