

The Columbian

High school football 2021

Sunday, August 29, 2021

TOUCHDOWN TITAN

There's more to Tobias Merriweather than the skill, speed and size that makes the Union receiver a top recruit

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Inside:

Preview stories and key players for 25 area football teams
Projections for local 4A, 3A, 2A and 1A leagues

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2021

A Special Section
of The Columbian

■ Stories by Meg Wochnick,
Joshua Hart and
Tim Martinez

■ Cover photo
by Amanda Cowan

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A PRIZED CATCH

Drive and determination go beyond football for Notre Dame-bound Tobias Merriweather

By MEG WOCHNICK
The Columbian

The question posed to Tobias Merriweather caused him to pause in deep thought.

How can Merriweather, Union High School's star wide receiver and a national four-star football recruit who recently committed to the University of Notre Dame, be a better receiver?

"That's a good question," Merriweather said during a recent 90-minute sit-down interview with The Columbian.

His answer doesn't dwell on what he does on the field. At 6-foot-4 and 190 pounds, Merriweather's unique intangibles made him a sought-after recruit for every Pacific-12 Conference school and for programs as far east as Michigan and Tennessee.

For Merriweather, it's about the little things off the field. Sitting in on quarterback meetings, being versatile and ready to play all receiver positions, and studying every aspect of an offense.

"Me being a better receiver," he said, "is just me being a better player overall, a better leader, and a better person. I think a lot of it is mental, honestly."

Clark County has had a strong run recently of players signing with Power 5 conference programs, and Merriweather is in a rare class of elite football recruits to ever come out of the region. On that list includes names like the late Travis Claridge, a Fort Vancouver High standout named All-American in 1995 by Parade Magazine and USA TODAY. At the time, many believed Claridge to be the best high school offensive lineman to come out of the state when he signed with USC.

Merriweather isn't too far back, rated as the No. 11 receiver in the Class of 2022 in 247Sports' national rankings.

The hype started in ninth grade



AMANDA COWAN/The Columbian

Union senior Tobias Merriweather will play college football for Notre Dame. One of the Northwest's most-prized recruits, Merriweather chose the university in part because of its world-class academic offerings.

as a tall, speedy receiver who played in big moments during Union's Class 4A state title-winning season in 2018. Now a senior, self-made high standards for football and academics has Merriweather poised to continue that success at Notre Dame.

But in-between, the COVID-19 pandemic the past 18 months led to a new-found love for high school sports. From delays and uncertainty came appreciation and gratitude as Week 1 of his senior season begins Sept. 3.

"I have more love for the game," the 17-year-old said, "just because I know it can be taken away from me.

"You never know what's going to happen."

From playmaker to leader

Merriweather didn't register an official stat from Union's 52-20 victory in the Class 4A state championship game three years ago, but there's a memory that's forever on tape: his false start.

It happened on Union's final drive of the first half against Lake Stevens at the Tacoma Dome when Merriweather jumped early and whistles blew for the 5-yard penalty.

The play call was for him.

Head coach Rory Rosenbach subbed Merriweather out, and Union ran the same play again — this time using Alishawuan Taylor at the "Y" position. After Taylor's 18-yard gain over the middle moved the chains, Rosenbach

turned to his young receiver on the sideline and said, "that should have been you."

Merriweather registered three varsity catches and also made an impact on defense as a freshman in 2018. Only after torching sub-varsity competition early in the season did he suit up on what turned out to be Union's perfect 14-0 season.

What Merriweather gained more than anything is proving he belonged. He said the limited role was the best thing for him, and also allowed him to have a front-row seat alongside a core group of senior leaders — Lincoln Victor, Darien Chase and JoJo Siofele —

MERRIWEATHER, Page 3

Merriweather

From Page 2

to learn, grow and mature. All three now play Division I football.

Playing alongside Chase, also a four-star receiver recruit out of high school, challenged Merriweather on a daily basis. The experience of that one season together still makes a lasting impression on the senior.

“That was great for me,” Merriweather said, “because I wanted to be the person I am right now.”

It paved the way for a career as a three-year starter and a two-year captain. During Merriweather’s college commitment ceremony at Union earlier this month, Rosenbach spoke on how the COVID-19 pandemic brought out the teenager’s best qualities.

“He worked hard to be a great athlete, he worked hard to be a great teammate, he worked hard in the off-season,” Rosenbach said, “... but then that leadership and that mental toughness piece are things that will serve him well.”

Separated by speed

Five seconds is all it took for Merriweather to get into open space.

The way he describes an 88-yard kickoff return for a score in March against Skyview is so rich in detail it’s as if it happened last week. He credits teammates for making his work look easy.

“The most insane blocking I’ve received,” Merriweather said. ... “That was such a crazy moment.”

Last spring’s pandemic-shortened season was the first time the wideout returned kicks on special teams. He had two kickoff returns for touchdowns in six games, in addition to four interceptions on defense and six receiving touchdowns.

At receiver, there isn’t a coverage from opponents Merriweather hasn’t faced. National recruiting analyst Brandon Huffman of 247Sports has watched Merriweather blossom on the 7-on-7 circuit, and said there’s several factors why he became a must-have target for college programs.

“Schools love his length, his route running, his ability to get

open and stretch the field and his catch radius,” Huffman told *The Columbian*. “He’s fast, especially for how long a strider he is. And his frame gives coaches the thought that they can bulk him up to how they want him, but his length is all natural that you really can’t touch.”

Speed is what separates Merriweather, and track and field is where he hones that craft.

The Merriweather last name is well-known at Union. His oldest sisters, Dai’lyn and Jai’lyn, won nine track and field state titles from 2014-17 and still own several school records in the sprints. They now compete at Oklahoma.

Their brother has carved his own path on the track, too. In June, Tobias Merriweather completed the track and field triple crown of sprints, winning district titles in the 100 (10.95 seconds), 200 (22.01) and 400 (49.78) meters. He hoped for just one sprints title, and unexpectedly got three on a hot day at McKenzie Stadium.

Hours later, he was on the bench for the Titans’ boys basketball game in a win over 3A Kelso.

Washington’s condensed high school sports seasons meant the Class 4A and 3A Greater St. Helens League schools had winter and spring sports happening simultaneously. Sleep was minimal, he said, and time management was critical. But one of his greatest joys from a hectic few months goes beyond a colleague championship in football and individual track titles. It’s the role he played off the bench in basketball, ending with him cutting down part of the net in June after Union captured the district championship.

Merriweather knows the spotlight often is on him, and chose to return to basketball after a year away to make his teammates better and have another lasting memory.

“That was fun,” he said. “I wanted to be around them and be a part of that because I knew they were going to be a good team. ... I liked being a part of that. I’m just one of the boys.”

Academically driven

When it comes to football critiques, Merriweather can be his own worst critic.



TAYLOR BALKOM/for The Columbian

Union senior Tobias Merriweather celebrates a touchdown during the Rumble at the River 7-on-7 football tournament this July at Union High School. At 6-foot-4 with breakaway speed, Merriweather earned scholarship offers from scores of colleges, including every Pac-12 university.

Perhaps it’s his competitive nature, which hasn’t always been glued strictly to sports. Before wowing crowds on the field, Merriweather wowed crowds at performances as a first-chair trombonist at Cascade Middle School.

“I loved that trombone,” he said.

From reading sheet music to now reading playbooks, Merriweather didn’t want to wait to commit to the college program that checks all his boxes.

Notre Dame has what Merriweather called the “complete package” — a tradition-rich his-

tory, first-class facilities, recruiting relationships with coaches, and world-class academics. An important part of his recruiting came down to doing homework on what a Notre Dame education means for his future.

“A lot of schools sell football, but what about after football?” said Merriweather, an honor-roll student. “I’d rather get a good degree and have good alumni people and programs around me. Those connections that you’re going to make, that’s more important almost than football.

“You’re going to be set for the rest of your life.”

Merriweather said he’ll major in psychology. He has sights on where football can take him, but not before handling business in what he hopes will be a memorable senior season at Union in 2021.

What does a successful season look like? Merriweather held up his left hand and pointed to his ring finger to symbolize a state championship ring.

The perfect bookends to a memorable and rewarding high school career.

“That’s what success is to me,” he said, “but it’ll still be a joy whatever happens.”

4A GREATER ST. HELENS LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

- 1  **UNION:** With the area's top recruit and depth on the lines, the Titans will be tough to beat.
- 2  **CAMAS:** Still the defending 4A champs, talented Papermakers are adjusting to a new coach.
- 3  **SKYVIEW:** Strong linebacking corps leads a team that can compete with anyone statewide on a yearly basis.
- 4  **BATTLE GROUND:** New coach Mark Oliverio relishes challenges that tough opponents bring.

BIGGEST GAMES

OCT. 15



7 p.m., Kiggins Bowl

OCT. 22



7 p.m., Doc Harris Stadium

OCT. 29



4:30 p.m., McKenzie Stadium

Skyview's
Tanner
Beaman (10).

SAMUEL WILSON/
for the Columbian



STEVE DIPAOLA/for The Columbian

Camas senior Logan Silva (42) and Union senior Kellen Milliken (17) are both two-way impact players.

Small league is big on talent, has state-title pedigree

If there's a given every year among 4A Greater St. Helens League, it's that it remains one of the toughest 4A leagues in the state.

"We're small in numbers," said Camas interim coach Jack Hathaway, "but we're mighty."

Most recent success at the state level proves that; Union (2018) and Camas (2019, 2016) each went 14-0 to capture Class 4A state titles.

Last spring's condensed

spring season meant no WIAA state playoffs, so officially, Camas remains the defending state champion.

But there's also a different look with the Papermakers. Hathaway takes the reins as interim coach after longtime head coach Jon Eagle left to be quarterbacks coach at Portland State. Hathaway spent the past seven seasons as an offensive assistant and special teams coordinator on Camas' staff.

Last spring, Camas,

Skyview and Union shared the 4A GSHL crown, and it's not far-fetched to think it could happen again this fall. While all three feature new starting quarterbacks, each have returning experience in other skill groups.

Skyview welcomes back all three starting linebackers in its 4-3 defense, and a trio of Camas' senior linebacking core played big minutes during Camas' state-title run in 2019 as sophomores. Union has depth up front and features

Clark County's top recruit, Notre Dame-bound receiver Tobias Merriweather.

Mark Oliverio takes over at Battle Ground, looking to put his own stamp on the Tigers program. He energized Hudson's Bay in 2015 and '16, and led the Eagles to the postseason his second year.

"That's three of the best teams in the state," Oliverio said of the 4A opponents. "They're some fantastic competition and it's a great opportunity for us."



BATTLE GROUND TIGERS

SPRING 2021

0-5, fourth in 4A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

First round in 1979, 2015

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Kameron Spencer	QB	jr.
Owen Wann	RB/LB	sr.
Leithan Reynolds-Weisenborn	RB/LB	jr.
Willie Novak	OL/DL	sr.
Ashton Eugenio	OL/DL	jr.
Reid Davis	WR/DB	jr.
Michael Kennedy	WR/DB	jr.
Kyle Simmons	RB/LB	sr.
Dakota Conners	TE/DL	jr.
Justin Ferguson	TE/DL	sr.
Matt Ferguson	WR/DB	sr.

Coach: Mark Oliverio (first year)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Mark Oliverio last coached locally at Hudson's Bay (2015, '16)
- Tigers seeking their first win since the 2019 season.
- BG opens the season hosting Ingraham, its only non-local opponent in 2021.



