

High school football 2024

Saturday, August 31, 2024



MIGHTY VERSATILE PLAYMAKERS

With college recruiters seeking adaptability, these Southwest Washington standouts can do it all

Inside:

Preview stories and key players for 25 area football teams

Projections for local 4A, 3A, 2A and 1A leagues

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL 2024

A Special Section of The Columbian

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• Stories by Meg Wochnick, Will Denner and Tim Martinez

• Cover photo by Amanda Cowan

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AMANDA COWAN/The Columbian

Woodland's Elijah Andersen, clockwise from upper left, joins Kalama's Aiden Brown, Skyview's Gavin Packer and Seton Catholic's Joe Callerame among Southwest Washington's standout players whose talent impacts multiple facets of the game.

EXCELLENCE EVERYWHERE

These four seniors show why positional versatility is a growing trend

By MEG WOCHNICK
The Columbian

They're offensive coordinators' best weapons and opposing defensive coordinators' worst nightmares.

The term 'Swiss Army knife' in sports culture is a metaphor meant to compliment an athlete's ability to excel in various ways.

For Skyview's Gavin Packer,

Woodland's Elijah Andersen, Seton Catholic's Joe Callerame and Kalama's Aiden Brown, their versatility shines just as much as their speed on the field. Name a scheme or formation and a position, and these four incoming seniors make an impact.

Three of them — Andersen (2A GSHL), Brown (Central 2B South Division) and Callerame (1A Trico) — are reigning league MVPs for state playoff teams in 2023. Packer, at Class 4A Skyview, is a five-time all-4A GSHL player at offense, defense and special teams.

Brandon Huffman, 247Sports' National Recruiting Editor based

in the Seattle area, said the rise of positional versatility in high school players now has college programs looking more at two-way prospects instead of one-way standouts. Also a growing trend? One school going after a high school recruit at one position, and another school recruiting that same player for a different position.

"There are a slew of guys who could legitimately play on either side of the ball in college," Huffman said, "and their recruiting has borne that out."

Chalk it up to versatility. Portland State football coach Bruce Barnum sees the next-level value

of versatility on the recruiting trail. In fact, the coach tells the tale of what versatility did for former PSU standout and one-time Kent-Meridian High quarterback David Jones. He never took a snap at quarterback in his career for the Vikings, yet Barnum took advantage of Jones' athleticism: on special teams, at receiver and finally, moved him to running back for one season as a senior in 2015.

That year, Jones rushed for 1,127 yards, earned All-Big Sky honors, and was at Washington rookie minicamp after signing an NFL

MVPs, Page 3

From Page 2

undrafted free agent deal. Even at the college level, versatility matters. Barnum welcomes it.

“The more competition they’re getting (at different positions),” Barnum said of high school players, “the better.”

WILLING (adj.): ready, eager or prepared to do something; Woodland’s Elijah Andersen

As part of Woodland’s hiring committee for a new football coach, Elijah Andersen came away impressed with the coach who’s been on Woodland’s football staff since the late 1990s and already is the region’s dean of girls basketball coaches.

“He showed that he cares about what he’s about to do, and he did it the right way,” Andersen said of new head coach Glen Flanagan, the longtime defensive coordinator, named the Beavers’ head coach in May. “Seeing that reassures me that I think we’re going to be really good.”

It’s understandable why Andersen and his teammates hoped the head-coach hire would stay in-house: to keep a good thing going. Andersen, the 2A GSHL MVP in 2023, did a lot of everything to help the Beavers win their first league title since 2007 and earn a 2A state playoff berth.

Going from an all-league running back to an all-phases spotlight player with nearly 2,500 all-purpose yards and 30 touchdowns boosted Andersen’s confidence and in turn, made him a better football player.

“It was the first time where I said, ‘I can do this’ and being able to put my body on the line every Friday like

I do,” Andersen said. “I learned that I can take the hits and I can carry the ball as much as my team needs.”

For a guy who plays five positions not including special teams, where will Andersen line up this fall? At one point this offseason, he had a quarterback battle with 6-foot-2 sophomore Michael Belvin, who is expected to earn the starting job. That will allow Andersen to continue to roam within the offense under new coordinator Stephen Short after leading the Beavers in rushing and receiving yards as a junior.

Andersen all over the field won’t be new, but a big change is



coming after Woodland’s big campaign last fall, he said.

“We’re going to be doing a lot of stuff that you don’t see often,” Andersen said. “We’re doing some new stuff. ... Everything we do is going to be different.”

RELIABLE (adj.): consistently good in quality or performance; Kalama’s Aiden Brown

Kalama is a town with no stoplights, which seems fitting since Aiden Brown is all-go, all the time when it comes to football.

“It’s a lot of work,” Brown said, “but I really enjoy it. It’s a lot of fun.”

Opposing coaches rave about Brown, Kalama’s dual-threat quarterback who led Class 2B in total offense in 2023 with 46 touchdowns and 4,000-plus yards. He earned all-state honors as an ‘athlete’, has an offer to play running back at Idaho State, and recently caught passes for quarterback Andrew Peasley, who signed with the New York Jets as an undrafted free agent.

Versatile enough? Could Brown play edge if Kalama coach Mike Phelps needed him?

“That would be funny,” Brown said.

Don’t put it past him.

It’s common at small schools for players to see both sides of the ball. Brown also plays safety on defense for Kalama. At 5-feet-9 and 185 pounds, he chose to market himself as an ‘athlete’ and said it was the best thing he could do recruiting-wise.

“It shows your open-mindedness, really,” Brown said. “I’m not picky about what I’m going to play at the next level. ‘I’ll play running back, I’ll play quarterback, I’ll play wherever. ... That’s something that’s helped me.’”

Huffman, of 247Sports, said the term ATH (athlete) became a position in recruiting

rankings about a decade ago when college football’s landscape shifted to more modern offenses and players open in space. Of 247Sports’ Class of 2025 Washington rankings, five of the top 10 players ranked are ‘athletes.’

But it’s Brown’s quarterbacking background for why Idaho State offered the teenager at running back. The coaches told Brown why they like recruiting high school quarterbacks.

“They can play other positions,” he said, “because we know and understand the game and coverages. ... They want a smarter kid who understands how to read defenses and understands what routes to run based on coverages.”

Class 2B’s loss is Class 1A’s gain. The Chinooks are back in the Trico League for the first time since 2016 coming off a 2B state quarterfinal appearance.

Time for Brown to impress a whole new set of coaches.

ADAPTABLE (adj.): able to adjust or be modified for a new use or purpose; Seton Catholic’s Joe Callerame

Part of Joe Callerame’s lengthy application process for the United States Military Academy includes candidate essays. Whatever the essay prompts will be, there’s a good chance football and its impact will find its way to Callerame’s words.

“It will probably be one of the main topics,” he said.

How Callerame fits at Seton happens to be the same way he’ll fit playing for Army. One of the state’s premiere three-way weap-



ons who can, does and will line up anywhere on the field will continue to do so at West Point.

“I’m super excited because I feel like it fits me perfectly,” the slot receiver and safety said. “At Seton ... I’m all over the field and they got me doing a lot of different things. And it’s sort of a similar situation at West Point where I’m going to be taking handoffs, I’m going to be taking pitches, I’m also going to be running a lot of routes.”

The Class of 2025 has been part of a history-making era for Seton Catholic football. So far, chapters include three straight postseason seasons beginning in 2021. That year, Callerame, a freshman, quarterbacked Seton to the program’s first-ever playoff appearance. Then, last fall, came

From Page 3

a run to the state semifinals behind two dramatic playoff road wins.

In fact, look no further than its 42-35 quarterfinal win over Cashmere for the definition of what Callerame can do. He recorded touchdowns rushing, passing and receiving and helped Seton rally down 14 points the final 7-plus minutes to win.

