

# Sports



SARAH GORDON Tri-City Herald

Ben Stanfield (34) scored four touchdowns in Richland's 49-28 win over Bothell in the state quarterfinals on Saturday, his first career multi-touchdown performance

4A STATE FOOTBALL | RICHLAND VS. SKYVIEW, 3 P.M. SATURDAY, LAMPSON STADIUM

## Stanfield fuels ground game

Senior back closing in on 1,000 yards rushing, teams with Parker McCary to balance Bomber aerial assault. Richland has reached the semifinals in consecutive seasons for the first time since 1980-81, and a win over Skyview would advance the Bombers to the championship for the first time since 1999.

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As good as the top-end talent for the Richland High

### FROM PAGE 1B GROUND

the team's middle line-backer.

Richland coach Mike Neidhold said his top two backs are in a 1A-1B situation, and that the system for doling out carries is pretty simple.

"If Parker has the hot hand, we'll go with him for a while and let him do his thing," Neidhold said. "And if Ben's got the hot hand, we use him."

Stanfield had the hot hand in Richland's 49-28 win over Bothell last Saturday, as he recorded 127 yards from scrimmage on 16 touches and scored four touchdowns (three rushing, one receiving). It was the first multi-touchdown game of his career.

"The most I've scored in a game for varsity was once, so it was a pretty good deal," Stanfield said.

In his first full season playing for the varsity

squad, Stanfield has shaped up to be one of the top producers on a Bombers team that has a shot at going undefeated for the first time in the modern era (records are incomplete before 1945).

The senior back said the team has had a lot of fun this season and has formed a lot of tight bonds, evidenced by the unique handshakes Stanfield gives to his blockers after he scores a touchdown.

"Me and my brother (junior tight end Jacob Stanfield), we usually scoop the ground and go high for like a shot block type of thing," Stanfield said. "(Senior right guard) Brigham Whitby sometimes picks me up and puts me in the air, so that's fun too. And me and Parker always jump up and hit shoulders and stuff."

"It's fun all around."

The Bombers have certainly had a lot to celebrate

so far this season, including consecutive state semifinal appearances for the first time since 1980-81. And few players are as happy about that success as Stanfield, who will likely never play another down after this season.

"Football's very important to me," Stanfield said. "Coming up, I always played Grid Kids, and I've been going to the Bomber games since I was a little kid and idolizing those guys. So to become a part of the Bomber tradition, and winning and stuff like that for Richland, it's a dream come true actually. It's pretty neat to be a part of it."

Stanfield enters this week needing 84 yards to crack the 1,000-yard rushing mark for the season, an accomplishment he said he'd likely be able to appreciate more once his football career is over.

#### BALL-HAWKING BOMBERS

In addition to the Bombers flexing their muscles in the run game in the quarterfinal win over Bothell, they also repeatedly flashed another one of their strengths: takeaways.

Facing University of Washington-commit Jacob Sirmon, who entered the game having thrown just two interceptions during his

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Richland running back Ben Stanfield

School football team has been this season, depth is likely the reason why the Bombers are 12-0 and headed to a state semifinal game for the second consecutive season.

With eight pass-catching options that likely could have started at most Mid-Columbia Conference schools this year, Richland's receiving core — and the 2,556 yards and 30 touchdowns quarterback Paxton Stevens has thrown for — has received a lot of praise. But the Bombers' stable of running backs is equally impressive.

With Richland's top options at running back including senior Ben Stanfield (first-year starter) and junior Parker McCary (transfer from Connell), the position group could have been a point of concern at the beginning of the season. But Stanfield and McCary have left all of those concerns far behind as they've combined for more than 1,600 rushing yards and 26 total touchdowns, solid enough production to allow No. 3 running back Victor Strasser to focus on his primary role as

SEE GROUND, 2B



#### SPORTS

### BOMBERS SET FOR SEMIFINALS

Senior Ben Stanfield fuels the Bomber ground attack as Richland heads into its semifinal matchup with Skyview on Saturday. **Page 1B**

stellar junior campaign, the Bombers recorded three picks and recovered a strip-sack fumble.

"When Sirmon rolled out Saturday night, our linebackers were coming up and trying to tackle him, and they cut him in half a few times," Neidhold said. "That'll get your attention if you're a quarterback."

The turnovers are hardly an unusual occurrence for the Richland defense. Led by Adam Weissenfels (7) and Alex Chapman (5), the Bombers have intercepted 30 passes this season.

"Our back-end guys, they're just good athletes and they have good football intelligence. And they understand what the offense is trying to do to them, and they're very seldom out of position," Neidhold said. "So when you're where you're supposed to be and you're kinda sneaky, like our guys are, you can bait the quarterback into some bad throws."

#### ON TO SKYVIEW

Richland will face a Skyview team in the semifinals that is making its second trip to the Tri-Cities this postseason.

The Storm (9-3) knocked off Chiawana 38-28 at Edgar Brown Stadium in the opening round of the state playoffs. They beat Lake Stevens — which entered the game as the undefeated Wesco 4A champs — 35-14 last week in the quarterfinal round.

Richland and Skyview will kickoff at 3 p.m. Saturday at Lampson Stadium.

A big reason why Skyview was able to outlast Chiawana was its ability to contain the MCC's leading rusher, Andrew Vargas, who averaged just five yards per carry on his 19 first-half touches (he came in averaging 9 yards a crack). That allowed the Storm to take a 21-7 halftime lead.

Skyview's run-stopping defense is led by 6-foot-4, 315-pound tackle Chyrius Duckett, whom Neidhold said the Bombers will have to keep an eye on, but also that he can't keep them from attaining offensive balance.

"We don't really change anything for him, but just, you know, block him," Neidhold said of Duckett.

"We've got to get that first-level removal, and if it takes two guys to move him out of there, then we will."

Penalties also slimmed the Riverhawks' chances a couple weeks ago, as they committed 17 of them for 143 yards and extended the Storms' final two touchdown drives with personal foul penalties.

Richland doesn't keep penalty stats, but Neidhold characterized the team's infractions against Bothell as "a lot" and said they would have to clean up that area of their game against Skyview.

Richland and Skyview match up well as both teams run similar run-pass option schemes and have talent at all the skill positions and in the trenches, Neidhold said. But with the Bombers' depth carrying them through a perfect first 12 weeks of the season, solid execution could be all it takes to lead the team to victory and into the state championship game for the first time since winning it all in 1999.

"Tidy up those penalties, play good offense, play great defense, keep the special teams going," Neidhold said. "We'll have a chance."