District Stadium

at Battle Ground HS
400 W. Main St.,
Battle Ground

First-year coach brings new offense, optimism

Literally, as soon as Mark Oliverio was hired as Battle Ground's next head football coach in May, he hit the ground running.

"I got going as quickly as I could," he said.

It has been a busy summer for Oliverio finalizing a coaching staff, implementing new offensive and defensive schemes, and getting to know his new players in a Class 4A program.

So far, progress is right on track, and even slightly ahead of schedule, he said.

"I feel good about where we're at," Oliverio said.

Competing in a league he feels has three of the top programs in 4A, Oliverio knows putting his stamp on the Battle Ground program will be a work in progress. He energized Hudson's Bay's program as its head coach in 2015 and 2016.

He plans to run a similar offense that had success in his two seasons at Bay. It's a hybrid look, featuring the spread, fly and I-formation. It's a good way to keep opponents guessing.

"You may see elementary of all three of those offenses on any one particular drive or even one play," Oliverio said.

Oliverio describes his Tigers as a "good, young team" with a lot of potential and



TAYLOR BALKOM for The Columbian

Battle Ground first-year head coach Mark Oliverio is working to bring his players up to speed on a new offense that combines elements of three different schemes.

talent. But there also is returning experience under center; junior Kameron Spencer is the most experienced quarterback in the league when it comes to varsity time.

Because of Oliverio's late-spring hiring, the Tigers got a later start to off-season work, but the coach said they've made the most of their summer time together.

"We're going to learn a lot about ourselves in the next few weeks," Oliverio said, "and hopefully put ourselves in a position to have a good, positive, successful season."

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	THU., OCT. 7	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	FRI., OCT. 29
Ingraham	Skyview*	Prairie	at Evergreen	at Camas*	Union*	at Heritage	at Mountain View	Kelso
5:30 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game



CAMAS PAPERMAKERS

SPRING 2021

4-1, 4A GSHL co-champs

BEST STATE FINISH

State champion in 2016, 2019

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Taylor Ioane	QB	jr.
John Schultz	RB/LB	sr.
Connor Murphy	WR	sr.
Mark Thorkelson	WR	sr.
Noah Christensen	OL/DL	sr.
Tyson Jacobson	OL/DL	sr.
Luke Jamison	LB	sr.
Jairus Phillips	LB	sr.
Logan Silva	LB	sr.
Zach Blair	WR/DB	jr.

Coach: Jack Hathaway (interim)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Camas faces four 6A Oregon opponents as part of its non-league schedule.
- Interim coach Jack Hathaway was Heritage's head coach from 2011-13.
- With no WIAA playoffs last spring, Camas remains the defending 4A state champion (2019).



Doc Harris Stadium

1125 NE 22nd Ave.,
Camas

New coach keeps program's championship mentality

It took some time, but Jack Hathaway has finally processed the whirlwind of the past 11 weeks as Camas' interim head coach and everything that comes with it.

"I feel we've got a good plan moving forward," Hathaway said. "The coaching staff is all in and the kids are gung-ho."

Camas turned to Hathaway in June after longtime head coach Jon Eagle left to become quarterbacks coach at Portland State. This fall is Hathaway's eighth season. He spent the past year on staff coaching tight ends and as special teams coordinator. He also led Heritage as its head coach from 2011-13.

Now, Hathaway is honored to be tasked with the interim gig, and while the program core and foundation Eagle build won't change, a few "tweaks and differences" are on the way, Hathaway said.

But the championship mentality remains. Technically, with no state playoffs last spring, Camas remains the defending Class 4A state champion from its 14-0 season in 2019 and comes off a spring sharing the 4A GSHL title. Its biggest strength lies in its linebacking core, led by veterans Luke Jamison, Logan Silva, and Jairus Phillips. All three played big minutes as sophomores during the champi-



FILES/The Columbian

Camas linebacker Luke Jamison (12), makes a tackle in the 2019 4A championship game vs. Bothell.

onship season.

And on tap is a schedule that's arguably the stiffest in the state. Camas' opens the season with four consecutive Oregon 6A juggernauts — Cen-

tral Catholic, Clackamas, Jesuit and West Linn — plus in-state power Tumwater in Week 7.

"We wouldn't want it any other way — that's the way we look at it," Hathaway said. "We

look at it as an advantage for us. Every week is going to be a challenge and we're going to grow. We know what we're up against; those teams get to play us, too."

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	THU., OCT. 7	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	FRI., OCT. 29
at Central Catholic (Ore.) 7 p.m.	Clackamas (Ore.) 7 p.m.	Jesuit (Ore.) 7 p.m.	at West Linn (Ore.) 7 p.m.	Battle Ground* 7 p.m.	at Mountain View 7 p.m.	at Tumwater 7 p.m.	Skyview* 7 p.m.	at Union* 4:30 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game

SKYVIEW STORM

SPRING 2021

5-1, 4A GSHL co-champs

BEST STATE FINISH

Second in 2011

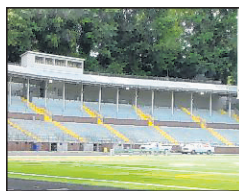
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Gabe Martin	RB/LB	sr.
Tanner Beaman	TE/LB	sr.
Jalen Savalea	LB	jr.
Niko Arriola	QB/DB	sr.
Jaydin Knapp	RB/DB	sr.
Ty Evans	OL/DL	jr.
Hezephaniah Po Ching	OL/DL	sr.
Teddy Beaver	DB/WR	sr.

Coach: Steve Kizer (18th year, 117-67)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Skyview face Coeur d'Alene (Idaho) at EWU on Sept. 25.
- Storm welcome back all three starting linebackers in its 4-3 defense.
- Team shared 4A league title with Camas, Union in the spring.



Kiggins Bowl

Near the campus of Discovery Middle School, 800 E. 40th St., Vancouver

Strong defense has Storm set to maintain momentum of spring

How good does Skyview coach Steve Kizer feel about carrying the momentum from the spring's 4A Greater St. Helens League title into the fall?

"I hope we can do that," the longtime Storm coach said. "It just doesn't automatically happen, but we feel pretty good about where we're sitting.

"I'm anxious to see how they've progressed from the summer."

Skyview, fresh off a co-league title in the spring with Camas and Union, welcomes back six starters on both offense and defense. That's highlighted by the return of all three starting linebackers on its 4-3 defense: seniors Gabe Martin and Tanner Beaman, and junior Jalen Savalea. Martin also is one of two starting running backs who return, alongside Jaydin Knapp.

Like any year, there are holes to fill, and one of the biggest question marks lies in its starting quarterback. Kizer said senior Niko Arriola has taken most of the repetitions over the summer. He also brings varsity experience at cornerback.

"He's tall, athletic and strong," Kizer said. "He's done a nice job so far."

With just three 4A league opponents, Skyview's schedule features two 3A GSHL teams



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Skyview's Gabe Martin brings a strong presence both as a running back and linebacker.

and four non-league opponents. Perhaps its stiffest nonleague for is Idaho 5A power Coeur d'Alene, which reached the Idaho state semifinals in 2020. The game will be played Saturday, Sept. 25 at Eastern

Washington University.

Program connections between Skyview and EWU officials behind the scenes to helped make that happen, Kizer said. Prior to Skyview, Kizer spent six years as East-

ern Washington's defensive coordinator. Head coach Aaron Best was a graduate assistant when Kizer was on staff.

"It'll be awesome," he said. "That doesn't hurt you. — they're good."

SAT., SEPT. 4



Columbia River
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



at Battle Ground*
7 p.m.

SAT., SEPT. 18



Sunnyside
3:30 p.m.

SAT., SEPT. 25



at Coeur d'Alene-#
4 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



at Prairie
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



at Kelso
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



Union*
8 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at Camas*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



Adrienne Nelson (Ore.)
5 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game; #-at Eastern Washington University



UNION TITANS

SPRING 2021

5-1, 4A GSHL co-champs

BEST STATE FINISH

State champion in 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Tobias Merriweather	WR/DB	sr.
Marques Cantu	WR/DB	sr.
Kellen Milliken	TE/LB	sr.
Joel Lee	OL/DL	sr.
Ra'Shaun Mataia	OL/DL	sr.
Clayton Maus	OL/LB	jr.
Tyson Fuehrer	QB/LB	jr.
AJ Attaran	WR/DB	jr.

Coach: Rory Rosenbach (sixth year, 39-13)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Union opens season hosting 3A title contender O'Dea of Seattle.
- Titans have trio of players remaining who saw significant playing time from 2018 4A title team.
- Team entered fall practices with three players vying to be starting quarterback.



McKenzie Stadium

Near Evergreen HS,
2205 NE 138th Ave.,
Vancouver

Quarterback competition spices up preseason practice

Never before as Union's head coach has Rory Rosenbach been in a situation where three quarterbacks are vying to be the starter entering fall practices.

That's what the Titans are facing in 2021. It can be a good problem to have, Rosenbach said, but also a bit nerve-wracking.

"It's a fine line to make sure I'm getting those guys all the (repetitions) they need," he said.

The guys Rosenbach is talking about are juniors Tyson Fuehrer and Dominic Colletto and sophomore Mitch Ratigan. And the coach said all three have done everything he's asked them to do.

"I told them going into fall camp there is not a 1, 2 or 3 — they've all earned the right to compete for the job," Rosenbach said.

Other jobs are more secure, including veterans Tobias Merriweather and Marques Cantu who are both three-year starters. Merriweather is Clark County's top football recruit who committed to Notre Dame on Aug. 4. Cantu has been the Titans' leading receiver the past two seasons.

Coming off a spring season sharing the 4A GSHL title with Camas and Skyview, Rosenbach said the spring's success



SAMUEL WILSON/for The Columbian

Union's Marques Cantu, right, has led the team in receptions each of the past two seasons.

also dictated how the Titans would do their summer program. They never got into pads, which was fine by Rosenbach since retention of knowledge by players is so high.

"When you got a bunch of

kids that are coming back," he said, "and you feel good about their knowledge level, it's a lot easier to not do as much in the spring."

He said the defensive front continues to be a strength, as

it has been in recent years. And they'll have a stiff test to open the season Friday hosting O'Dea of Seattle.

Union also has 4A nonleague road games at Wenatchee and Chiawana.

FRI., SEPT. 3



O'Dea

4:30 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



Mountain View

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



Heritage

7 p.m.

THU., SEPT. 23



at Chiawana

6 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



Evergreen

7 p.m.

THU., OCT. 7



at Battle Ground*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



at Skyview*

8 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at Wenatchee

6 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



Camas*

4:30 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game

3A GREATER ST. HELENS LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

- 1  **MOUNTAIN VIEW:** Returning talent has Thunder in familiar role as league favorite.
- 2  **KELSO:** The Hilanders are tough to beat in the trenches. Conner Noah brings Division-I talent.
- 3  **HERITAGE:** A team on the rise, thanks to coach Dennis Moody's tenacious defense.
- 4  **EVERGREEN:** The Plainsmen look to reload after graduating two of the league's best playmakers.
- 5  **PRAIRIE:** The Falcons are two years removed from a league title, but went winless in the spring.

