

PREP FOOTBALL

Top MCC teams look to stand pat

Sub-.500 teams are searching for upset opportunities

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With the top three football teams in the Mid-Columbia Conference — Kamiakin (4-1 overall, 3-0 MCC), Richland (4-1, 3-0) and Hanford (4-1, 2-1) — all facing squads with sub-.500 records this week, it would be a great time for the front-runners to create some separation between the top and bottom halves of the MCC.

Then again, it could be a golden opportunity for teams

such as Chiawana, Kennewick and Walla Walla — all 2-3, 1-2 — to make their move to contend for a postseason berth.

The game of the week looks to be today's Chiawana-Hanford matchup at 7 p.m. at Fran Rish Stadium in Richland. The game will feature the MCC's top rusher — Riverhawks junior Andrew Vargas (863 yards, 8 TDs) — and one of the conference's most electric players — Falcons senior running back Elwood Davis. He leads Hanford in rushing (296 yards, 2 TDs) while topping the MCC in receiving (23 catches, 193 yards, TD).

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Hanford junior Desmond Samples may have recently lost the starting quarterback job to freshman Joshua Fonner, but he could be even more dangerous now as a wide receiver. And Chiawana's Roman Ruiz (11 catches, 140 yards, 3 TDs) is emerging as one of the best combinations of size, speed and strength in the MCC.

Richland at Kennewick, Lampson Stadium, 7 p.m.: The Bombers' defense continues to assert itself, allowing an MCC-low 9.2 points and just 121 rushing yards a game. But the Lions will look for a bounce-back game after a tough-luck loss to Pasco (1-4, 1-2). Richland quarterback Paxton Stevens leads the MCC with 845 passing yards and seems to have found his groove in the pocket.

Southridge at Walla Walla, Borleske Stadium, 7 p.m.: The Suns are the only MCC team without a league win but could have a chance against the Blue Devils, who have lost two of their past three. Southridge must find a way to contain Wa-Hi's Mitch Lesmeister, who leads the MCC with 11 passing touchdowns, and Brennan Barberich, who has run for six scores.

Kamiakin at Pasco, Edgar Brown Stadium, 7 p.m.: The Bulldogs showed some toughness and grit in a 36-35 win over Kennewick last Fri-

day, with Kaleb Ash (488 rushing yards, 4 TDs) emerging as a major offensive asset. The Braves, however, are the MCC's top team on offense and defense, possessing the ability to control every aspect of the game. Kamiakin running back Jethro Questad leads the MCC in scoring with 54 points.

Grandview at Othello, 7 p.m.: Huskies running back Reese Jones is starting to turn it up, averaging 185 rushing yards over the past three games. The Greyhounds are coming off their first win in more than a year but might be overmatched against a more physical team.

Kiona-Benton at Connell, 7 p.m.: Both teams are stocked with playmakers, but the Eagles' physicality in the trenches gives them the edge here. Still, a strong showing from Benton City fans could give the Bears an advantage.

River View at Royal, 7 p.m.: It has been a rough year for the rebuilding Panthers, who were outscored 120-6 over the past two weeks. Things won't get any easier on the road against the top-ranked Knights.

Columbia-Burbank at Waitsburg, 7 p.m.: The Coyotes ended a two-game skid against Highland last week. Waitsburg has lost two in a row.

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