It's all part of utilizing Callerame in different ways in Seton's offense under third-year offensive coordinator Jason Gesser, the former Washington State quarterback.

Callerame knows the opportunities provided at Seton likely wouldn't happen at a larger school. There's something special about playing Class 1A football, he said, and that starts by being privileged to play everywhere.



"I really help me be able to love the game," he said, "and appreciate the game because there's so many different things that go into it."

"It's really fun being at a small school, and I wouldn't trade it for anything."

TRUSTWORTHY (adj.):
able to be trusted or
deserving of trust;
Skyview's Gavin Packer

When asked how often track and field comes up in conversation, Gavin Packer flashes a smile before answering the question.

"A lot," Skyview's receiver and cornerback said. "Probably every (college) coach asks me about it."

Packer likely is Clark County's fastest man who isn't a sprinter, but still gets asked about turning out for the sport. That's what happens when you own a personal-best 4.51-second time in the 40-yard dash, and are named "Fastest Man" at football camps and showcase events. That tends to turn some heads, Packer said.

"A lot of times, people are a little surprised," he said. "I'm more of the unknown guys there."

But he is well known in Clark County and in Class 4A football. If it feels like Packer has torched opponents for years, it's because he has behind game-changing speed that can make him a blur on the field at receiver, in the secondary or on special teams.

Even before his first varsity reps, Skyview teammates had a good feeling about Packer. So much so, he got added to the varsity text group chat in eighth

grade.

Remember Gavin Packer's first varsity start as a freshman in 2021 for Skyview in a playoff game, no less? His 103-yard interception return for a touchdown capped the team's win over Kamiak. He got the start at cornerback that game, and during the regular season, also played quarterback for the freshman team.

Instead of a quarterback battle with eventual two-year starter Jake Kennedy, Packer believed he could play receiver. Over two seasons, he's become a sure-handed, reliable pass catcher and elite route runner with more than 100 receptions and 23 touchdowns.

Boise State caught on at the perfect time, too. Packer verbally

committed to the Broncos when an offer came following what he called his best team-camp performance in June.

"By the end of the night," Packer said, "they had the whole (coaching) staff watching and I kept making plays."

Just like Packer has done at Skyview since 2021.



"The more competition they're getting (at different positions) the better."

Bruce Barnum
 Portland State head football coach

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4A GREATER ST. HELENS LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

- 1  **CAMAS:** New leader at the top, but expectations haven't changed.
- 2  **SKYVIEW:** Beefy schedule has Storm facing playoff-caliber teams weekly.
- 3  **UNION:** Championship coach quick to instill a championship culture.
- 4  **BATTLE GROUND:** What can Tigers do for an encore following 2023 playoffs?

KEY GAMES



SKYVIEW at UNION
Oct. 18, McKenzie Stadium



UNION at CAMAS
Oct. 25, Doc Harris Stadium



CAMAS at SKYVIEW
Nov. 1, Kiggins Bowl



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Battle Ground and Union have been stalwarts in the small but competitive 4A Greater St. Helens League.



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Skyview's Gavin Packer, left, and Beau Harlan of Camas vie for a pass in a game that decided last year's league title.

All four teams guided by elite coaches

Question: In how many leagues statewide does every school's football coach have 100 or more career wins?

Answer: At least one — the 4A Greater St. Helens League.

Camas' Adam Mathieson (108 career wins, 16th season as a head coach), Battle Ground's Mike Woodward (127, 25th), Skyview's Steve Kizer (147, 21st), and Union's Steve Pyne (216, 26th).

With experience comes victories. Pyne, in his first season at Union after the past 21 at Portland's Central Catholic High, knows a lot about victories. He guided

the Rams to five Oregon 6A state titles — all coming in the past 10 seasons. In recent years, Central Catholic has faced Camas and Skyview in non-league action, and Pyne knows just how stiff the 4A GSHL will be.

"It's going to be a blood-bath," Pyne said. "It's going to be physical, it's going to be well-coached and it's going to be competitive. And that's exciting because iron sharpens iron, so I'm looking forward to that.

"I'm looking forward to the chess matches."

Six of Pyne's assistants came over to Union from Central Catholic. While the

Titans have gone 5-13 the past two seasons, Pyne said he's already established a championship blueprint in a program that last won a state title in 2018.

Mathieson, best known as Mountain View's coach from 2008-22, is the new leader at Camas. But that's one of the few changes from the Papermakers' team from last year that went 9-2.

There are seven returners on each side of the ball, including last year's 4A GSHL defensive MVP (Nikko Speer) and all-league quarterback Jake Davidson. Camas has won the past five 4A GSHL titles.

Skyview, fresh off a state

quarterfinal appearance, has one of the toughest schedules in the state. Its non-league slate features teams that went 33-13 last season. The Storm have a league-best five all-league returnees, including a pair of Division I commits: receiver/cornerback Gavin Packer (Boise State) and offensive lineman Noah Thomas (Oregon State).

Battle Ground had its best season in nearly a decade in 2023, reaching the postseason for the first time since 2016. The Tigers will look more to the passing attack behind quarterback Ethan Adams and a trio of receivers 6-foot-2 or taller.



BATTLE GROUND TIGERS

LAST SEASON

7-3, 1-2, third in 4A GSHL.
Reached state preliminary round.

BEST STATE FINISH

First round in 1979, 2015

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Ethan Adams	6-2, 185, jr.	QB
Boston Walker	6-5, 195, sr.	WR/LB
Dom Rivas	5-8, 165, jr.	RB/DB
TJ Richardson	6-3, 170, jr.	WR/DB
Thomas Avery	6-2, 185, jr.	WR/DB
Matt Whitthauer	6-3, 260, sr.	OL/DL
Owen Mereen	6-2, 175, sr.	WR/DB

Coach: Mike Woodward (third year)

Tigers aim to sustain last season's success

The graduating senior class of Battle Ground's playoff-bound 2023 season — the program's first taste of the playoffs in a decade — left a big impression that coach Mike Woodward hopes continues.

"The big thing for us is we don't want to be a one-hit wonder," Woodward said.

Last fall's 7-3 mark and advancing to the 4A state preliminary round was Battle Ground's best season since the 2015 team had eight wins and reached the first round of state. With the departure of 24 seniors — and many as big-time contributors — the coach hopes the seeds are planted to not only compete, but win.

"I think what would be the best legacy those guys could leave behind begins with that sustainability," the coach said, "and that comes from these younger kids seeing that group's work ethic and their belief, and all those things that took place in the summer and throughout the season.

"Hopefully, we're sustaining what they started."

So far, the third-year coach believes that's the direction this year's team is headed. While the Tigers are thin on returning starters — three on offense and five on defense — plenty of off-season growth has the coach feeling confident in



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Battle Ground quarterback Ethan Adams, left, will have many inviting targets with three receivers who stand 6-foot-2 or taller.

several areas.

Three of the five starters back are on the defensive line, led by all-league defensive end and tackle Aiden Goncalves. The development of the offensive line, anchored by left tackle Tyler Kangas at 6-foot-9, is what stood out to Woodward at team camp at George Fox University. So, too, has been

the progression of second-year starting quarterback Ethan Adams with his skillset and leadership, the coach said.

Woodward has high hopes for an athletic bunch of receivers who will start on both sides of the ball. A trio of them stand 6-2 or taller. Boston Walker, a transfer from La Center who played basketball last season at

Battle Ground, is 6-5 and will be part of an all-new linebacking corp.

TJ Richardson returns after not playing in 2023, and Thomas Avery, strictly a cornerback last season, will now be a two-way threat.