BIGGEST GAMES

- SEPT. 24**  vs. 
4:30 p.m., McKenzie Stadium
- OCT. 1**  vs. 
7 p.m., Kelso High School
- OCT. 7**  vs. 
4:30 p.m., McKenzie Stadium



STEVE DIPAOLOA/for The Columbian

Mountain View lineman Jurell McDade, left, is among 10 returning starters on the Thunder's defense.

League features close matchups on any given week

Chaos has reigned over the 3A Greater St. Helens League the past two years. The final week in each of the past two seasons has seen several teams have the possibility of capturing a league title.

That trend is looking like it will continue into 2021, as the five-team league is competitive top to bottom.

After missing the post-season in 2019, Mountain View returned to its perch atop the 3A GSHL with a 4-0 record against league opponents in the COVID-shortened campaign.

While some key pieces, including do-it-all quarterback Riley McCarthy, graduated, the Thunder enter 2021 as the team to beat once again. The Thunder return 18 starters, including 10 on defense.

Kelso returns starting quarterback Hunter Letteer and college prospect Conner Noah to a team that wants to bully opponents in the trenches.

The Hilanders and Thunder have a history of outstanding matchups to decide a league title, and an Oct. 1 meeting will be

electric.

Heritage, which joined the 3A ranks last season, made a quick name for itself. The Timberwolves hang their hat on defense under coach Dennis Moody and are an incredibly tough team to beat on any Friday.

Heritage topped Kelso 30-17 last season, a result that gave credibility to the program, Moody said.

Evergreen, which finished second behind Mountain View last season, graduated starting quarterback JJ Woodin and the exciting Jaylen Fite. Led

by junior defensive back Jonathan Landry, Evergreen could be a stronger team than last year's squad, coach Christian Swain believes.

Prairie is just two years removed from a 2019 league title and the Falcons, who went winless last season, are eager to return to that level. The Falcons have the belief they can, but it's always a battle in the 3A GSHL.

"There's not a night off in our league," Swain said. "Everybody is getting better."



EVERGREEN PLAINSMEN

SPRING 2021

3-3, second in 3A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Champions in 2004

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Kyle Norton	RB/S	sr.
David Kailea	DE/TE	sr.
Gary McCulley	MLB/FB	sr.
Jayden Crace	QB	soph.
Jonathan Landry	DB/WR	jr.
Koby Kast	OL/DL	sr.
Shane Newell	WR/FS	sr.
Fox Crader	OL/DL	soph.
Carlos Charupe	OL/DL	jr.

Coach: Christian Swain (third year, 8-8)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Plainsmen's defensive line starters average 270 pounds.
- Jayden Crace is a first-time starter under center as a sophomore.
- Team went 3-1 in league play during last spring's condensed season.



McKenzie Stadium

Near Evergreen HS,
2205 NE 138th Ave.,
Vancouver

Evergreen coach sees much potential in young team

When asked how his young Evergreen football team compares to previous stops in 13 years as a head coach, Christian Swain pointed to the 2013 Roosevelt (Ore.) team he led to a league title and an Oregon state quarterfinal berth.

What they have in common is a deep pool of talented — albeit young — players. The question mark, Swain said, for this year's Evergreen squad how quickly they adapt and acclimate to varsity football.

"I can look at every position," Swain said, "and see kids in our program we're developing who are special players and so that's pretty exciting."

"I couldn't be more excited for the future."

But that future also is now. Youth is flooded around several positions, including starting quarterback Jayden Crace. Just a sophomore, Swain said he has all the intangibles coaches want in a starting quarterback.

Evergreen is also one of — if not the top — defensive teams Swain said he's had. It's highlighted by a defensive front averaging nearly 270 pounds and anchored by the lone senior, David Kailea. Starting tackles Koby Kast and Steve Canda are both at 290 pounds. In the secondary, Jonathan Landry will be a three-year



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Evergreen will look to senior leaders such as Kyle Norton to mold the next generation of talent.

starter as a junior.







With the 4A/3A football season ending in April, the road to traditional off-season work was detoured. Evergreen had what Swain called "consistent participation, not selective

participation" when it came to summer events and workouts. That's why he called it the best summer he's had as a head coach from a player commitment level.

While he couldn't predict

wins and losses, he knows what's already present.

"I just know we're super talented, hard working and have high-character," Swain said. "Those normally are recipes for success."

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	THU., OCT. 7	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	THU., OCT. 28
								
at Centralia	Washougal	at W.F. West	Battle Ground	at Union	Heritage*	Kelso*	Prairie*	at Mountain View*
7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



HERITAGE TIMBERWOLVES

SPRING 2021

3-4, third in 3A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Preliminary round in 2007

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Jack Warren	DE/TE	sr.
Kedyn Bolds	RB/LB	jr.
Aiden Miller	S/RB/WR	jr.
Adam Youkon	OL/DL	jr.
Tate Steinbach	OL/DL	jr.
Austin Steinbach	OL/DL	jr.
David Lubyanskiy	OL/DL	jr.
Braeden Mcilmoil	LB	jr.
Dustin Garrett	DL	jr.
Ladaimien McCord	DB/WR	jr.

Coach: Dennis Moody (third year, 5-11)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Timberwolves have an all-junior offensive line with four returning starters.
- Team won three of its first four games during COVID-19 spring season.
- Dennis Moody enters his third season as head coach.



McKenzie Stadium

Near Evergreen HS,
2205 NE 138th Ave.,
Vancouver

Successful spring has team's confidence on the rise

Dennis Moody views the COVID-19-shortened spring season as a springboard for Heritage this fall. Especially when its biggest win in Moody's tenure as head coach — a 30-17 victory over Kelso — came with 70 percent of starters only sophomores.

Young players gained varsity experience and knowledge throughout seven games, which only boosts their confidence as the fall season approaches, he said.

"Now they have that under their belts," Moody said, "I feel like their confidence will be a little bit more of knowing, 'OK, we've done this already. Let that flow and let them become football players.'"

Becoming football players is, in part, what's changed in Moody's short tenure leading the Timberwolves. He and his coaching staff has seen progress, and where the program is now compared to when he took over in 2019 is vastly different.

"We've come a long way from the first day I took over," Moody said. "We have guys who are now becoming football players rather than just guys who play football. They're understanding concepts and understanding the game more."

While Moody acknowledges the program is going in the



Heritage running back Aiden Miller, left, was part of last season's strong sophomore class.

STEVE DIPAOLA/for The Columbian

right direction, he says there's still a lot of progress to be made. Last season's win over a program like Kelso solidified credibility, and perhaps, a turning point.

"It's very encouraging,"

Moody said.

Also encouraging are all the underclassmen. It includes an all-junior offensive line behind returnees Adam Youkon, Tate Steinbach, Austin Steinbach and David Lubyanskiy.

Moody preaches to his players how to leave a program better than how they received it. And with it comes talk of winning.

"And we hold them to that standard," he said.

FRI., SEPT. 3	SAT., SEPT. 11	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	THU., OCT. 7	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	FRI., OCT. 29
at Ridgefield	W.F. West	at Union	at Mountain View*	at Sunset (Ore.)	Evergreen*	Battle Ground	at Kelso*	Prairie*
7 p.m.	1 p.m.	7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



KELSO HILANDERS

SPRING 2021

2-4, fifth in 3A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

State champion in 1983

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Hunter Letteer	QB/LB	sr.
Brady Phillips	OL/DL	jr.
Conner Noah	RB/DB	jr.
Dominic Kemp	OL/DL	jr.
Payton Stewart	OL	so.
Colby Cooper	WR/DB	sr.
Zeke Smith	WR/DB	jr.
Michael Hause	RB/LB	sr.

Coach: Steve Amrine (ninth year, 46-34)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Conner Noah is among the state's top recruits in the Class of 2023.
- Kelso is strong on the lines. The Hilanders sent 10 players to summer "trench camp."
- Kelso shared the 3A GSHL title with Prairie in 2019, the most recent full season.



Schroeder Field

Kelso HS,
1904 Allen Street,
Kelso

Skilled players, strong lines make Kelso tough to tackle

Kelso football is young but experienced and among the favorites to capture a 3A Greater St. Helens League title in 2021. The Hilanders are one of two teams in the league to return their starting quarterback — senior Hunter Letteer — but that's not all they return.

Junior Conner Noah is ranked as the state's 26th best prospect in the class of 2023. He will soon start garnering college offers. But first, Noah will have the luxury to run behind an offensive line that includes bruising juniors Brady Phillips and Dominic Kemp and 6-foot-4 sophomore Payton Stewart. Colby Cooper also returns to patrol the defensive backfield. He was an all-league player two years ago.

"There are no weak links," ninth-year Kelso coach Steve Amrine said.

For anybody that follows Kelso football, the Hilanders have an identity. They're usually big and dominant upfront and they like to pound the rock, putting their most athletic players in a position to make a play. Ask any longtime Kelso native, and they'll tell you the Hilanders have long prided themselves on winning the battle in the trenches.

It's a proven recipe for success and 2021 is no different. Kelso sent 10 players to trench



TAYLOR BALKOM/for The Columbian

Kelso junior Judah Calixte, left, jukes a defender during a 7-on-7 football tournament at Union High.

camp this year and they will go as far as the big guys up front can take them.

The Hilanders went 2-4 last season, but showed glimpses of what could be accomplished in a full year. The 40-32 loss

to Camas, in particular, was eye-opening for a lot of players, Amrine said.

"We were right there," he added.

With last season so recent — it ended in April — a lot has

carried over during the preparation this summer. That gives the Hilanders plenty of reason for excitement, and a belief that they can return to the top of the league. Kelso shared a league title with Prairie in 2019.

FRI., SEPT. 3



at W.F. West

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



North
Thurston

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



at Centennial
(Ore.)

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



at Prairie*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



Mountain
View*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



Skyview

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



at Evergreen*

4:30 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



Heritage*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



at Battle
Ground

7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



MOUNTAIN VIEW THUNDER

SPRING 2021

5-2, first in 3A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 2001, 2002, 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Gavin James-Dues	OL/DL	sr.
Jurrell McDade	OL/DL	sr.
Alexis Plummer	OL/DL	sr.
Casen Reed	TE/LB	sr.
Zak Gable	RB/LB	sr.
Walker Richardson	RB/LB	sr.
Valika Tomakloe	RB/LB	sr.
Eli Warne	K	sr.
Kyle Chen	DB/WR	jr.
Aiden Nicholson	TE/LB	so.
Porter Drake	RB/DB	so.
JJ Thompson	RB/DB	so.

Coach: Adam Mathieson (14th year, 83-48)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Thunder return 18 starters, including 10 on defense
- Team went undefeated in spring against 3A opponents (4-0)
- Coach Mathieson started three freshmen in the spring, the most in his tenure.



McKenzie Stadium

Near Evergreen HS,
2205 NE 138th Ave.,
Vancouver

10 returning starters on defense ready to lay the boom

In the few times Mountain View has returned as many starters under head coach Adam Mathieson as it does for 2021 — 18, in fact — good things have happened.

Take the 2018 season, as the most recent example, when the Thunder reached the Class 3A state semifinals.

Broken down, Mountain View has 10 of 11 defensive starters back, including its entire defensive line and middle linebackers, plus the majority of its offensive line.

“That’s a decent place to start if you’re building a football team from scratch,” Mathieson said.

The Thunder, however, are far from starting from scratch. What the condensed COVID-19 spring season gave Mathieson and his coaching staff is a glimpse into the fall. Teams in Clark County didn’t participate in team camps and tailored their spring and summer off-season to best fit their needs after their spring seasons. That left Mathieson symbolically filling out the fall depth chart by April.

