

Sports



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NO EASY YARDS IN RICHLAND, CHIAWANA CLASH

Chiawana running back Andrew Vargas (14) looks for an opening behind the blocking of his teammate Joey Aikala during Friday night's game against the Richland Bombers in Pasco. Richland defenders Brigham Whitby (74) and Victor Strasser (44) close in on the the play near the goal line. The second-ranked Bombers led the No. 4 Riverhawks 7-0 at the half.

MCC FOOTBALL | RICHLAND 21, CHIAWANA 14

UN-FUM-BELIEVABLE

■ **The undefeated Bombers collect 5 Riverhawk fumbles in the first half on the way to clinching the MCC title.**

BY DUSTIN BRENNAN
dbrennan@tricityherald.com

The Richland Bombers forced six turnovers and held off a furious second-half comeback from the Chiawana Riverhawks to preserve a 21-14 victory Friday night at Edgar Brown Stadium to clinch the Mid-Columbia Conference football championship.

Tied at 14 with 3:41 to play, the No. 2 Bombers (8-0, 6-0 MCC) got the ball on their 5-yard line after forcing the No. 4 Riverhawks (7-1, 5-1) to go three-and-out.

A 50-yard completion from quarterback Paxton Stevens to wideout Josh Mendoza — on a pass that traveled about 60 yards in the air — highlighted Richland's winning, 95-yard touchdown drive. Parker McCary scored on a 9-yard dash, his second TD of the game.

"I just saw his defender get beat, so I blinked their safety right and came back to Josh, and just launched that thing up there," Stevens said. "And he just went up there and got it for me. Hell of a catch by Josh."

After losing five fumbles in the first half — three by running back Andrew Var-

gas — and failing to put a point on the board, Chiawana finally looked as though it was taking control of the game toward the end of the third quarter. Vargas and quarterback Troy Simpkins each had a rushing touchdown to tie the score, and Hayden Carrasco recovered a fumble by Stevens.

But the Bombers would absorb every blow the Riverhawks threw at them.

"I want to give a lot of credit to Chiawana, for fighting," Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "They gave us a ton of shots to the mouth, and maybe a couple to the gut too."

Vargas' stat line epitomized Richland's bend-but-don't-break mindset. The senior back broke loose on a couple of carries, but he finished with only 170 yards on his 31 touches — about 100 yards off his season average.

"We had to find a way to slow that guy (Vargas) down, and all we did was slow him down. We didn't stop him," Neidhold said. "You can't stop Andrew Vargas; he's just a really, really good player. He's the best running back we've seen all year."

Dontae Powell, the Bombers' 6-foot-5, 300-pound senior left tackle, played almost the entire game on the defensive line — Neidhold said he usually only plays defense in goal-line

situations — and the Richland secondary did an excellent job of tackling Vargas in the open field behind him. Both of those efforts to slow down Vargas, in addition to the six turnovers, kept Chiawana from maintaining offensive rhythm.

"We emphasized tackling all week in practice — eyes on the thighs, wrap and squeeze, like I said earlier," said linebacker Victor Strasser, who recovered two fumbles. "We've gotta drive for five, and that's what we did."

McCary also scored on a 1-yard run on the opening drive of the second half after Chiawana fumbled the kick-off to start the third quarter.

Richland senior running back Ben Stanfield opened the scoring in the second quarter with a 6-yard scamper, capping off a first half in which he had 65 yards on nine carries. Stanfield appeared to suffer an injury in the fourth quarter that kept him sidelined for the remainder of the game.

Stevens didn't throw a TD pass, but also didn't throw an interception as he racked up 171 passing yards and guided a Richland offense that only turned it over once. The Riverhawks bottled up Stevens' favorite target and the the MCC's leading receiver, Alex Chapman, who had just one grab for 3 yards.

In two weeks, Richland will host the Greater Spo-

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Prep scores and standings, **3D**

kane League's No. 2 team, and Chiawana will go on the road to face the GSL's No. 1 team. Central Valley and Gonzaga Prep, who both are 4-0 in league play, will play each other to end the regular season.

With an overtime win over Kamiakin in Week 6 and another thrilling win over Chiawana on Friday, the Bombers feel ready for whatever the playoffs can throw at them.

"We're just going to take it one game at a time and know we're not going to look too far ahead," Stevens said. "We're gonna play like Bombers."

Richland	0	7	7	7	-	21
Chiawana	0	0	7	7	-	14

SCORING PLAYS

R—Ben Stanfield 6 run (Adam Weissenfels kick)
R—Parker McCary 1 run (Weissenfels kick)
C—Andrew Vargas 20 run (Ryan Lowry kick)
C—Troy Simpkins 1 run (Lowry kick)
R—McCary 9 run (Weissenfels kick)

STATISTICS

RUSHING — R, Stanfield 12-73, McCary 22-68, Paxton Stevens 2-(minus 6). C, Vargas 31-170, Troy Simpkins 6-3, Trent Simpkins 1-2, team 2-(minus 25)
PASSING — R, Stevens 14-31-0—171. C, Troy Simpkins 6-12-1—77, Trent Simpkins 0-1-0-0.
RECEIVING — R, Josh Mendoza 8-107, Stanfield 1-37, Weissenfels 3-20, Gaven Brasker 1-4, Alex Chapman 1-3. C, Hayden Carrasco 4-79, Michael Sanchez 1-2, Josh Alvarez 1-(minus 4).

Dustin Brennan:
509-582-1413,
@Tweet_By_Dustin

MID-COLUMBIA CONFERENCE

	Lg	All
Richland	6-0	8-0
Chiawana	5-1	7-1
Kamiakin	4-2	6-2
Southridge	4-2	5-3
Hanford	2-4	4-4
Walla Walla	2-4	3-5
Kennewick	1-5	2-6
Pasco	0-6	0-8

Thursday
Kamiakin 48, Walla Walla 21
Friday
Hanford 49, Pasco 23
Richland 21, Chiawana 14
Southridge 31, Kennewick 21