"That's a good group right there that we're excited about," Woodward said.

2023 HIGHLIGHT

- The apex of Battle Ground's best season in years came on a mid-October evening. The Tigers beat Union 48-30, marking their first win over the Titans or any other 4A GSHL team since 2016. That raised Battle Ground's record to 7-0 and paved the way for the Tigers' first postseason berth since 2015.



District Stadium

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

FRI., SEPT. 6



Eisenhower

4 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Mountain View

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



at Prairie

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at McKay (Ore.)

7 p.m.

FRI. OCT. 4



at Post Falls (Idaho)

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



W.F. West

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



at Camas*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



Skyview*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



at Union*

4:30 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game



CAMAS PAPERMAKERS

LAST SEASON

9-2, 3-0, first in 4A GSHL.
Reached 4A state first round.

BEST STATE FINISH

State champion in 2016, 2019

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Jake Davidson	6-4, 185, sr.	QB
Ayden Jones	6-3, 235, sr.	DL/OL
Anthony Forner	5-10, 170, sr.	WR/DB
Chase McGee	6-2, 185, sr.	WR/DB
Luke Webb	6-2, 225, sr.	DL/TE
Nikko Speer	6-3, 225, sr.	LB/TE
Beau Harlan	6-0, 195, sr.	RB/LB
Titan Brody	5-10, 190, sr.	RB/LB
Zuko Lopez	6-0, 200, jr.	WR/LB
Jack Macdonald	6-2, 170, sr.	WR/DB

Coach: Adam Mathieson (first year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Another win over rival Skyview punctuated a fifth consecutive 4A GSHL title for Camas. Last season's 21-9 victory saw the Papermakers beat a Skyview team that had averaged 42 points and allowed just two touchdowns through six games. Yet Camas had the Storm's number for a 13th consecutive game, a streak dating to 2011.



Doc Harris Stadium

1125 NE 22nd Ave., Camas

Mathieson takes reins of team full of talent

New Camas coach Adam Mathieson has been down this path before: walking into an established, successful high school football program with a veteran coaching staff.

It reminds Mathieson of when, at age 27, he became Ferndale's coach. He succeeded a Hall of Fame coach as a first-time high school head coach with a roster featuring a future NFL first-round pick at quarterback.

"There was a great staff in place, the equipment was already ordered and in, things were rolling and you just kind of came in and coached football," Mathieson said.

That's also what's happening at Camas. Mathieson, previously known for his 15 seasons at Mountain View from 2008-22, spent last season at Camas as an assistant under head coach Jack Hathaway.

Roles are now reversed. Hathaway remains on Mathieson's staff, and the new coach already knows not much tweaking is needed.

"You just try to figure out where you can help move the program forward," Mathieson said, "and build off the things that have already been put in place."

The Papermakers' preseason buzz? Perhaps the classification's most well-rounded team entering 2024. They return



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Camas quarterback Jake Davidson threw for more than 2,400 yards and 21 touchdowns last season.

seven starters on each side of the ball, and that wealth of experience has Mathieson excited for what could be in store.

Camas has plenty of firepower. Quarterback Jake Davidson threw for 2,400-plus yards and 21 touchdowns in 2023, Titan Brody led Camas in rushing last fall, and Chase McGee and Anthony Forner combined for nearly 1,000 receiving yards and 11 touchdowns as juniors.

McGee and Forner also are part of what will be a senior-heavy secondary.

Defensively, Mathieson said depth also stretches to players with "high-IQ position versatility." Nikko Speer, last year's 4A GSHL defensive MVP, and all-league defensive tackle Ayden Jones lead the front-7. WSU commit Luke Webb, a state placer in wrestling last winter, is expected to start at edge.

A lot can be said for a veteran team full of experience.

"We have a lot of kids that have played football at a high level," Mathieson said, "or if they haven't been involved in football at a high level, they've done other things at a high level. And I think veteran maturity matters. ... The more experienced you are, the greater opportunity you have for success."

FRI., SEPT. 6

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

FRI., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



Roosevelt

7:15 p.m.



at Clackamas (Ore.)

7 p.m.



at Lincoln-Tacoma

7 p.m.



Oregon City

7 p.m.



at Coeur d'Alene (Idaho)

7 p.m.



at Monroe

7 p.m.



Battle Ground*

7 p.m.



at Union*

4:30 p.m.



at Skyview*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game

LAST SEASON

10-2, 2-1, second in 4A GSHL.
Reached 4A state quarterfinals.

BEST STATE FINISH

Second in 2011

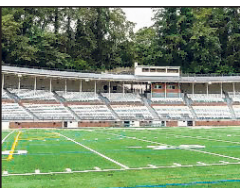
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Gavin Packer	5-11, 180, sr.	WR/DB
Noah Thomas	6-6, 280, sr.	OL/DL
Riah Tua	6-1, 230, sr.	DL/TE
Micah Robison	6-1, 170, sr.	WR/DB
Kaden Hamlin	6-1, 220, sr.	TE/LB
Brian Martinez	6-1, 295, sr.	OL/DL
Max Christiansen	6-0, 250, sr.	OL/DL
Rex Allinger	5-10, 165, sr.	RB/DB
Levi Webb	5-10, 210, sr.	RB/LB
Toren Baker	6-4, 210, soph.	LB

Coach: Steve Kizer (21st year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Skyview reached the state quarterfinals for the first time since 2016 with a dominant win over Skyline in the first round. The 42-7 victory showed everything that made the Storm successful last season, led by a defense that allowed just 7.4 points per game.



Kiggins Bowl

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

Successful senior class ready for tough schedule

Like only Steve Kizer can, he's taking a light-hearted approach when he looks at what he calls one of, if not the most difficult schedule his Skyview Storm have had in his 21 years as head coach.

"Who made that schedule?" Kizer said. "We actually have to go play those games."

One thing Kizer knows for certain is that his Storm will be tested well in non-league before 4A Greater St. Helens League play begins mid-October.

And it starts out of the gate Sept. 6 hosting Radford of Honolulu, Hawai'i, a team that's already three games into its 2024 season. High school football in Hawai'i kicked off Aug. 3. After that comes non-league tilts against five playoff teams that went a combined 33-13 in 2023, including Oregon 6A power West Linn and last year's 4A runner-up, Graham-Kapowsin.

The good news? This is one of Skyview's most successful senior classes, and the final chapter has yet to be written. Last season's 10-2 mark and reaching the state quarterfinals were the most wins and deepest state run since the 2016 Skyview team that reached the Class 4A semifinals.

Since the 2021 fall season, no Clark County team has won



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Skyview senior Riah Tua is a key returner to a defense that allowed 7.4 points per game last season.

more games than Skyview (26).

"They really committed in the off-season and had a great summer and spring," Kizer said. "I'm excited for those guys."

Skyview welcomes back five all-league honorees, but also, a host of veteran experience at almost every position group. Rex Allinger and Levi Webb,

an all-leaguer at defensive line, anchor the backfield. Riah Tua (defensive end) and Kaden Hamlin (linebacker) lead the front 7. Micah Robison, 4A's leader last season in interceptions, is part of an experienced secondary that includes Boise State commit Gavin Packer moving back to corner after two seasons playing safety. Skyview also has a Division I

commit leading its offensive line — 6-foot-6 tackle Noah Thomas (Oregon State).

Kizer is excited for what new quarterback James "Doogie" Poindexter brings as a first-year starter, but a veteran in Skyview's system.

"He just knows the offense so well," the coach said, "that I think he could probably coach it."

FRI., SEPT. 6



Radford
(Hawai'i)

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



Graham-
Kapowsin

7 p.m.

SAT., SEPT. 21



at Puyallup

Noon

FRI., SEPT. 27



West Linn
(Ore.)