Mathieson calls his team a veteran group, aiming for their second consecutive league title and fifth in the past six years. And very rarely do returning sophomores in Mountain View’s program have the



STEVE DIPAOLA/for The Columbian

Mountain View defensive back Casen Reed (13) is among this year’s large, talented senior class.

returning varsity experience as JJ Thompson and Porter Drake at running back and defensive back, and Aiden Nickelson at tight end have. That’s because for the first time in his head-coaching career, Mathieson started multiple freshmen back

in the spring.

In a way, Mathieson said, the past several months felt like being part of college football program. Spring ball followed by summer workouts, and now ready for a fall season again.

“We tried to view it with the

fall always in mind,” Mathieson said. “But we viewed it as development for a lot of guys. We wanted to be competitive and play and care about our seniors and want them to have a great experience, but we also have to have an eye out for the fall.”

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	THU., OCT. 7	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	THU., OCT. 28
Kentlake	at Union	Wenatchee	Heritage*	at Kelso*	Camas	at Prairie*	Battle Ground	Evergreen*
7 p.m.	7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



PRAIRIE FALCONS

SPRING 2021

0-5, fifth in 3A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1985, 1986, 1989

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Braeden Slamp	QB	so.
Benjamin Kapelka	OL/DL	jr.
Parker Neyens	OL/DL	sr.
Alex Ford	RB/LB	jr.
Thor Stepina	RB	sr.
Grayson Weber	WR/DB	sr.
Kaleb Blick	H/LB	sr.
Joshua Blick	H/LB	sr.
Jake Hylton	OL	sr.
Izzie Duncan	H/LB	sr.

Coach: Mike Peck (fourth year, 14-13)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Sophomore quarterback Braeden Slamp takes the reins of the offense.
- Slot receiver Thor Stepina was an all-leaguer in Illinois before moving to Prairie.
- The Falcons had more than 60 players regularly attend summer workouts.



District Stadium

at Battle Ground HS
400 W. Main St.,
Battle Ground

With new faces, Prairie looks to rekindle recent success

Prairie football is just two years removed from a 3A Greater St. Helens League title. The Falcons are eager to get back to that point. But they know it will take work. The Falcons finished 0-5 last season and enter this 2021 campaign with a difficult road ahead in a very competitive league.

Still, hopes are high for fourth-year coach Mike Peck and his squad. The team has consistently had 60-70 kids out throughout the summer and the Falcons won't have any shortage of depth.

Who will emerge as standouts, though? That's the big question for Prairie, whose best skill position standouts of recent years — The Dixson brothers, Dustin Shelby, Ian Davis — have moved on.

Enter Thor Stepina, a talented transfer from Illinois, which is coincidentally nicknamed "The Prairie State."

"He has great ball skills; he's good in space," Peck said.

Stepina was an all-league player in Illinois and should immediately slot in as an impact player for the Falcons.

Distributing the ball is sophomore quarterback Braeden Slamp. It's not often a sophomore can step into that position and excel, but Peck believes in the youngster.

"He loves the game and that rubs off on other kids," Peck said of his playcaller. "He has the respect of his team because he has put in the work."

In the trenches, Prairie should again be strong. Benjamin Kapelka, Parker Neyens and Jake Hylton lead a big offensive line.

Seniors Grayson Weber, Kaleb Blick, Josh Blick and Izzie Duncan add some experience to the skill positions.

"We want to compete for a league title and have a 3.0 team GPA," Peck said. "We talk about these things often."



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Prairie sophomore quarterback Braeden Slamp and senior receiver Israel Duncan celebrate a touchdown in a 7-on-7 game this summer at Prairie High School.

FRI., SEPT. 3



at Washougal

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



at Hudson's Bay

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



at Battle Ground

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



Kelso*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



Skyview

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



Black Hills

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



Mountain View*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at Evergreen*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



Heritage*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game

2A GREATER ST. HELENS LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

- 1  **HOCKINSON:** New head coach, but same high talent and title expectations.
- 2  **WASHOUGAL:** Young, athletic and poised to be a challenge for anyone.
- 3  **RIDGEFIELD:** Spudders want to show they are now regular contenders.
- 4  **COLUMBIA RIVER:** Small but talented senior class looks to set high standard.
- 5  **HUDSON'S BAY:** Eagles look to make noise in first full season at 2A.
- 6  **WOODLAND:** Air raid offense should see Beavers rack up passing yards.
- 7  **MARK MORRIS:** Young Monarchs look to use lessons of tough spring season.
- 8  **R.A. LONG:** Second-year coach aims to build foundation after tough years.

BIGGEST GAMES

- SEPT. 17**  vs. 
7 p.m., Hockinson High
- SEPT. 24**  vs. 
7 p.m., Kiggins Bowl
- OCT. 8**  vs. 
7 p.m., Kiggins Bowl
- OCT. 29**  vs. 
7 p.m., Hockinson High



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Hockinson quarterback Jarod Oldham (18) led the Hawks to their seventh straight 2A Greater St. Helens League title last spring. Hockinson will be tested in a league that has seen many of its teams improve.

Will this be the year Hockinson is knocked off its perch?

Almost every coach in the league echoed the sentiment: For the first time in awhile, the 2A Greater St. Helens League is wide open.

That suits seven-time defending champion Hockinson just fine.

"We don't mind people forgetting about us," first-year Hawks coach Clint LeCount said.

Despite the overall feeling that the league title and every playoff spot — a presumed four, though the official allocations have not been released — are up for grabs, the Hawks are the favorites until someone dethrones them.

They return starting quarterback Jarod Oldham, a trio of offensive linemen, multi-tooled Andre Northrup and bruising back Cody Wheeler. The team made the state semifinals in 2019.

Ridgefield, which was a play or two from toppling the Hawks last year, graduated the league's offensive and defensive player of the year in Luke Price and Bailey Meek, respectively. But the Spudders are a program looking to make the jump from playoff team and league contender to a state contender sooner than later.

"A big part for us from a coaching perspective is get-

ting the guys ready to go to that level," third-year coach Scott Rice said.

Behind those two, there are several teams with the belief they can compete at the top. It should make for a chaotic final few weeks as the teams hash out postseason bids.

Washougal is led by standout sophomore quarterback Holden Bea and a strong young core that should grow as the season progresses.

Columbia River is always strong in numbers and has a talented group sure to be a tough out every Friday.

Hudson's Bay is on the doorstep of making the leap

from "dark horse" to contender in the Eagles' first full season in the league since making the drop from Class 3A.

Woodland is returning to the signature Mike Woodward air-raid offense and will be one of the more entertaining teams to watch any given night.

Mark Morris and R.A. Long are still looking to claw back to the postseason after some frustrating seasons in Longview.

"It's probably the first time since I've been coaching here that I can say it's so wide open," Woodland fifth-year coach Mike Woodward said.



COLUMBIA RIVER RAPIDS

SPRING 2021

3-2, tied for third in 2A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 2002

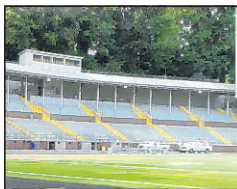
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Dylan Kier	RB/LB	Sr.
Adam Watts	QB/DB	Jr.
Nicolas Hutchinson	OL/DL	Sr.
Brock Schulz	OL/DL	Sr.
Jacobi Fobbs	WR/DB	Jr.
Victor Flores	WR/DB	Sr.
Adam Huerena	TE/DL	Sr.
Aden Flores	WR/DB	Sr.

Coach: Brett Smedley (third year, 6-9)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- River has not won a league title since playing in the 3A GSHL in 2015.
- River has not had a losing record in league play since joining in the 2A GSHL in 2016.
- The Rapids will likely play all of their home games at Kiggins Bowl as improvements on their home stadium continue.



Kiggins Bowl

Near the campus of Discovery Middle School, 800 E. 40th St., Vancouver

Experience of spring should help new starting QB

The key injury at quarterback dealt a big blow to Columbia River's hopes for 2A Greater St. Helens League title last season.

But, in a way, it may have paved a path for the Rapids to compete for the title in the fall of 2021.

"I hated to see Mason Priddy get hurt last year," River coach Brett Smedley said of Priddy's injury in a 16-6 loss to Hockinson. "But we were fortunate in the fact that Adam Watts got a lot of reps over those last 2½ games."

After throwing four interceptions in relief of Priddy against Hockinson, Watts regrouped to complete 33 of 50 passes for 356 yards in his final two games last March.

"He's been putting the work in," Smedley said of Watts. "He's definitely got a growth mindset when it comes to that. He's a worker, so it should be fun to see what he can do."

And Watts will have a small, but talented, group of senior players around him, including first-team all-leaguers in lineman Nicolas Hutchinson and receiver/defensive back Victor Flores. Second-teamers Dylan Kier (RB/LB) and Adam Huerena (TE/DL) also return for River.

"This upcoming class, the seniors, there's only eight or nine of them," Smedley said.



TAYLOR BALKOM/for The Columbian

Columbia River senior Nick Hutchinson helps teammates push a sled during a lineman challenge.

"But they work, and they've got a little bit of attitude to them, so they're going to be a fun group to watch. And there's a really nice handful of juniors who are going to contribute. It will be a good group, but just young in terms of varsity experience in some spots. But we'll be fine."

Smedley said River had good turnout to summer weight room sessions and the limited number of practices they held.

"We cut back a little in the

summer because kids haven't had a vacation or anything like that for a year and a half," Smedley said. "So we make it as much about football as we can, but we also preach family at River. That's something that's one of our priorities. And if you're going to preach it, you need to show it in the way you schedule things for you players."

But Smedley expects the Rapids to attack once the season begins.

"A big thing at River is kind of leaving you legacy and that goes over the entire athletic program," Smedley said. "It's these seniors' opportunity to do that. The league championship is something we haven't had in quite a while, but it's something that drives us, and it's what the kids are working for."

"There's not going to be any quit in these kids. That's what you'll see when you come to a game."

SAT., SEPT. 4



at Skyview

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



at Bremerton

6:30 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



Woodland*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



at R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



at Hockinson*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



Ridgefield*

5 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



Washougal*

8 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



Hudson's Bay*

8 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



HOCKINSON HAWKS

SPRING 2021

5-0, 2A GSHL champions

BEST STATE FINISH

Champions in 2017, 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Andre Northrup	WR/DB	sr.
Cody Wheeler	RB/LB	sr.
Dalton Penner	OL/DL	sr.
Kenyon Johnson	WR/DB	sr.
Hale Prior	WR/DB	sr.
Jarod Oldham	QB/DB	jr.
Kason Goldman	OL/DL	sr.
AJ Domingos	RB/LB	sr.
Tyler Litle	WR/RB/DB	jr.
Conlan Albertson	OL/DL	sr.
Noah Prior	TE/LB	so.

Coach: Clint LeCount (first year)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Senior Andre Northrup is an impact player on offense, defense and special teams.
- Nearly all of Hockinson's current staff worked under retired head coach Rick Steele.
- The Hawks return three senior starters on the offensive line.



Nautilus Field

at Hockinson HS.
16819 N.E. 159th St.
Hockinson

New coach won't depart from winning formula

Most football teams in the area declined to participate in an offseason camp this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. Hockinson, too, chose to stay home. But while many viewed this as a negative in the development of team chemistry, first-year Hawks coach Clint LeCount looked at the positives.

