

Sports

HERALD ALL-AREA FOOTBALL TEAM

Whitby takes top honors

Richland senior was rated the MCC's top offensive lineman and defensive player as the Bombers played in the Class 4A state championship game. Chiawana running back Andrew Vargas also had an unforgettable season with 2,783 yards and 42 touchdowns.

BY DUSTIN BRENNAN
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A year removed from having to sit out almost the entire 2015 football season, Brigham Whitby didn't want to miss a single rep this season for Richland.

Whitby's Whitby relentless play at offensive guard and defensive tackle helped the Bombers reach the state championship game for the first time since 1999, and earned him the Tri-City Herald's All-Area Player of the Year honors.

Whitby broke his left foot in Richland's 2015 season opener against Gonzaga



BOB BRAWDY Tri-City Herald



Richland senior Brigham Whitby (74), here taking on Chiawana running back Andrew Vargas, was a standout on the offensive and defensive lines for the Bombers and is the Tri-City Herald's All-Area Football Player of the Year.

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TOP HONORS

Prep and sat out the rest of the regular season before making brief appearances in Richland's three state play-off games.

"In practice, as this season was unfolding like in Week 9 or 10, I came up to (Whitby) and said, 'We know what you can do, so we're gonna hold you out of some drills today,'" Richland coach Mike Neidhold said. "And he was like, 'No you're not. I signed up to play.' And it donned on me that of course he's not coming out. He's been out, and of course that was last year's deal. He gets it."

This season, the 6-foot, 275-pound Whitby led a Bombers defense that was best in the Mid-Columbia Conference in yards (205.2 per game) and points (10.4) allowed through the regular season and gave up an average of 14.8 points in each of its four playoff games. On offense, Richland was able to produce two of the conference's top running backs in senior Ben Stanfield (1,327 total yards, 14 touchdowns) and junior Parker McCary (821 rushing yards, 16 touchdowns).

Whitby and the rest of the Bombers had a season for the ages, winning the Mid-Columbia Conference championship and their first 13 games of the season before falling to Camas in the Class 4A championship. Richland also advanced to the state semifinals in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 1980-81. Neidhold now places Whitby in the company of former Bomber linemen like Mark Bone (class of 1995), Ryan Lukson ('99) and Ryan Brooks ('99) as the best to ever play for Richland.

As Whitby recounts, those grandiose accomplishments started with humble expectations at the beginning of the season.

"Mainly it was just don't get hurt," Whitby said. "It was 'don't get hurt' because there was no next year. 'You're going to have to put it all out on the field every game and just do your best.' That's what I did."

Other than the loss to Camas, the two tightest games the Bombers played came in the regular season against the No. 2 and 3 teams in the MCC, and Whitby made an impression on the leaders of both squads.

The Bombers came up against eventual 3A state champion Kamiakin in Week 6, and the matchup lived up to the hype as Richland entered ranked as the No. 1 team in the state. The Bombers prevailed 21-20 in overtime after Adam Weissenfels blocked Garrett Paxton's extra point attempt on the last play of the game.

Kamiakin quarterback Zach Borisch — who is the

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Chiawana running back Andrew Vargas

first team All-Area QB — struggled to find consistency in that game, as he hit on some big passes to rack up 180 yards through the air with three touchdowns, but he also threw three interceptions as both teams played to a scoreless stalemate in the first half.

"(Whitby) kept me on my toes. I had to scramble quite a few times when he got through," Borisch said. "He's physical, he fights hard."

Two weeks later, Richland matched up against Chiawana in the unofficial conference championship as both sides entered with undefeated records. The Bombers came in with the goal of slowing down Chiawana running back Andrew Vargas — who wound up as the state's leading rusher — and did exactly that, allowing the senior back to rush for 170 yards, but making him carry the ball 31 times to get there (his 5.5 yards per carry was more than 3 off his season average). The Bombers also had six total takeaways in the 21-14 victory.

"Honestly, I was trying to run away from Brigham, because it kind of sucks getting tackled by him," said Vargas, a first team All-Area running back. "They had a really good D-line, and they kind of shut us down a little bit. And that was the issue of that game was getting past their D-line. And Brigham Whitby."

Going head-to-head against Vargas, especially for an MCC title, was something Whitby had been looking forward to since his youth.

"I've known Vargas from back when we were in Grid Kids — well I wasn't allowed to play Grid Kids because my parents wouldn't let me, but I watched him play for the Bullpups with my cousin Jared," Whitby said. "I remember watching him and thinking 'Man, that guy's pretty good.'"

"I remember finally having a chance in middle school to play him and thinking it was going to be great. He was good then — he's just a good athlete, and he's a great running back. He was a big kid, he's really strong, and he still is."