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Decatur

7 p.m.

SAT., OCT. 12



Richland

4 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



at Union*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Battle
Ground*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Camas*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game



UNION TITANS

LAST SEASON

2-7, 0-3, fourth in 4A GSHL.

BEST STATE FINISH

State champion in 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Chase Lofton	6-0, 175, sr.	WR/DB
Garrett Klopman	5-6, 290, sr.	OL/DL
Blake McDonald	6-0, 195, jr.	QB
Tobias Chappell	6-2, 210, jr.	OL/LB
Rylan Steverson	6-2, 200, sr.	OL/LB
Mou Letioa	6-2, 220, jr.	LB/TE
Blake Childreth	5-9, 155, jr.	WR/DB
James Miller	6-0, 190, sr.	RB/DB
Canaan Moore	6-0, 180, sr.	K/P

Coach: Steve Pyne (first year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

Union's Week 4 win over Prairie was extra special as it was the first under Kevin Coad, a longtime Titans assistant who took over the program on an interim basis last year. Leading 15-14 at halftime, Union allowed just 68 yards in the second half for a 27-14 victory. Chase Lofton scored two touchdowns and Taylor Lepak returned an interception for a touchdown in the win.



McKenzie Stadium

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

Pyne era begins with focus on team culture

For the first time in 21 seasons and the third overall since becoming a high school head football coach in 1999, Steve Pyne is going back to the basics of program identity.

How you establish a championship-caliber program isn't about Xs and Os.

"The biggest thing we're trying to do is change the culture, change the expectations and reinvigorate that process," Pyne said. "You have to work for things, you have to be accountable for yourself and you have to serve others."

Nowhere did Pyne mention winning or state championships, but the coach is experienced in both. He's won more than 200 games at two schools — a bulk of that success happened over the past 21 seasons at Portland's Central Catholic.

Under Pyne's direction, Central Catholic climbed as an Oregon 6A power: Five state titles in 10 years, the state quarterfinals or better 12 times, and 14 league titles. Three of those state titles came since 2019, including the one last fall which put Pyne in a company of one. No coach all-time in Oregon's largest classification has won more state titles than Pyne.

Now, the coach's new challenge is Washington high school football and inheriting a Union program that's gone 5-13 the



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Two-time all-league honoree Chase Lofton brings talent, experience and leadership to Union.

past two seasons. Union is six years removed from its undefeated 2018 4A state title team and has a nearly 70 percent winning percentage all-time since the school opened in 2007.

"I think the kids are chomping at the bit to have some direction and some vision about what the program can be," Pyne said.

Early on, change has been

noticeable. Pyne points to a number of players who've been off-season difference-makers, including two-time all-league honoree Chase Lofton (receiver/defensive back) and nose tackle Garrett Klopman.

Pyne said the offensive line, while on the youthful side, has made big off-season strides and potentially could go nine players deep. Depth is equally visible at

outside linebacker and labeled the strongest unit by Pyne.

Since his February hiring, Pyne said he's been impressed with several factors, such as attitudes, work ethic and leadership of players.

"They're clueing in on how we want things done and how those things can lead them to potential success on the field," Pyne said.

FRI., SEPT. 6



at Evergreen

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Woodinville

6 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



Mountain View

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at Tualatin (Ore.)

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



Tumwater

4:30 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



TBD

FRI., OCT. 18



Skyview*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Camas*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Battle Ground*

4:30 p.m.

*-denotes 4A Greater St. Helens League game

3A GREATER ST. HELENS LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

- 1  **EVERGREEN:** Defense, depth and talent have Plainsmen thinking big things.
- 2  **KELSO:** Hilanders postseason-bound every year under Steve Amrine.
- 3  **MOUNTAIN VIEW:** All-senior starting OL will pave way for run game.
- 4  **PRAIRIE:** Small senior class, but numbers are good at WR, RB and QB.
- 5  **HERITAGE:** While young in areas, T-Wolves could be league's surprise.
- 6  **SHELTON:** Newcomer has interim coach coming off a 3-6 season in 2A.

KEY GAMES



KELSO at EVERGREEN

Oct. 4, McKenzie Stadium



KELSO at MOUNTAIN VIEW

Oct. 25, McKenzie Stadium



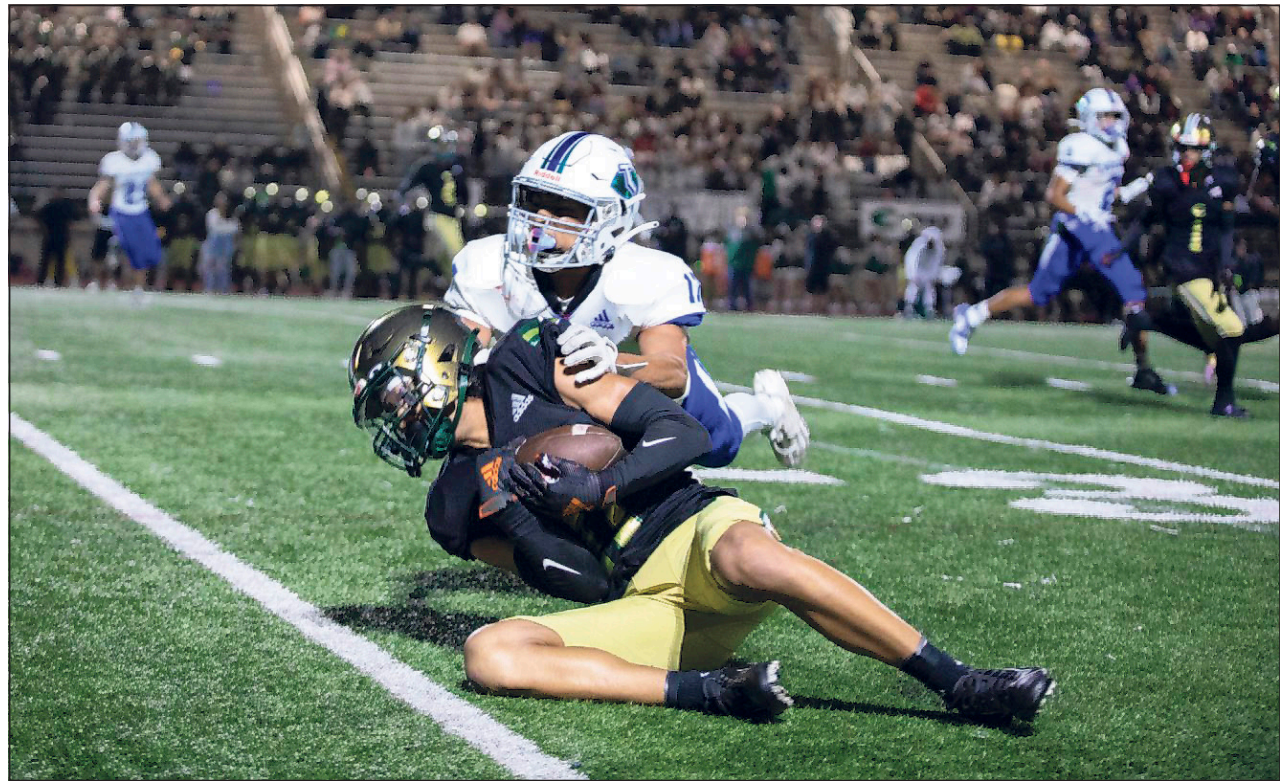
MOUNTAIN VIEW at EVERGREEN

Nov. 1, McKenzie Stadium



Sean McDonald is now coaching Mountain View after leading Woodland to a league title in 2023.

TAYLOR BALKOM/
The Columbian



ELAYNA YUSSEN for The Columbian

Evergreen is aiming for its first league title since 2007 while Mountain View hopes to defend its 3A GSHL crown.