"When you go to camp, the athletes spend quite a bit of time working with college coaches and players," said LeCount, who takes over for longtime coach and now retired Rick Steele. "All their time this offseason was spent with us as a coaching staff. ... It's been good to spend more time with them."

LeCount, though, isn't planning on changing much on a team that is the seven-time defending 2A Greater St. Helens League champions. The entire coaching staff remains the same, sans the offensive line coach. Kasey Powers, who has had stops at Seton Catholic, Hudson's Bay and Skyview, takes over the role. LeCount remains the defensive coordinator and Josh Racanelli will captain the offense.

"We've stayed true to what we've been doing," LeCount said.

The Hawks finished 5-0 last year and return several key



MOLLY J. SMITH/for The Columbian

Hockinson's Andre Northrup (1) is perhaps the best all-around athlete in the 2A GSHL.

pieces, including junior quarterback Jarod Oldham.

"He was thrown into the mix as a sophomore following some really amazing quarterbacks in the program," LeCount said of his signal-caller. "He handled it really well for being as young as he was and he's taken some huge strides this offseason in terms of his confidence."

Bruising running back Cody Wheeler returns for his senior

campaign, as does last season's breakout star Andre Northrup. The do-it-all Northrup's speed and athleticism led to a remarkable campaign in the 2020-21 season, in which he starred on offense, defense and special teams.

"He's one of those guys you're lucky enough to have in your program," LeCount said. "He's one of the reasons we had as much success as we did last

year."

In the trenches, the Hawks return three starting offensive linemen in Dalton Penner, Kason Goldman and Conlan Albertson, all seniors. That's enough to have the Hawks believing an eighth league title is in store.

Said LeCount: "These athletes and the culture that has been established here doesn't allow for complacency."

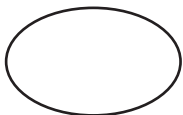
FRI., SEPT. 3



at Lynden

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



Open

FRI., SEPT. 17



Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



at Woodland*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



Columbia River*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



at Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at Hudson's Bay*

5 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



Washougal*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



HUDSON'S BAY EAGLES

SPRING 2021

1-4, seventh in 2A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1999

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Pablo Pedroza	WR/DB	sr.
Quincy Blocker	WR/LB	sr.
Dean Castillo	QB	jr.
Dylan Damos	WR/DB	sr.
Lenox Tuala	RB/LB	sr.
Mateo Varona	RB/DB	jr.

Coach: Ray Lions (fifth year, 12-21)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Thirteen seniors are entering their second year in the Eagles' spread offense.
- Quarterback Dean Castillo has a prime target in Pablo Pedroza.
- For the first time, Hudson's Bay played some of its varsity home games on campus last spring instead of Kiggins Bowl.



Kiggins Bowl

Near the campus of Discovery Middle School, 800 E. 40th St., Vancouver

Eagles believe they have talent, experience to contend

Hudson's Bay football is not content with being the team everyone else describes as having the possibility to surprise some teams. The Eagles don't want to be the dark horse; they want to be contenders.

There is certainly talent for Lions' coaching staff to work with. The Eagles have 13 seniors entering their second year of a spread offense. Three of five starting linemen return.

"There's more familiarity with the system," Lions said. "You've practiced all these things."

Turnout has been strong, too, for the Eagles, who have 20 freshmen and have had up to 50 players in the new and revamped weight room this offseason. Coming off a 1-4 COVID-shortened season, the Eagles will turn to the run a bit more this season, Lions said, utilizing their size up front.

In the passing game, junior gunslinger Dean Castillo takes over at quarterback. He's got a big arm and some weapons to utilize. Wide receiver Pablo Pedroza will be a primary target. The senior has stepped up as a leader, and after a summer 7-on-7 at Prairie High School, asked Lions if he could get a group together to watch film.

That type of outreach is important for a team like the Eagles.

"With COVID, the structure of hybrid school, we weren't able to get that everyday interaction," Lions noted.

Other skill position players certain to be familiar names in the boxscore include seniors Quincy Blocker, Dylan Damos and Lenox Tuala and junior Mateo Varona.

With a hopefully more normal year upon them, the Eagles want to fight for a playoff spot. Hudson's Bay has gone 6-17 since a playoff appearance in 2018.

"Is this team good enough to be the team to make that next jump?" pondered fifth-year coach Ray Lions.

It's a question only time can answer.



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Hudson's Bay senior receiver Pablo Pedroza, center, has become a team leader, organizing film-watching sessions with teammates in the offseason.

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	FRI., OCT. 8	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	FRI., OCT. 29
at Elma	Prairie	at R.A. Long*	at Ridgefield*	Mark Morris*	Washougal*	at Woodland*	Hockinson*	at Columbia River*
7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	5 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	5 p.m.	8 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



MARK MORRIS MONARCHS

SPRING 2021

2-3, tied for fifth in 2A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Second in 1979

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Deacon Dietz	WR/DB	jr.
Tim Sears	OL/LB	sr.
George Mosier	RB/DB	sr.
Zack Ziegler	OL/DL	jr.
Owen Huhta	RB/LB	jr.

Coach: Shawn Perkins (19th year, 81-94)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Mark Morris was the last team to win the 2A Greater St. Helens League title other than Hockinson, when the Monarchs won back-to-back titles in 2012-13.
- The Monarchs' two wins from last season came against Hudson's Bay and R.A. Long.
- Mark Morris had seven different players score touchdowns in the season-ending win over R.A. Long.



Longview Memorial Stadium

R.A. Long High School
2903 Nichols Blvd.,
Longview

Monarchs are wiser, better after challenging spring

The Mark Morris football team was especially young last season, and the Monarchs took their lumps.

But that was part of the plan. "That was kind of our mantra," Mark Morris coach Shawn Perkins said. "We wanted to send our seniors out on a high note. But these are kind of spring scrimmages here to get our kids ready to go for the fall 2021 season."

Perkins hopes lessons learned from the 2020-21 season, plus a solid summer of workouts that averaged about 45 players, can push the Monarchs toward their first winning season since 2013.

"It's kind of been a rush," Perkins said. "You went from football season into baseball season into basketball season. It was kind of a push at the end there. And we sort started back up right after school ended, and I think kids appreciated it. They were looking forward to getting some kind of normalcy."

Perkins likes what he's seen from his crew of ball carriers this summer.

"Our backs in our offense, we have enough backs back there to give an area of strength," Perkins said. "And I think our receiver corps is another strength. If we stay healthy up front, I think we'll have a good



LONGVIEW DAILY NEWS

Mark Morris senior George Mosier (13) and Owen Huhta are expected to get a bulk of the carries.

group of kids. We're not real deep there."

Leading the way is junior slot receiver Deacon Dietz, who is one of two returning all-league players.

"He's a big-time playmaker," Perkins said. "He had more than 1,000 yards rushing and receiving in just five games last

year." Senior George Mosier and junior Owen Huhta are expected to be the top running backs.

On defense, two-time all-leaguer Tim Sears returns after leading the team with 45 tackles at linebacker.

"We only had four seniors

last year, so we're going to have a pretty good group of seniors and a ton of juniors," Perkins said. "At times last year, we had eight sophomores on the field. ... I think we'll be junior-, senior-dominated. And that's good for those kids, because they put in a lot of work last year."

FRI., SEPT. 3



Castle Rock

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



at Aberdeen

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



at Columbia River*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



Washougal*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



at Hudson's Bay*

5 p.m.

THU., OCT. 7



at Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



Hockinson*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at Woodland*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



R.A. LONG LUMBERJACKS

SPRING 2021

0-5, eighth in 2A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

First round in 2010

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Shaun Mize	QB/S	jr.
Jamond Harris	RB/DB	jr.
Jorge Aguilar	FB/LB	sr.
Tyler West	OL/DT	sr.

Coach: Jon Barker (second year, 0-5)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

■ The young Lumberjacks will rely on speed, running a spread offense with plenty of jet sweeps.

■ Jon Barker, who took the job prior to the spring season, is the Lumberjacks' fourth head coach in the past six seasons.

■ R.A. Long has just one win in the past three seasons. That win came in the 2019 opener against Fort Vancouver.



Longview Memorial Stadium

R.A. Long High School
2903 Nichols Blvd.,
Longview



LONGVIEW DAILY NEWS

R.A. Long junior running back Jamond Harris is the primary ballcarrier for the Lumberjacks.

Second-year coach, young team build toward future

R.A. Long second-year coach Jon Barker was shocked to hear the question: "Are you going to be here next year?"

It was a fair query from a Lumberjack football player. Barker is the team's fourth coach in the past six seasons.

"The kids want to know they can buy into you and that you're going to be there," said Barker, who was tabbed as the Lumberjacks' next head coach in May 2020. The Jacks went

0-5 in the pandemic-shortened 2020-21 season.

But now Barker sees the foundation is set for a youthful and excited team. A lot of what they ran in the spring is translating on the field this summer.

"We certainly are feeling more prepared," Barker said.

The team hovered around 55-60 kids throughout spring and summer, a strong turnout, said Barker, who was particu-

larly excited about the freshman class.

"It's finally starting to click in for a lot of them," he said.

R.A. Long will run a spread offense with a lot of jet sweeps and a 3-4 defense. Heading the ship is junior quarterback Shaun Mize, who doubles as a defensive back, and talented junior running back/defensive back Jamond Harris.

Still, Barker knows it's not an easy task to climb through

the ranks of the 2A Greater St. Helens League. After non-league games with Rochester and Franklin Pierce, they open league play with Hudson's Bay, Hockinson and Columbia River.

For a program with just one win in the past three years, the Lumberjacks will take their lumps. But from Barker's eyes, this is a program on the rise and he's here for the long haul, a welcome change of pace for the R.A. Long players.

SAT., SEPT. 4



Rochester

1 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



at Franklin
Pierce

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



Hudson's Bay*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



at Hockinson*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



Columbia
River*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



Woodland*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



at Washougal*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



at Mark
Morris*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



RIDGEFIELD SPUDDERS

SPRING 2021

4-1, second in 2A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Champions in 1995

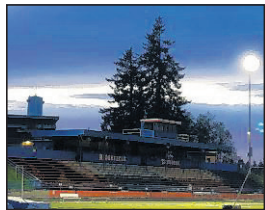
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Ty Snider	WR/DB	sr.
Conner Delamarter	RB/LB	sr.
Wyatt Bartroff	OL/DL	jr.
Ryan Jenkins	WR/DB	sr.
Isaiah Cowley	WR/DB	jr.
Matt Kinswa	OL/DL	sr.
Matt Lewis	TE/LB	sr.

Coach: Scott Rice (third year, 10-6)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- The Spudders allowed just 21 points in five games last spring and shut out their first three opponents.
- Four of the team's six returning starters earned all-league honors last spring.
- Brayden Malella and Logan Debeaumont, both sophomores, are competing for the starting quarterback job.



Ridgefield Stadium

at Ridgefield HS,
2630 S. Hillhurst
Rd., Ridgefield

Spudders set to show spring's success was no fluke

Ridgefield football was yards away from dethroning Hockinson atop the 2A Greater St. Helens League last season. The Spudders, down 14-7, advanced to the red zone only to have the drive fall short in the defeat that decided the league championship.