MVP/OL/DL, Brigham Whitby, sr., Richland



Coach, Scott Biglin, Kamiakin



QB, Zach Borisch, sr., Kamiakin



RB, Andrew Vargas, sr., Chiawana



RB, Zayid Al-Ghani, sr., Southridge



WR, Isaiah Brimmer, sr., Kamiakin



WR, Joe Gauthier, sr., Hanford



TE, Steven Kroontje, sr., Connell



OL, Wyatt Musser, sr., Kamiakin



OL, Dontae Powell, sr., Richland



OL, Anthony Reisch, sr., Chiawana



OL, Brendon Villaseñor, sr., Kennewick



K, Hunter Spiva, sr., Southridge



DL, AJ Vongphachan, so., Chiawana



DL, Josh Alvarez, jr., Chiawana



DL, Hayden Larson, sr., Kamiakin



LB, Caleb Weber, sr., Chiawana



LB, Victor Strasser, jr., Richland



LB, Alex Bayuk, sr., Kamiakin



LB, Corey Bibe, sr., Southridge



DB, Darreon Moore, sr., Kamiakin



DB, Alex Chapman, sr., Richland



DB, Adam Weissenfels, jr., Richland



DB, Michael Kernan, sr., Prosser



AP, Mitch Lesmeister, sr., Walla Walla



P, Bryar Jensen, sr., Walla Walla

Six Kamiakin players are on the All-Area first team, and coach Scott Biglin was named the coach of the year for leading the Braves to the first football state championship for a Kennewick high school. Chiawana and Richland both have five players on the first team, but the Bombers occupy six spots with Whitby ranked as the top offensive and defensive lineman.

GREAT COMPETITOR, BETTER TEAMMATE

While Richland wasn't able to win its third state championship in school history, Whitby still managed to leave the Tacoma Dome with some hardware as the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association awarded him the Class 4A sportsmanship award.

The honor came as no surprise to Neidhold, who has watched Whitby lead his team on and off the field.

"He's not just a great player, but he's also a really, really honorable teammate," Neidhold said. "He's probably one of the best teammates on our team, just as far as making sure everyone is included on our team and no one is left out. Making sure that we're a welcoming outfit where everyone has value and everyone has worth."

"The kid that can't get his pants on and can't snap his helmet, that kid's got a place on our team, and Brigham made sure that guy felt good about being on the Bombers and felt good about being with our team, and celebrated with us after a win."

A SEASON FOR THE RECORD BOOKS

Whitby earned the All-

Area Player of the Year nod for his contributions as a two-way player who played in all 14 games for the Bombers, but Vargas was a run-away favorite for the unofficial offensive MVP award.

The 5-10, 205-pound running back posted the third most rushing yards in a single season in state history (2,783) and scored 42 touchdowns in just 11 games, and was on pace to set the state record if the Riverhawks had won a game in the state playoffs. Instead, they lost a hotly contested 38-28 affair to Skyview in the opening round, and Vargas would have to settle for a spot in the state record books behind former teammate Austin Urlacher (2,877 yards in 2014) and Vashon Island's Bryce Hoisington (2,929 yards in 2015).

With four returning starters on Chiawana's offensive line, Vargas expected that it could be a special year for

the Riverhawks' run game.

"I held them (the offensive line) to high expectations because without them I'm not going to do much, and they improved a lot this year," Vargas said. "I think it's the bond that our team had, especially me with the linemen (that allowed us to be successful). ... This year we just felt more connected, we worked better together."

As skilled as Vargas is on the gridiron, he will take his talents to the baseball diamond after high school. Recruited as a pitcher and outfielder, Vargas committed to play for Yakima Valley in October.

SECOND TEAM
Quarterback: Kaden Jenks, sr., Royal.
Running backs: Jethro Questad, sr., Kamiakin; Jax Whitby, sr., Connell.
Wide receivers: Benson Smith, jr., Kamiakin; Corbin Christensen, jr., Royal; Alex Chapman, sr., Richland.
Offensive linemen: Josh Alvarez, jr., Chiawana; Brock Wellsfry, sr., Hanford; Julian Benitez, jr., Chiawana; Ford Powers, jr., Chiawana; Juan Garcia, sr., Royal.
Defensive linemen: Jax Lee, jr., Richland; Eric Stayrook, jr., Southridge; Brennan Barberich, sr., Walla Walla; Steven Kroontje,

sr., Connell.
Linebackers: Kolby Swift, sr., Prosser; Garrett Guffey, sr., Richland; Andrew Fridley, sr., Kennewick; Miguel Garcia, sr., Othello.
Defensive backs: Hayden Carrasco, sr., Chiawana; Brycen Kelly, sr., Southridge; Caleb Price, sr., Connell; Trent Simpkins, sr., Chiawana.
Kicker: Garrett Paxton, jr., Kamiakin.
Punter: Hunter Spiva, sr., Southridge.
HONORABLE MENTION
Quarterback: Paxton Stevens, sr., Richland.
Running backs: Ben Stanfield, sr., Richland; Parker McCary, jr., Richland.
Wide receivers: Darreon Moore, sr., Kamiakin; Adam Weissenfels, jr., Richland.
Tight end: Carter Davis, sr., Walla Walla.
Offensive linemen: Jordan Barttels, sr., Grandview; Adam Boggs, sr., Walla Walla; Flynn McPheron, jr., Southridge; Zane Andrewjeski, jr., Connell; Gavin Cooper, jr., Hanford.
Defensive linemen: Jacob Amato, sr., Tri-Cities Prep; Anthony Reisch, sr., Chiawana; Jude Schnellbach, sr., Prosser; Juan Hernandez, sr., Royal.
Linebackers: Will Diturri, sr., Tri-Cities Prep; Jhonny Garcia, sr., Royal; William Harshaw, sr., Richland; Carter Davis, sr., Walla Walla.
Defensive backs: Micah Giles, sr., Othello; Ryan Piper, jr., Richland; Josh Mendoza, jr., Richland; Sam Kori, sr., Southridge.
Kicker: Ryan Lowry, so., Chiawana.
Punter: Miguel Moreno, jr., College Place.

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