Six-team league has seen plenty of change

New faces in the 3A Greater St. Helens League go beyond the new head coaches at half of the league's teams for 2024.

Another new face is a new member: Shelton. The Highclimbers out of Mason County will join the 3A GSHL for football only for at least the 2024 and 2025 seasons, and possibly for the entirety of the latest four-year reclassification cycle. In January, Shelton got reclassified to Class 3A after being a 2A school the previous four years.

Now a six-team football league, expect the 3A GSHL to have three post-season berths for 2024.

In fact, three are the number of new head

coaches in the league. Josh Munro takes over as Shelton's interim coach following the team's 3-6 season in 2A in 2023. Mountain View (Sean McDonald) and Prairie (Junior Miller) are first-year coaches at their schools.

One team poised for a playoff push is Evergreen, which last reached the postseason in 2019.

After consecutive years of having its season end in a three-team league tiebreaker, Swain has high hopes for his team to take a step forward with a veteran defense and plenty of weapons at receiver. Could a league title be part of that step forward, too? Evergreen last won a league crown in 2007 when it was Class 4A.

When it comes to league consistency, Kelso comes to mind. The Hilanders have reached the playoffs every year (except the spring COVID-19 season) under coach Steve Amrine, now in his 12th year. Three-year starter and two-time all-league quarterback Tucker Amrine, the coach's son, is one of Southwest Washington's most experienced under-center. Aden Mintonye is a returning 1,000-yard rusher.

Everywhere Sean McDonald goes, he wins. The three-time 2B state champion coach who led 2A Woodland to its first league title in 16 years last fall is now Mountain View's third coach in as many seasons. The Thunder's strength?

The offensive line anchored by four-year center Juan Pasillas-Stanton, a Portland State commit.

Heritage is hungry to end its 20-game losing streak that dates back to October 2022. The program is trending in the right direction in many areas on second-year coach Kevin Peterson's checklist, which has the coach believing change is coming.

Prairie alum Junior Miller takes over a Falcon program that will look to a number of underclassmen to step up in key positions. Miller and a number of assistants on staff were part of Prairie's coaching staff from its 2019 state playoff team.



EVERGREEN PLAINSMEN

LAST SEASON

5-4, 2-2, tied for second in 3A GSHL

BEST STATE FINISH

State champions in 2004

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Terrance Saryon	5-10, 170, jr.	WR/DB
Josiah Alanis	6-2, 185, sr.	WR/DB
Jakai Clardy	6-2, 180, sr.	WR/DB
Ryder Keplar	6-2, 185, sr.	WR/DB
Makhi Miller	5-11, 215, sr.	DL/RB
Mark Williams Jr.	5-11, 215, sr.	LB/RB
Anthony Hernandez	6-2, 290, sr.	OL/DL
Jamal Anderson	6-1, 230, sr.	OL/DL
James Bethune	5-10, 185, sr.	RB/LB

Coach: Christian Swain (sixth year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Evergreen came up big in a Week 8 must-win clash against Prairie. After falling behind 12-3, the Plainsmen found another gear in a 40-19 win. That ensured Evergreen at least a spot in a three-team tiebreaker for a postseason berth. Evergreen had four rushers with more than 50 yards and a defense that shut out Prairie in the second half.



McKenzie Stadium

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

Stingy defense has Plainsmen thinking big

Christian Swain is a self-described constant optimist when it comes to talking about his high school football teams. As a head coach since 2009, and now in his sixth year at Evergreen, he paused for a moment when asked if this Plainsmen squad is, perhaps, the best defense he's ever had. "It's pretty close," Swain said.

Football games aren't won on paper, but it's easy to see why Swain is high on a defense that's yet to play a game in 2024. Collectively, the defensive line, linebackers and the secondary have talent and depth. Not to mention, eight of the 11 spots have a player with starting experience. That includes reigning all-leaguers Jakai Clardy (cornerback) and Makhi Miller (defensive end).

"I think that group's going to be really good this year," Swain said. "We're good at all three levels and our system has been really successful."

Evergreen entered mid-August practices with two underclassmen — sophomore Braiden James and freshman Jayden Baum — battling it out for the starting quarterback job. Whoever the starter is has plenty of notable weapons. A pair of senior receivers, Josiah Alanis (Boise State) and Ryder Keplar (Air Force) are Mountain West Conference com-



WILL DENNER/The Columbian

Evergreen's Terrance Saryon (1) celebrates with teammate Makhi Miller (52) after scoring a touchdown during last season's game against Kelso. Both are expected to be key players this year.

mits. A third, junior Terrance Saryon, is "the most developed, most polished guy I've had," Swain said.

Evergreen will have an offensive line that averages 280 pounds and goes eight players deep, led by three-year center Anthony Hernandez.

Will all of this translate to success on the field? Evergreen

last reached the postseason in 2019 — Swain's first year at the helm. The past two years, the team finished in a three-way tie for second place in league, and lost in the tiebreaker both years to determine the final playoff spot. Swain called last year's 5-4 season under-achieving after injuries at key positions made for a different

Plainsmen team in October than August.

He hopes what's on paper comes to fruition.

"I just pray that we are able to kind of avoid that this year," Swain said, "and have a chance to work to our potential with all our guys on the field this year.

"I feel really good about this season."

FRI., SEPT. 6



Union

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Puyallup

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



North Thurston

4:30 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at Westview (Ore.)

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



Kelso*

7 p.m.

THU., OCT. 10



Shelton*

4:30 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



at Prairie*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Heritage*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Mountain View*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



HERITAGE TIMBERWOLVES

LAST SEASON

0-9, 0-4, fifth in 3A GSHL.

BEST STATE FINISH

State preliminary round in 2007

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Justin Noyons	5-11, 170, sr.	WR/DB
Owen Daley	6-1, 185, jr.	QB
Michael Lail	6-0, 210, sr.	OL/DL
Jaidin Compton	6-0, 205, sr.	DE/OL
Dakari Bradford	6-1, 180, jr.	WR/DB
Delorian Holmes	6-0, 160, sr.	WR/DB
Luke Melvin	6-0, 170, sr.	WR/DB
Shacarion Wrencher	5-5, 160, jr.	DB/RB

Coach: Kevin Peterson (second year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• One of the season's standout performances came in Heritage's season finale against Prairie. Hunter Renteria caught touchdown passes of 87 and 37 yards from Baron Graham. Renteria's 124 yards receiving was a single-game season-high for a Heritage receiver.



McKenzie Stadium

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

Trust has T'wolves optimistic for future

Heritage's off-season mantra of ETS — End The Streak — has kept the Timberwolves motivated.

The program's current 20-game losing streak dates back to October 2021, including winless seasons in 2022 and 2023. But steady growth has second-year coach Kevin Peterson believing change is near.

"All of our kids are hungry to succeed," Peterson said. "They're tired of accepting losing, so until you win, you don't know how to win."

For starters, player turnout for 2024 is close to 100 behind large underclassmen groups. More than 60 percent of the program are freshmen and sophomores, meaning Heritage will field all three levels of teams: varsity, junior varsity and freshmen.

Peterson said players have trusted the coaches vision and bought into their plan, starting with big improvements in off-season workout attendance. That's one of the reasons why Peterson said the program is slightly ahead of schedule.

"Now as coaches," the coach said, "our fingers are crossed that we did it the right way and it's going to produce some wins."

With head coaches of other Heritage sports on staff and eight football coaches in-



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Luke Melvin (8) and his teammates are in the process of rebuilding the Heritage football program.

building, athletes from other sports were attracted to join the football team and step up to be vocal leaders.