That loss, in which the Spudders came up empty-handed on three trips inside the Hockinson 10-yard line, will stick with coach Scott Rice and the Spudders for a long time.

"They knew how to do it. They knew what it meant to be in a cutthroat situation," Rice said of the seven-time defending league champions. "We didn't have that mentality."

That's why Rice has challenged his guys all off-season to compete against the best. This summer, they went to a scrimmage at Tumwater that featured the T-Birds, Lynden and Steilacoom, three of the top 2A programs in the state. They hosted Camas and Union for scrimmages this off-season.

"We tried to get out with the group we have right now and find as many opportunities as we could to compete," Rice said. "We were right on the doorstep last year."

The Spudders graduate several important pieces from an impressive 4-1 squad last year



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Ridgefield coach Scott Rice brought his team to face Class 2A powerhouses Tumwater, Lynden and Steilacoom in scrimmages this summer. The Spudders also took on 4A powers Camas and Union.

that outscored opponents 172-21, including starting quarterback and offensive player of the year Luke Price and defensive player of the year and Army commit Bailey Meek.

But Ridgefield also returns six starters on each side of the ball and 19 with varsity experience. At the top of that list is all-league returners Ty Snider (receiver), Wyatt Bartroff (line-

man), Matt Kinswa (lineman) and Ryan Jenkins (receiver).

That experienced group is paired with an extremely talented sophomore class that gets Rice "fired up," he said.

That sophomore class should include the Spudders starting quarterback. Sophomores Brayden Malella and Logan Debeaumont are competing for the starting gig.

"They're dialed in," Rice said. "These guys have been quarterbacks since fifth grade and throw three, four, five days a week. They're working on it and did a great job through the summer."

Senior Conner Delamarter will be a primary ballcarrier while Isaiah Cowley and Matt Lewis could be instrumental pieces for the Spudders.

FRI., SEPT. 3



Heritage

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



at Castle Rock

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



at Hockinson*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



Hudson's Bay*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



at Washougal*

7 p.m.

THU., OCT. 7



Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



at Columbia River*

5 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



Woodland*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



WASHOUGAL PANTHERS

SPRING 2021

3-2, tied for third in 2A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 1974

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Thomas Brown	WR/S	sr.
Holden Bea	QB	so.
Garrett Mansfield	LB	jr.
Carson Morris	DB	sr.
Zach Phillips	OL	jr.
Jose Alvarez-Cruz	OL/DL	so.

Coach: Dave Hajek (16th year, 61-79)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- The Panthers graduated 15 players from last season's team, meaning youngsters will have opportunities.
- Sophomore quarterback Holden Bea (6-foot-1, 180 pounds) is already attracting the attention of colleges.
- In 2019, Washougal made the state quarterfinals for the first time since 1975.



Fishback Stadium

at Washougal HS, 1201 39th St., Washougal

Next in a long line of Bea athletes takes reins at QB

Another Bea movie is set to air in Washougal this fall, as the newest face in the long family line of Panthers is ready to star.

Sophomore Holden Bea will take over as Washougal quarterback this year and longtime coach Dave Hajek wasn't shy about declaring the kid's talent.

"He's the real deal," Hajek said.

Bea is a dual-threat quarterback, whose legs will get him outside of the pocket where he can make throws all over the field. The 6-foot-1, 180-pound quarterback is already on college coaches' radars after he competed at the prestigious Northwest 9, a showcase of the region's top gunslingers.

Bea's talents will rightfully attract a lot of eyeballs to the Panthers, where a youthful group will get a chance to shine.

"We have a strong core that's young and talented," Hajek said.

The Panthers graduated 15 players from a 3-2 squad last season, including all-league quarterback Tristan Farrell, running back Gavin Multer, receiver Michael Egger and defensive lineman Gabe Kent.

Junior linebacker Garrett Mansfield and senior defensive back Carson Morris are return-



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Washougal sophomore quarterback Holden Bea bounces outside against a Prairie defender in a scrimmage last month at Prairie High School.

ing all-league players and will anchor the defense.

Senior wide receiver Thomas Brown will be a top threat as a passcatcher. Zach Phillips and Jose Alvarez-Cruz lead a young but seasoned offensive line.

"We are as talented as last year's team, just maybe not as seasoned," Hajek said. "I'm excited to see this team grow."

During the 2019 season, the Panthers made the state quarterfinals for the first time

since 1975. They were led by linebacker Brevan Bea.

This year's group has a chance to develop to a similar level over the next couple years. It's no surprise another Bea is leading the way.

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	FRI., OCT. 8	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	FRI., OCT. 29
Prairie	at Evergreen	Woodland*	at Mark Morris*	Ridgefield*	at Hudson's Bay*	R.A. Long*	at Columbia River*	at Hockinson*
7 p.m.	4:30 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	8 p.m.	7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game

W

WOODLAND BEAVERS

SPRING 2021

3-2, tied for third in 2A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 1974

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Daeton Lofgren	OL/LB	jr.
Mark Morales	Slot/LB	sr.
Justin Philpot	WR/DB	jr.
Drew Burns	QB	jr.
Brett Martynowicz	QB	so.
Dalton Beassie	Slot/LB	jr.
Beau Swett	WR/DB	jr.
Daymon Gressett	RB/DL	sr.

Coach: Mike Woodward (fifth year, 20-15)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- The Beavers have employed three different offensive schemes in the past three seasons, all to suit three very different quarterbacks.
- Senior Daymon Gressett gives Woodland a weapon at running back in case opponents over-defend the pass.
- Linebacker Daeton Lofgren is the emotional leader of the defense.



Beaver Stadium

at Woodland HS,
1500 Dike Access Rd.
Woodland

Switch to pass-heavy offense suits this year's talent

In Woodland coach Mike Woodward's first two years with the Beavers, he ran his signature air raid offense that helped Mountain View to a Class 4A state semifinal appearance in 2001. Behind big-armed Wyatt Harsh, the Beavers thrived in the up-tempo spread offense.

Then Woodward switched gears in 2018 with multi-tooled Tyler Flanagan under center, operating a spread-based attack with a bevy of designed quarterback runs.

Last season, with JJ Fuerst converting from running back to quarterback, Woodward slowed the offense down and the Beavers attacked through the ground game.

Now, Woodward is eager to get back to that up-tempo aerial offense he became known for around the state two decades ago.

"There has been a little bit of a learning curve on the offensive side of the ball," Woodward said. "It's your typical air raid with a little different flavor on it."

Junior Drew Burns and sophomore Brett Martynowicz, who both played junior-varsity last year, are competing for the starting quarterback gig, a role that should produce hefty statlines.

But the Beavers love what



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Woodland defensive coordinator Glen Flanagan talks to his team about gap schemes during practice.

they have around those two on offense as well. Senior Daymon Gressett is a bruising running back that will serve well to keep defenses off-guard.

Tall junior receivers Justin Philpot and Beau Swett are strong passcatchers and senior Mark Morales and junior Dalton Beassie will man the slots.

"There will be games where we are very balanced and games where we are less so," Woodward said of the run-pass mix. "It will depend on what the defense is giving us and what matchups we want to go after." On defense, junior Daeton Lofgren, an all-league first-team linebacker, is the leader and impact player to

watch.

"He's the face of our franchise," Woodward said.

With the air raid back in Woodland, the Beavers are hoping to replicate some of the success of those first year of Woodward at the helm, namely the playoff appearances.

"We feel really good about it," Woodward said.

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	FRI., SEPT. 17	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	FRI., OCT. 8	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	FRI., OCT. 29
Kalama	at La Center	at Washougal*	at Columbia River*	Hockinson*	at R.A. Long*	Hudson's Bay*	Mark Morris*	at Ridgefield*
7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game

1A TRICO LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

- 1  **LA CENTER:** Size, strength and experience is recipe for success.
- 2  **CASTLE ROCK:** Senior quarterback Naugle has Rockets set for liftoff.
- 3  **SETON CATHOLIC:** Cougars set to build on surprise success of spring.
- 4  **COLUMBIA - WHITE SALMON:** Bruins aim to replace 16 who graduated.
- 5  **FORT VANCOUVER:** Team continues to build under second-year coach.

BIGGEST GAMES

- OCT. 1**  **VS.** 
7 p.m., Columbia High
- OCT. 22**  **VS.** 
7 p.m., Seton Catholic
- OCT. 29**  **VS.** 
7 p.m., Castle Rock High



FILES/The Columbian

La Center, which has won nine league titles in the past 12 seasons, aiming for a deep playoff run this season.

Perennial favorite La Center remains the team to beat

Castle Rock coach Aaron Gehring probably put it best when he said the road to the 1A Trico League championship goes through La Center.

"Right now, you've got to put La Center on top because that's where they've been," Gehring said.

And history bears him out.

In the 12 years since Castle Rock captured its last outright Trico League title in 2008, La Center has won or shared the Trico title nine times. And the schools that denied the Wildcats a part of crown — Toledo (2010), Kalama (2015) and Stevenson (2010, 2018) — have all since dropped down to Class 2B.

And with the Wildcats

bringing back four of five starters on a line, including 300-pound sophomore Ryan Kawalek. That gives La Center strength, size and experience up front, the mark of a preseason league favorite.

"We have a lot of returners," La Center coach John Lambert said. "We had some quality seniors last year, but we didn't have many of them. We had maybe five or six senior starters last year. I think we have the talent to repeat (as league champions) and make a deep playoff run."

Castle Rock will be trying to replace some talented seniors who graduated. But the Rockets bring back senior quarterback Chance Naugle, a second-team

all-league pick last season, and senior lineman Landon Gardner, who was the Trico League defensive player of the year.

Gehring has his sights set on the regular-season finale, when the Rockets host La Center.

"If we can stay healthy, we hope to be competing for a league title by the end of the season," Gehring said.

Seton Catholic was a surprise team last winter, posting a 3-2 record under first-year coach Dennis Herling and a roster that featured barely 20 players.

But this season, the number has doubled to nearly 40 with some talented returnees led by Lance Stuck, a first-team all-league pick at

receiver and defensive back, as well as seniors Dax Clifton and Sean Emberlin.

Columbia-White Salmon graduated 16 seniors from last year's squad and will be filling holes with a lot of inexperienced players.

Fort Vancouver continues to rebuild its program under second-year coach Doug Bilodeau.

Regardless of their prospects, every team is excited to be back playing football in the fall.

"The kids are so excited," Lambert said. "It was just a couple of weeks ago we were scrimmaging Heritage, and then Prairie before that, during the summer. And now we're getting ready for the season. It's coming fast."



CASTLE ROCK ROCKETS

Rockets set sights high with returning quarterback, key defensive players

It has been 13 seasons since the last time Castle Rock won a playoff game and advanced to state.

Coach Aaron Gehring thought

SPRING 2021

4-1, second in Trico

BEST STATE FINISH

Champions in 1988

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Landon Gardner	RB/DL	sr.
David Garcia	OL/LB	jr.
Chance Naugle	QB	sr.
Hayden Curtiss	DB	sr.
Chase Rusher	WR/DB	jr.

Coach: Aaron Gehring (fourth year, 14-10)

2020 was the season for the Rockets to break that skid.

"We had a first-team all-state running back (Wyatt Partridge) who was returning off a 2,200-yard season," Gehring said. "We had an offensive line with Jonah McGarry, who was on the offensive and defensive side. We were excited last year. We had a lot of great players last year, who could have done some things in a full season."

