



Blue Devils look to knock off Bombers

Richland is atop the state rankings as Wa-Hi tries to pick up a primetime MCC victory on Friday.

Hector del Castillo Updated Oct 13, 2016 (0)

Walla Walla High School's football Blue Devils would love nothing more than to shock undefeated Richland this week, and they will have the chance Friday night over at Fran Rish Stadium in a primetime Mid-Columbia Conference showdown to be featured over SWX.

Last week's lopsided, 42-8, victory over Pasco put Wa-Hi back on track after they had lost a pair of close games back-to-back.

Of course, Homecoming provided more than enough motivation. Whether the Blue Devils can maintain those good vibes this Friday at Richland is of no concern to head coach Eric Hisaw.

"It always helps coming off a win," Wa-Hi coach Eric Hisaw said. "The kids' spirits are brighter, but (motivation) isn't gonna be an issue. Our kids really don't care for Richland, and I'm saying that politely. To us, it's our biggest rival in the league. We don't care for them at all, and I don't think they really care for us. That's OK. As far as any incentive to get excited for this game, there's no problem at all."

The Blue Devils go to Richland with one of the league's top offenses, but also a defense fresh off one of its best performances last week. Frustration from back-to-back losses forced Wa-Hi to focus on tackling fundamentals, and Pasco mustered only one late touchdown with the outcome already all but certain.

The Wa-Hi defense had forced three punts and six fumbles, three of which resulted in turnovers.

Pasco also surrendered the ball three times after fourth-down gambles.

"It's nice to get a win and play better and execute better and play like you're supposed to rather than sneak by," Hisaw said. "Film was a little easier to watch, for everybody's sake. We're still learning more, and we're going to continue the same approach as last week where we are going to teach and coach and explain and slow it down a little bit so the kids get things and build off last week."

Richland (6-0 record) presents one of the biggest challenges.

Bombers quarterback Paxton Stevens has followed his all-MCC first-team honors last year with another big season. He has already thrown for a league-best 1,408 yards and 16 touchdowns on 103-of-196 passing, with only five interceptions.

Receiver Alex Chapman leads the league with 570 yards and eight touchdowns on 23 catches, and Ryan Piper has caught 17 passes for 168 yards, including a TD.

Running backs Ben Stanfield (64 carries, 427 yards, four TDs) and Parker McCary (65-372-5) balance the attack. They combined to rush for 220 yards last week in an overtime win over Kamiakin.

"Depending on which poll you've got, Richland is No. 1 or No. 3 in the state," Hisaw said. "They're huge up front. They're physical. They use their hands really well. They're going to throw the ball a lot, in a lot of different ways. They're going to formation you to death when they're on offense. They're going to run the ball well enough to keep you honest, but they run it really well."

Meanwhile, the Richland defense has recorded two shutouts.

"They're arguably the best defensive front seven, along with Chiawana, in the league," Hisaw said. "They don't give you the line of scrimmage. They make you earn every yard you get. They tackle incredibly well, and they've got creative skills kids in the secondary.

"They're probably the most complete team we've played this year yet."

However, the Blue Devils welcome the challenge.

"It's a game for us that we always seem to play well in," Hisaw said, "but we'll be ready to play mentally."



Hector del Castillo

Hector writes stories about local sports, helps produce the daily section and updates the web site. A lifelong sports nut having grown up in Maryland, he joined the U-B with more than 15 years experience in journalism.