One of them is senior Delorian Holmes, a standout guard in basketball, who will be part of a deep receiving corp. Heritage's senior class is small, but a trio of seniors — Holmes, Justin Noyons and Luke Melvin — lead perhaps the team's biggest strength.

Through the team's spring and summer work, Peterson said the confidence in the skill positions and passing game has never been higher.

"It's beautiful," Peterson said, "because a lot of those kids will also play a lot on defense. So we can develop rotations either offensively or defensively to keep them fresh and not lose any talent or skill."

Then there's depth. Numbers

across multiple position groups have created competition and a change in program dynamic, Peterson said. That's all part of why the Timberwolves hope their off-season mantra comes to fruition.

"We feel we've put in about as good of work as we can," Peterson said, "and hopefully, we've done enough to change that outcome that we've experienced the last two years."

SAT., SEPT. 7

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

THU., OCT. 10

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



at Fort Vancouver

7 p.m.



Hudson's Bay

4:30 p.m.



at River Ridge

7 p.m.



Kentlake

4:30 p.m.



at Shelton*

7 p.m.



Mountain View*

7 p.m.



at Kelso*

7 p.m.



Evergreen*

7 p.m.



at Prairie*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



KELSO HILANDERS

LAST SEASON

3-7, 2-2, tied for second in 3A GSHL.
Reached state preliminary round.

BEST STATE FINISH

State champion in 1983

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Tucker Amrine	5-10, 185, sr.	QB
Aden Mintonye	5-10, 180, sr.	RB/DB
Bryce Collins	6-1, 170, jr.	WR/LB
Anders Dahl	5-10, 165, jr.	QB/DB
Jase Sloan	6-3, 285, sr.	OL/DL
Tate Meade	6-1, 195, sr.	WR/DB
Jonas Conrad	5-11, 180, sr.	RB/LB
Blake Parsons	6-0, 185, sr.	RB/LB

Coach: Steve Amrine (12th year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• In a season that saw Kelso lose two league games by three points or less, the Hilanders came through when it counted. Kelso's defense clamped down to beat Prairie 14-7 and Evergreen 3-0 in a 3A GSHL tiebreaker to clinch the program's 10th consecutive postseason berth.



Schroeder Field

at Kelso HS,
1904 Allen Street,
Kelso

Depth on offense pairs with speedy defense

If there's an aspect of Kelso's football program that's a staple under coach Steve Amrine, it's this: count on the Hilanders to be physical, and also count on the program to be, year after year, in the playoff mix.

Kelso has qualified for the postseason every year (minus the spring 2021 COVID-19 season) under Amrine, now in his 12th season. That's 10 straight years going back to Amrine's first season in 2013.

What's special about it is that it's done Kelso's way.

"There's just a sense that it's what we do here," he said. "... We might not look great at 7 on 7 or this or that, but when it comes down to playing high school football, we have managed to be right there most of the time. And we talked a lot about it this off-season."

An aspect that's new? Depth at quarterback and what Amrine calls the deepest receiving room in his tenure.

Tucker Amrine, the coach's son, is a two-time all-leaguer at quarterback. When a late-season health issue sidelined the quarterback the final three weeks of 2023, Anders Dahl replaced Amrine, won a Week 9 game to force a league tiebreaker. He then helped Kelso win the tiebreaker to reach the 3A state preliminary round.



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

As a junior, Kelso running back Aden Mintonye rushed for more than 1,000 yards. His 15 rushing touchdowns were the most in the 3A Greater St. Helens League.

A good problem for Coach Amrine now is how best to utilize two quality quarterbacks.

"You come into a pressure-packed deal, and then do that?" Amrine said of Dahl. "I really like our quarterback room."

Tucker Amrine, Bryce Collins (linebacker) and

Aden Mintonye are Kelso's returning all-league players. Mintonye burst onto the scene as a 1,000-yard rusher with 15 touchdowns in his first season after relocating from California. Collins also is part of the receiving corps that Coach Amrine said is the deepest in his 12 seasons. That's the same speed and quickness

Amrine said he likes defensively, too, starting with the linebackers.

"We have a lot of kids that can run and have some length and some size to them," the coach said. "When you talk about if you've got good running backs and good receivers, that makes for pretty good speed people."

FRI., SEPT. 6

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

FRI., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



Mark Morris

River Ridge

at Bellarmine
Prep

at Bremerton

at Evergreen*

Prairie*

Heritage*

at Mountain
View*

Shelton*

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

6 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

* - denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



MOUNTAIN VIEW THUNDER

LAST SEASON

9-2, 4-0, first in 3A GSHL.
Reached state first round.

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 2001, 2002, 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Juan Pasillas-Stanton	6-3, 315, sr.	OL/DL
Jaden Brown	5-9, 200, sr.	RB/LB
Rylan Reinbach	6-2, 200, sr.	OL/DL
Xavier Frazier	6-1, 240, sr.	OL/DL
Guadalupe Jimenez	6-0, 240, sr.	OL/DL
Florian Berani	6-0, 220, sr.	OL/DL
Ayden Cummings	6-2, 210, sr.	TE/DL
Tre'von Hughes-Farmer	6-3, 190, sr.	WR/DB

Coach: Sean McDonald (first year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

● The 3A GSHL title came down to one play. Mountain View stuffed Kelso's two-point attempt in overtime to earn a 35-34 win that wrapped up the Thunder's sixth league title in eight years. It capped a thrilling game that saw Mountain View pull even with a late 71-yard TD drive before blocking a field goal on the final play of regulation.



McKenzie Stadium

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

Success starts in the trenches for Thunder

As a former standout lineman in high school, college and the Arena League, Sean McDonald knows about quality offensive lines.

He's got one in his first season at Mountain View. A projected all-senior starting five up front, including a four-year starter at center? McDonald likes what he sees.

"The front five are going to be really strong for us," the coach said. "I think every position in our front five can play the ball and we're really going to be strong and physical up front."

Few high school football teams have a four-year starter at center, especially at the 3A level. Juan Pasillas-Stanton, a Portland State commit, anchors the experienced line. The other seniors — Rylan Reinbach, Xavier Frazier, Guadalupe Jimenez and Florian Berani — have a range of familiarity on both sides.

McDonald knows how important offensive lines are to a football team's success. He coached Kalama, his alma mater, to three Class 2B state titles (2017, 2019, 2021). The past two seasons at 2A Woodland, he won 12 games and led the Beavers to a league title and the state playoffs in 2023.

Now at the 3A Thunder, McDonald faces a different challenge not seen previously at Mountain View. McDonald is



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Mountain View's Jaden Brown, right, will have one of the area's top offensive lines blocking for him.

the program's seventh head football coach all-time, but the third in the past three seasons.

McDonald knows for the upperclassmen who have another new leader, connecting with players and gaining trust is key. And McDonald has listened to what Thunder football means to the seniors.

"There's a lot of talent and a lot of great leadership in that

group," McDonald said. "We want to make it about them, try to build relationships with them as quickly as possible and hopefully, they have a great final year."

While Mountain View graduated a bulk of its starting 22 off its league-title and state playoff-bound 2023 season, the cupboard isn't bare. The offensive line will pave the way for the run

game, led by Jaden Brown, an all-league linebacker who is the team's returning leading rusher. And that's a recipe for success, McDonald said.

"We're going to weigh heavily on those front five and that running back to get us there in big games," he said, "because if you've got guys up front that can get it done, that's where you win it."

FRI., SEPT. 6



Washougal

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



Battle Ground

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



at Union

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at Mountainside
(Ore.)

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Prairie*

7 p.m.

THU., OCT. 10



at Heritage*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



Shelton*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



Kelso*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



at Evergreen*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game



PRAIRIE FALCONS

LAST SEASON

2-7, 2-2, tied for second in 3A GSHL.