But the pandemic shortened last season to five games with no postseason.

"But the good news is we are returning seven (starters) on offense and eight on defense," Gehring said.

That was the result of a plan Gehring learned out of necessity.

"I try to rotate as many younger guys as I can because the very first year I coached we ended up having 10 players going out on season-ending injuries," he said.

Junior Chase Rusher was one of those younger players who got valuable experience last season in relief of seniors Partridge and Austin McQuilliams.

Rusher ran for 123 yards on 20 carries and a touchdown. He also caught five passes for 126 yards.

"Chase Rusher is a guy who will see some time at tailback," Gehring said. "He really impressed us in the 7-on-7s as a slot receiver. So in different formations and some of the things we do, we're going to try to utilize him a lot. He's going to be a fun one to watch fly around, and he's

put on some strength, too."

Chance Naugle returns for a third season as the Rockets' starting quarterback after passing for 504 yards last season and three touchdowns. He also rushed for five scores.

"With being the offensive general on the field, he will be the one setting the tempo for the offense," Gehring said of Naugle. "He is another person that has spent a lot of time in the weight room improving his mobility and strength, which is needed at the QB position."

And the Rockets return Landon Gardner, the Trico League's defensive player of the year after recording 25 tackles, 7.5 tackles for loss, three sacks and one forced fumble in three

games played.

"He is going to be a fun player to watch and follow throughout the season," Gehring said.

Gehring hopes the players he had back, plus a challenging non-league schedule that includes Montesano, Eatonville plus 2As Ridgefield and Mark Morris, will get the Rockets ready to contend for a league title.

"I think the last time we won a league title was 2008, so it's been a while," he said. "And since then, it's been La Center almost every year. The road right now goes through La Center. So hopefully, we can stay healthy and have all cylinders firing when we play La Center at home (in Week 9) for Senior Night and potentially the league title."

FRI., SEPT. 3

at M. Morris

FRI., SEPT. 10

Ridgefield

FRI., SEPT. 17

Elma

FRI., SEPT. 24

Montesano

FRI., OCT. 1

at Fort*

FRI., OCT. 8

Columbia-WS*

FRI., OCT. 15

at Seton*

FRI., OCT. 22

at Eatonville

FRI., OCT. 29

La Center*



COLUMBIA BRUINS

With just one starter back, 2021 is season of renewal, opportunity in White Salmon

SPRING 2021

2-3, fourth in Trico

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1996, 1998

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Jace Greenwood	RB	Sr.
Michael Smith	OL/DL	Jr.
Landon Castilla	FB	So.
Moses Henning	LB	Jr.
Avery Schalk	WR/DB	Jr.

Coach: Dan Smith (fourth year, 11-13)

Columbia-White Salmon coach Dan Smith was really looking forward to the 2020 season.

The Bruins had a strong senior class led by all-league running back Austin Charters.

But the fall 2020 season became the winter 2021 season, and it didn't go as planned for the Bruins, who finished 2-3 in the 1A Trico League.

"I didn't feel like we went into that season in the best of shape," Smith said. "We weren't able to get in those two-a-day practices

that you normally do to start the season. Everything just happened so quickly."

Now with 16 seniors graduated out of the program from last year, the Bruins return only one starter up from in junior offensive and defensive lineman Michael Smith.

So the 2021 fall season will be one of starting over for the Bruins.

"We ended with 33 kids this last spring, during our spring workouts in June," Smith said. "The majority of those are going

to be underclassmen. They're pretty athletic and they're hard workers. But we're just going to be young and unexperienced."

And not all of the new faces on the rosters will be younger players.

"I've got some guys who are seniors who are turning out for the first time, or who turned out earlier and are now coming back," Smith said. "So they might help alleviate some of the pressure of having to put young guys there. But it will just be kind of that raw inexperience that we'll

have to deal with."

So much of what the Bruins did in past season when through Charters, who rushed for more than 500 yards in the short season earlier this year. Smith said the Bruins will look to a variety of players to fill that void, led by senior running back Jace Greenwood.

"Trying to fill that role with multiple people is going to be the difficult aspect," Smith said. "And then we need to be willing to adapt and not get tunnel vision to one solution."

FRI., SEPT. 3

at Goldendale

FRI., SEPT. 10

at Stevenson

FRI., SEPT. 17

Montesano

FRI., SEPT. 24

at Fort

FRI., OCT. 1

Seton*

FRI., OCT. 8

at Castle Rock*

FRI., OCT. 15

at La Center*

FRI., OCT. 22

Fort*

FRI., OCT. 29

Tenino



FORT VANCOUVER TRAPPERS

SPRING 2021

0-5, sixth in Trico

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1973

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Nathan Nellis	OL/DL	so.
Kenan Weinmaster	OL/DL	jr.
Carlos Flores-Villalobos	OL/DL	sr.
Kaeleb Cvitkovich	QB/DB	jr.
Jesse Mumm	TE/LB	sr.
Anthony Peake	RB	so.
Berick Nilson	RB	sr.

Coach: Doug Bilodeau (second year, 0-5)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Fort's biggest strength is its size on the lines.
- A 2A school, Fort is playing as a 1A team for the second consecutive season.
- Fort is developing a youth football program, the first time the Trappers will have one in 20 years.



Kiggins Bowl

Near the campus of Discovery Middle School, 800 E. 40th St., Vancouver

Growing program believes it can compete in Trico

It doesn't take long once you step on the practice field to notice Fort Vancouver football's biggest strength entering the 2021 fall season. The Trappers are massive up front.

Sophomore Nathan Nellis, junior Kenan Weinmaster and senior Carlos Flores-Villalobos anchor a big offensive line the Trappers should be able to hang their hat on this season.

Fort Vancouver, which is Class 2A, will play a 1A Trico League schedule this season. And for the first time in awhile, the Trappers feel they can compete.

Fort Vancouver has just nine wins in the past decade.

"We're in a good spot," second-year head coach Doug Bilodeau said. Bilodeau has been with the program in some capacity for the past five years. "We've come a long way."

The turnout has been strong all offseason for the Trappers, who enter the season with about 45 kids.

Junior quarterback Kaeleb Cvitkovich has a good arm and running backs Anthony Peake, a sophomore, and Berick Nilson, a senior, give him weapons in the run-based spread offense.

Bilodeau believes the player to watch this season is senior tight end and linebacker Jesse Mumm. At 6-foot-3, 210-pounds, Mumm has a chance to be a



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Fort Vancouver second-year coach Doug Bilodeau walks his offensive line through a trapping block scheme during a practice at Fort Vancouver High School.

difference-maker.

"He's going to have a breakout year," Bilodeau said. "He has done a really good job preparing for the season."

Even better news for Fort Vancouver in the coming years is the development of a youth football program, the first time the Trappers will have one in 20

years, Bilodeau said.

"We just want to compete and get better and build that character," Bilodeau said. "Character can win games sometimes."

FRI., SEPT. 3



McDaniel (Ore.)
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



Corbett (Ore.)
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



at Charles Wright
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



Columbia-White Salmon
1 p.m. #

FRI., OCT. 1



Castle Rock*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



at La Center*
7 p.m.

SAT., OCT. 16



at Irrigon (Ore.)
4 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at Columbia-White Salmon*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



at Seton Catholic*
7 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game, #-at Fort Vancouver High



LA CENTER WILDCATS

SPRING 2021

5-1, first in Trico

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 2016, 2017

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Darren Cepeda	QB/DB	sr.
David White	WR/LB	sr.
Ryan Kawalek	OL/DL	so.
Miles Bacon	OL/DL	sr.
Andrew Kysar	WR/DB	sr.
Jalen Ward	RB/LB	so.

Coach: John Lambert (23rd year, 158-72)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- The Wildcats have reached the state playoffs 13 times under John Lambert
- La Center returns four of five starters on the offensive/defensive line, including 300-pound sophomore Ryan Kawalek.
- The Wildcats open the season vs. Cascade Christian, in a rematch of the 2017 1A state quarterfinal La Center won 41-35 in triple overtime.



La Center High

725 N.E.
Highland Rd.
La Center

Rich on talent and experience, Wildcats set sights high

The strength of any football team generally starts up front.

And that puts La Center coach John Lambert in an enviable position this fall.

"There are some years you're replacing 80 percent of your team, starters-wise," Lambert said. "But this year, we've got a lot of our team back. And even the ones who didn't start last spring still got a lot of playing time. We've got almost our whole line back, four of the five kids. So I feel like we'll be starting our season in good shape with our experience."

Anchoring the line is Ryan Kawalek, a first-team all-league lineman who measures in at 6-foot-3 and 300 pounds. And he's just a sophomore.

"I don't think it's uncommon anymore to have guys who weigh 300 pounds in high school," Lambert said. "What's uncommon is someone who can move really well. It's uncommon to find someone who has a really good work ethic, is tough mentally and physically. Ryan is going to play at the next level, and he has a huge upside. His Week 5 game compared to Week 1 last season was like night and day. And he was a freshman. He's playing as a freshman. And he had a lot of pancake blocks in that



FILES/The Columbian

Andrew Kysar is among several La Center players who have at least two years of varsity experience.

final game for the league title. There's nothing but upside for him."

But Lambert's excitement for his guys up front doesn't stop there.

"And we're excited for the guys around (Kawalek), too," Lambert said. "The guys we have coming back — Miles Bacon, Clayton Muffett, Adam White — they all started last year. And it's so nice to be able to hit the ground running with this group."

It sets up nicely for Lambert,

whose teams over the past 22 seasons have run a more run-heavy offense. But that might not necessarily be the case this fall, even though the Wildcats graduated their starting quarterback of the past three seasons, Trico League MVP Tom Lambert.

"With our practices in November, December, January last winter, we threw the ball a lot, because that's all we could do," Lambert said. "So we had a lot of kids who got a lot of practice route-running, catching the

ball and schemes, and they'll be coming back."

And the Wildcats will need to hit the ground running as they face a traditionally tough non-league schedule.

"We want those challenges," Lambert said. "You try to get teams that are traditionally good. ... We know those are going to be the type of team we are going to see in the playoffs. And that's our goal, to go deep in the playoffs and maybe one of these years, who knows, maybe win it all."

SAT., SEPT. 4



at Cascade
Christian
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



Woodland
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



Kalama
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



Eatonville
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 1



at Montesano
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



Fort
Vancouver*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



Columbia-
White Salmon*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



at Seton
Catholic*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



at Castle
Rock*
7 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game



SETON CATHOLIC COUGARS

SPRING 2021

3-2, third in Trico

BEST STATE FINISH

Haven't qualified

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Lance Stuck	WR/FS	sr.
Sean Emerlin	WR/CB	sr.
Dax Clifton	WR/DB	sr.
Joe Callareme	QB/DB	fr.

Coach: Dennis Herling (second year, 3-2)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Team is playing all home games under lights installed last spring.
- Program has its largest ninth-grade class: 21 players
- Seton Catholic is projected to start a freshman at quarterback.



Seton Catholic

9000 N.E.
64th Ave.,
Vancouver

Success last spring followed by productive summer

What did coach Dennis Herling take away the most by putting his young Seton Catholic squad up against larger competition all summer?

"They're not afraid to compete against anyone, which I love," he said.

Herling is talking about the handful of summer 7 on 7 events — all pass plays with skill position players and zero contact allowed — hosted by area teams. And every time, at Class 1A, the Cougars were the smallest team at the competitions.