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1985, 1986, 1989

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Nick Merritt	6-1, 240, jr.	OL/DL
Taylor Gause	5-11, 185, sr.	RB/LB
Riley Burke	6-3, 225, sr.	TE/DE
Jackson Kimball	5-11, 175, jr.	WR/DB
Jackson Paris	5-8, 170, jr.	WR/DB
Tommy Vick	5-8, 150, jr.	WR/DB
Nick Crousore	5-11, 175, sr.	QB/WR
Judah Bullock	6-3, 235, sr.	LS/T

Coach: Junior Miller (first year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Braeden Slamp hit a 33-yard field goal with six seconds remaining as Prairie beat Kelso 36-33 to avoid its first 0-5 start since 2016. Kelso had scored three straight TDs to lead 33-25, but Alex Juhl hauled in a 31-yard touchdown catch with 1:03 remaining. Pierson Lameh then ran in the two-point conversion to tie the game. Prairie recovered a fumble at midfield with 45 seconds left to set up the winning kick.



District Stadium

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

New coach aims to bring wins to alma mater

Junior Miller calls being back at his high school alma mater as its head football coach a dream come true. In fact, his past experiences at Prairie — first as a player and more recently as an assistant coach — goes into the coach's plan and vision for its football program.

Miller never experienced playoff football as a high school player at Prairie from 1998-02. As an assistant coach overseeing the defensive line and later as co-defensive coordinator, Miller saw how winning can change a program.

That's what he wants for the school and community.

"I couldn't be happier to be back at Prairie," Miller said. "These kids, the community, they just need something to believe in and that's the vision I've given the school and the program."

Prairie isn't far removed from the 2019 season as co-3A Greater St. Helens League champions that reached the state playoffs. Miller was on that coaching staff under-then head coach Mike Peck. In fact, in rounding out his first staff as head coach, most of Miller's hires have Prairie roots, including familiar faces off the 2019 staff. A common mindset surrounds the veteran coaches, Miller said.



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Prairie football players go through drills during the first day of football practice.

"We started something back in the day," he said, "and we really didn't get to finish it. We want to build this to where we can finish the things we set out to do. So I surrounded myself with good people — coaches, players, families, booster club and that's going to help grow the program to where I think the level we can be at."

Prairie has two all-league returnees from its 2-7 campaign in 2023 — senior outside linebacker and running back Taylor Gause and junior defensive end/nose guard Nick "Spud" Merritt, who Miller said expects to now play both sides of the line. Miller's team will be a spread offense under new offensive coordina-

tor James Young-Lewis, and the head coach is high on the depth at receiver and running back on his young team. The Falcons go between 5-8 deep at both position groups, and also have three quarterbacks battling for the starter's role.

"That's a good problem to have," Miller said.

SAT., SEPT. 7

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

FRI., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



Ridgefield

at Washougal

Battle Ground

at Dallas
(Ore.)

Mountain
View*

at Kelso*

Evergreen*

at Shelton*

Heritage*

4 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

7 p.m.

4 p.m.

*-denotes 3A Greater St. Helens League game





2A GREATER ST. HELENS LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

- 1  **RIDGEFIELD:** Spudders continue raising expectations after fourth runner-up finish in last five years.
- 2  **WOODLAND:** Defending league champs return dynamic Elijah Andersen, eight defensive starters.
- 3  **HUDSON'S BAY:** Eagles ready to take another step with veteran group of linemen after breakout 2023 season.
- 4  **WASHOUGAL:** Flashy offensive weapons have graduated, but the Panthers still have plenty of talent.
- 5  **MARK MORRIS:** Monarchs are seen as a wild card under new coach Mike Peck, an offensive innovator.
- 6  **HOCKINSON:** After two years on the outside looking in, the Hawks hope to make another run at the postseason.
- 7  **COLUMBIA RIVER:** Rapids switch to run-heavy, Wing-T offense in hopes of controlling the ball.
- 8  **R.A. LONG:** Lumberjacks aim to play more balanced, complementary football with players embracing their roles.

KEY GAMES

-  **WOODLAND at HUDSON'S BAY** 
Oct. 18, Kiggins Bowl
-  **RIDGEFIELD at HUDSON'S BAY** 
Oct. 27, Kiggins Bowl
-  **RIDGEFIELD at WOODLAND** 
Nov. 1, Beaver Stadium

League has been anything but predictable

The last three champions in the 2A Greater St. Helens League have followed a similar, albeit unpredictable trend — an upstart team knocks off the favorite en route to winning the 2A GSHL title.

In 2021, Ridgefield took down seven-time defending league champ Hockinson, a signature moment that set the table for an undefeated regular season and a post-season run to the 2A state quarterfinals.

The following year, a high-powered Washougal team led by quarterback Holden Bea broke through for its first league title since 1999. The Panthers also ran the table in seven 2A GSHL games, including a dramatic win over Ridgefield.

"It's a fun league to coach in and it's stressful at times because of that parity," Ridgefield head coach Scott Rice said.

Most recently in 2023, Washougal appeared to be the favorite with an experienced group of returners. Instead, Woodland caught everyone's attention in a Week 3 upset against the Panthers, and ultimately clinched its first league title since 2007 by defeating Ridgefield in a winner-take-all Week 9 game.

With that recent history in mind, 2024 has the makings of another chaotic season in the 2A GSHL. Among eight head coaches, there's little consensus on which team is the favorite, though several teams have convincing cases.

"It's the one year I can think of where I don't think there's a (favorite)," Washougal head coach Dave Hajek said. "I would say Woodland



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Ridgefield and Woodland's Week 9 clash could once again decide the 2A GSHL title.

is number one right now, but after that, who knows?"

Woodland returns Elijah Andersen, the reigning All-Region and 2A GSHL player of the year, and promoted longtime defensive coordinator Glen Flanagan to head coach after Sean McDonald moved to Mountain View in the offseason.

Could the Beavers become the first repeat league champion since Hockinson?

"It's a fickle game," Flanagan said. "... Last year a lot of games went our way, so hopefully we can parlay that into doing the same thing. But again, everybody has to be at the top of their game or you're not going to win in this league."

Motivated by runner-up finishes in four of the last five seasons, Ridgefield players and coaches are intent on polishing the details that have tripped up the

Spudders in their pursuit of another league crown.

Hudson's Bay found a winning formula last season with a strong run game and stout defense, both of which were built on the foundation of the Eagles' line play. They're aiming to take another step forward with a veteran group of linemen and versatile playmaker Aqeel Bauman.

Although Washougal is making small tweaks after graduating a strong senior class led by Bea, the Panthers are still regarded as a contender with talent across the board. Senior Harrison DeShazer, an Idaho commit, is one of the top athletes in the league at defensive end, tight end and receiver.

The biggest wild card of all could be Mark Morris. The Monarchs have transformed their offense to a pass-heavy, spread

formation under first-year coach Mike Peck, who has a long track record of success locally at Prairie.

Columbia River is also in the midst of transforming its offense to a Wing-T formation. The Rapids' aim to play ball control and allow its defense to thrive, which second-year coach DeWayne Patterson sees as a good fit for the program.

With Aiden Donowitz at Hockinson, plus Nick Niday and Jaxson Rivenes competing at R.A. Long, the two teams return the most experience at quarterback in a year where nearly everyone is introducing a new signal-caller.

"I think the league is just gonna be a slobberknocker again where it's almost like a Boggle set — you can just shake it up every week and see who beats who," said R.A. Long coach Jon Barker.



COLUMBIA RIVER RAPIDS

LAST SEASON

2-7, 2-5, sixth in 2A GSHL.