The goal was to improve, but also face teams that run a similar pass-heavy offense like Seton.

"It lets us work on a few things," Herling said. "Because we're one of the few (1A Trico) teams that will throw the ball quite a bit."

Last spring was Herling's first time as a head coach. He's still putting his stamp on the program, but knows this fall also is a milestone year.

For starters, the 21-player ninth-grade class joining the program in 2021 is the largest in school history. It features a freshman quarterback — Joe Callareme — and multiple freshmen who will be starters on the offensive line.

"Future is bright in that regard," the coach said. "Keep those guys all together and build off that. There's an even bigger group for next year's freshman class."

The season is also monumental in other ways. This fall marks the school's 10th season of football and first full season playing all home games under lights that were installed in the spring.

Never before has Seton reached the post-season nor had more than four wins in a year. Herling believes that can change this fall.

"That's the first step for us," Herling said, "make the playoffs then aim for (a league title)."



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Seton Catholic receiver Lance Stuck makes a catch over the outstretched arm of an R.A. Long defender in a 7-on-7 event this summer.

FRI., SEPT. 3



at Charles
Wright

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



at Rochester

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



Tenino

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



at Friday
Harbor

5:30 p.m. #

FRI., OCT. 1



at Columbia-
White Salmon*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



Elma

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



Castle Rock*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



La Center*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



Fort
Vancouver*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game, #-at King's Academy, Shoreline



KING'S WAY KNIGHTS

SPRING 2021

Did not play

BEST STATE FINISH

8-man quarterfinals in 2011

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Aidan Sweeney WR/LB jr.
 Marcus Whitney RB/LB jr.
 Jamison Duke WR/DB jr.
 Brayden Schieter QB so.

Coach: Nick Mancillas (first year)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Program took a one-year break to focus on youth programs and boosting turnout.
- The Knights have just one senior and about 30 players on their roster.
- Team is playing an independent schedule because most teams' schedules were full when King's Way announced its return.



King's Way Christian High

3300 N.E. 78th
 St. Vancouver

After a year off, Knights back with independent slate

Thirteen months ago, King's Way Christian's football program was put on pause. With turnout dwindling, administrators made the decision to suspend the high school team and focus on the youth programs in an effort to eventually re-emerge stronger than ever. Coaches moved on; players moved on; the stadium sat empty on Friday nights.

Less than a year later, under new leadership, King's Way announced a return to the high school gridiron.

And it was first-year coach Nick Mancillas' job to reignite the once-extinguished spark for the Knights. A history teacher at Agape Christian School in Camas and a former coach at Fullerton College in California, Mancillas leapt at the opportunity. Football and the energy and culture around it excites him and he couldn't fathom a school and its student body not having that.

Knowing this was not a one-year project, Mancillas started with a youth camp. Fourth to eighth graders turned out last fall to experience football at King's Way.

"We want to focus on the youth and plant those seeds of love for this game," Mancillas said. "And water that for the next few years."

The Knights will have just



JOSHUA HART/The Columbian

Coach Nick Mancillas gives a thumbs up as his King's Way Christian players watch at the program's first practice since taking a hiatus after the 2019 season.

one senior on the team, which will hover around 25-30 players in its return season. Only a couple players return from the 2019 Knights' squad, which finished 5-5 under coach Brian Rodriguez.

The foremost player to lead the ship was junior Aidan Sweeney, who will play tight end, flex receiver and linebacker.

"He's talking to other players

and coaching them up," Mancillas said. "He's really taken it seriously."

Juniors Marcus Whitney and Jamison Duke will be playmakers for the Knights and sophomore Brayden Schieter will be under center in a pro-style, single-back offense.

The Knights will play an independent schedule this season because most teams

had already filled the spot on the league slate when King's Way announced its return. While there is technically a way into the playoffs for King's Way, that's not the focus in the first year.

"Winning is fun, but we want to focus on the details," Mancillas said. "Our philosophy here is foundation, fundamentals, fun."

FRI., SEPT. 3	FRI., SEPT. 10	SAT., SEPT. 18	FRI., SEPT. 24	FRI., OCT. 1	FRI., OCT. 8	FRI., OCT. 15	FRI., OCT. 22	FRI., OCT. 29
Tenino	Open	at Bellevue Christian	at Elma	Adna	Toledo	Stevenson	Open	Wahkiakum
6 p.m.		3 p.m.	7 p.m.	7 p.m.	6 p.m.	7 p.m.		6 p.m.



KALAMA CHINOOKS

SPRING 2021

2-3, tied for second in 2B Central-South

BEST STATE FINISH

1A champs in 1998,
2B champs in 2017, 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Jackson Esary	QB/S	sr.
Jack Doerty	WR/LB	sr.
Max Cox	WR/DB	sr.
Preston Armstrong	DL	sr.
Gino Santi	OL/DL	sr.
Seth Hoseney	OL/DL	sr.

Coach: Sean McDonald (seventh year, 54-14)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Kalamazoo has played in the last three 2B state championship games
- McDonald resigned as coach in late May, saying he wanted to become a PE teacher and didn't anticipate a position opening up in the school district. He returned a month later when he was offered a position as a PE teacher at Kalamazoo Middle School.
- Quarterback Jackson Esary has received a college offer from Eastern Washington.



Kalamazoo High

548 China Garden Road, Kalamazoo

Senior-laden team set to rebound from rough spring

For Kalamazoo, last season was one like no other.

Not only was it shortened to five games and played in February and March, the Chinooks staggered to a 2-3 mark, losing as many games or more as they had in any of their previous three seasons when Kalamazoo played for 2B state titles.

"It was a tough year, but we got through it," Kalamazoo coach Sean McDonald said. "I was glad that we got to at least play and get some games under our belt, even though most games didn't turn out the way we wanted them to."

A short window to prepare for the season led to injuries. Injuries led to defeats in the tough Central 2B League.

"A lot of injuries, a lot of mental mistakes," McDonald said. "And we're just ready to hit the ground running and get a fresh restart this year."

And the Chinooks will be doing so with a very experienced lineup.

"We'll have all seniors, except for maybe two or three, who will be starting," McDonald said.

"It will be pretty heavy senior-wise. We're dealing with some academic ineligibility for the first couple of weeks, so that's going to hurt. But other than that, we'll be senior-heavy with a lot of returners."

Topping the list is senior



LONGVIEW DAILY NEWS

Kalamazoo senior Jack Doerty, left, brings all-league receiving talent to the Chinooks lineup.

quarterback Jackson Esary, 2B South Division offensive player of the year last season after passing for 1,169 yards.

"He's a once-in-a-century kind of player," McDonald said. "Probably the most coachable, recruitable kid I've ever had. He's just a force to be reckoned with at quarterback."

And Kalamazoo will be returning a bevy of all-league players, including senior receivers Jack Doerty and Max Cox.

"Obviously we'll need to plug some younger guys into spots where we had older guys last

year," McDonald said. "But for the most part, we only lost three guys. And we have some younger guys who are stepping up into those positions. So we just used last season as an extended spring ball season. We got some good quality practices in the summer, got back into the weight room. That should help us manage the injuries."

After opening the year with games with Woodland, Forks and La Center, the Chinooks will dive into league play.

"They kind of flip-flopped things in the schedule, so we

won't have to see Napavine in the non-league season, which I kind of like because we won't have to play them twice in a season," McDonald said. Kalamazoo played Napavine twice in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 – once in Week 2 and again in the state playoffs. The Tigers and Chinooks played in the 2B state title game in 2018.

"But Onalaska is in our division, and they're going to always be tough," he said. "I think it will be between us and Onalaska. And if we can play well, hopefully we'll come out on top."

FRI., SEPT. 3



at Woodland

7 p.m.

SAT., SEPT. 11



Forks

2 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 17



at La Center

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



Adna*

7 p.m.

THU., SEPT. 30



at Stevenson*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



Wahkiakum*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



Onalaska*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



Toledo*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



at Toutle Lake*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2B Central league game



STEVENSON BULLDOGS

SPRING 2021

3-2, third in
2B Central-Lower East/West

BEST STATE FINISH

First round in 2010, 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Landon Pearson	RB/LB	Sr.
Triston Rhodes	OL/LB	Sr.
Gavin Gantner	OL/LB	Jr.
Max Jenkins	OL/DL	Jr.
Joseph Jenkins	RB	Jr.
Frank Jenkins	RB	Jr.

Coach: David Waymire (11th year, 39-75)

3 THINGS TO KNOW

■ Stevenson will start the season with only three seniors on the roster.

■ The Bulldogs feature triplets on the roster, juniors Max Jenkins, Joseph Jenkins and Franklin Jenkins. "And they're all athletes," Waymire said.

■ This will be Stevenson's first full season as a member of the talented Central 2B League after moving down from 1A.



Stevenson High

390 NW Gropper Rd., Stevenson

Young team set for first full season in tough 2B league

The move down in classification is supposed to help teams.

But for his football team, Stevenson coach David Waymire is not so sure.

After years of opting-up to be a member of the 1A Trico League, the Bulldogs are preparing for their first full season as a member of the Central 2B League, which may be the toughest league in the state for 2B football.

"2B football is a whole different creature, and we're learning that," Waymire said. "It's going to be a challenge this season because we got, I think, four of the top 10 teams in the state in our league this year. We're not sure how we're going to match up with any of them, but we know they're good."

Stevenson went 3-2 in its first abbreviated season at 2B earlier this year. But the Bulldogs didn't face the 2B powers like Onalaska, Kalama and Adna.

All three 2B state semifinalists in 2019 are on the schedule this fall, and the Bulldogs will take those teams on with a young roster.

"I've got a couple of seniors who are good leaders, but I'm really light on seniors," Waymire said. "I actually only have three seniors on the team. I have a junior class that really makes up the bulk of



FILES/The Columbian

Stevenson players hoist the Gorge Bowl trophy after a victory over Columbia-White Salmon. Though now in different leagues, the Columbia River Gorge rivals will clash in Week 2 of the 2021 season.

my talent. I've got some great good-sized, fast line guys, and I've got some running back and receiver types that are also in that junior class that are pretty special.

"Next season I'm excited even more about that group. But this season, these kids lost out on a whole year in the norm to help those guys get better. Hopefully we can pick up quickly, but last year sure didn't help any team build up their program."

Offensive tackle/linebacker Triston Rhodes and running back/linebacker Landon Pearson, who Waymire describes as a solid all-around athlete, will be the senior leaders on this year's team.

Waymire said the Bulldogs were among the lucky few teams that got to participate in a summer team camp. But even that didn't go as planned.

"We were lucky enough to go to team camp at Linfield, but we were unlucky enough

that it happened during the major heatwave that we had (in June). And it was also at the same time when most schools couldn't go (because of COVID precautions), so there were only three other schools there. So we didn't get a lot of experience there either."

Experience will need to come on the field, particularly in early non-league games against Morton/White Pass and gorge rival Columbia-White Salmon.

FRI., SEPT. 3



at Morton/
White Pass
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 10



Columbia-
White Salmon
7 p.m.

THU., SEPT. 16



Toledo*
7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 24



at Toutle
Lake*
7 p.m.

THU., SEPT. 30



Kalama*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 8



at Adna*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 15



at King's Way
Christian
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 22



Wahkiakum*
7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 29



at Onalaska*
7 p.m.

*-denotes 2B Central league game

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