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 2002

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Preston Shearer	6-1, 210, sr.	TE/DE
Ha'aheo Delarose	6-2, 180, sr.	WR/DB
Savion McCoy	5-10, 175, jr.	RB/DB
Joey Ianello	5-10, 220, sr.	RB/LB
DeVaughn Tumbaga	5-10, 220, jr.	OL/DL
Noah Rendon	5-9, 155, sr.	WR/DB
Ezekiel Kamakea	5-9, 165, sr.	WR/DB
Luke McWilliams	6-3, 210, jr.	OL/DE
Jed Carson	6-1, 260, jr.	OL/DL

Coach: DeWayne Patterson (second year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Columbia River played a role in the topsy turvy 2A GSHL season by handing eventual champ Woodland its only league loss. The Rapids gained 466 yards of offense in the 26-20 Week 4 win. Making his second start at quarterback, Ethan Long threw for 288 yards including 239 in the first half. Chris Parkin had 89 yards rushing and 91 yards receiving.



John O'Rourke Field

On the campus of Columbia River High, 800 E. 99th St., Vancouver

New run-heavy offense fits Rapids' personnel

Since taking over as Columbia River's head coach ahead of the 2023 season, DeWayne Patterson has put his stamp on the program with small tweaks.

The latest change took shape this offseason when the Rapids transitioned to a more run-heavy Wing-T offense. River coaches believe the switch will better suit the team's personnel, allowing the Rapids to control the ball and help their defense thrive.

Plus, after watching two of River's feeder middle schools, Thomas Jefferson and Jason Lee, have success in a similar scheme, Patterson sees the new offense as a good long-term fit for the program.

"I was just kind of looking at our program going forward," he said. "What I'm used to as a player (and) as a coach, I grew up in the Wing-T offense. We grew up playing good defense and controlling the ball, so it was just kind of a mentality thing for me. That's what I feel comfortable in as a head coach."

Although the Rapids are retooling after graduating 30 seniors, they have several talented skill players returning to the fold.

Multi-year starter Ha'aheo Delarose is listed as a receiver, but the athletic senior will move around to multiple posi-



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Ha'aheo Delarose, left, goes for a catch against Savion McCoy during a Columbia River practice.

tions. Running backs Savion McCoy and Joey Ianello both carry varsity experience while senior Noah Rendon gives River added depth in the backfield.

The starting quarterback competition is a close one between juniors Ethan Bumgarner and Cole Pearson, both of whom are entering their first year as full-time varsity players.

"It's been pretty even, so it's a good problem to have," Patterson said. "They're both good athletes where (if) one

wins out, one can play another position that can help the football team."

River's defense is anchored by a defensive line returning starters at all four positions — Preston Shearer, DeVaughn Tumbaga, Jed Carson and Luke McWilliams.

Shearer, a senior fourth-year varsity starter and all-league first team selection, was picked as the Rapids' team captain by his peers.

Another notable change is River's 2024 non-league schedule, which no longer includes

in-district rival Skyview. Instead of facing the Class 4A Storm, the Rapids will play 1A programs Seton Catholic and Columbia-White Salmon to prepare for their 2A GSHL slate. Their Week 1 home game against the Cougars, who reached the 1A state semifinals last year, will be a quality test to open the season.

"We're not playing a 4A school anymore, but we're still playing a very good football team this year to help us see where we're at," Patterson said.

SAT., SEPT. 6

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

FRI., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

THU., OCT. 31



Seton Catholic

at Columbia-White Salmon

at Mark Morris*

at Woodland*

R.A. Long*

Hockinson*

at Ridgefield*

Washougal*

at Hudson's Bay*

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



HOCKINSON HAWKS

LAST SEASON

3-6, 3-4, fifth in 2A GSHL.

BEST STATE FINISH

State champions in 2017, 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Jacob Dark	6-4, 240, sr.	OL/DL
Keegan McAfee	6-4, 250, jr.	OL/DL
Jayden Sheffield	5-11, 230, jr.	OL/DL
Aiden Donowitz	6-1, 170, sr.	QB
Robert Matheson	6-0, 160, sr.	QB
Jake McKee	5-7, 170, sr.	RB/DB
Ryder Stenersen	6-2, 195, sr.	TE/LB
Xavier Maitland	5-7, 160, soph.	RB/LB
Kyle Alexander	6-3, 190, sr.	WR/DB
Easton Weber	6-0, 180, sr.	TE/DL

Coach: Clint LeCount (fourth year)

Hawks to get physical with experienced line

Talented skill players, several of whom went on to play Division I college football, were often at the forefront of Hockinson's run atop the 2A GSHL from 2012 to 2019.

And while the Hawks have lots of potential at those positions this season, likely the biggest x-factor will be in the trenches.

A dedicated commitment to the weight room over the off-season has allowed players to bond and build a cohesive unit.

The offensive line, in particular, appears to be stout with both starting tackles returning in senior Jacob Dark and junior Keegan McAfee. Junior Jayden Sheffield is taking over the starting center spot after playing guard last season. Seniors Talen Allsup, Jex Garrett and sophomore Erdalbek Mailov are competing for playing time at the two starting guard spots.

"We're definitely a different team than we had been when we were successful with those state championship teams. ... We had a lot of kids who played at the next level," Hockinson head coach Clint LeCount said.

"It's kind of moving back to a little bit more of a physical, smash-mouth kind of a game. ... Playing good, solid defense (and) really utilizing our strength, which I believe is going to be our offensive line."



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Hockinson football players go through drills during a preseason practice.

Hockinson also has something no one else in the 2A GSHL does — a returning quarterback who played meaningful snaps in nearly every game last season.

Senior Aiden Donowitz split time with Andon Stenersen as a junior and threw for nearly 1,000 yards and nine touchdowns. Now, he's competing

with fellow senior Robert Matheson for the full-time starting job.

"Having somebody who's played on Friday nights, has been in the fire, playing at that Friday night speed is always helpful," LeCount said. "That's going to benefit him with his ability to prove that he's the starter this year."

As for skill positions, Hockinson brings back veteran experience with senior tight end Ryder Stenersen, a strong blocker and route runner with good hands. Senior Jake McKee returns to the running back rotation, while sophomore Xavier Maitland is looking to build on a promising freshman campaign.

2023 HIGHLIGHT

● With its postseason hopes on the line, Hockinson came up with a clutch drive late in a 28-21 win over Mark Morris in Week 7. Andon Stenersen's 6-yard touchdown run with 2:22 to play capped the Hawks response after Mark Morris tied the game with a touchdown and two-point conversion with 7:45 to play. Stenersen also passed for 253 yards and three touchdowns.



Hockinson HS Stadium

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

FRI., SEPT. 6



Fife

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Mount Baker

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



at Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



Woodland*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



at Columbia River*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



Hudson's Bay*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



at Washougal*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



HUDSON'S BAY EAGLES

LAST SEASON

7-3, 5-2, tied for second in 2A GSHL.
Reached district playoffs.

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1999

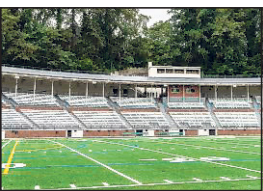
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Aqeel Bauman	5-11, 185, jr.	RB/WR/DB
Taiese Telea	5-10, 255, sr.	OL/DL
Jake Hildebrand	5-9, 220, sr.	OL/DL
Jeremiah Moen	6-1, 230, sr.	OL/DL
Amari Gilbert	6-1, 210, sr.	OL/DL
Andres Vazquez	6-3, 280, sr.	DL

Coach: Mark Oliverio (fourth year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• When did the rest of the 2A GSHL know Hudson's Bay was for real? No doubt after a dramatic 28-24 win at Ridgefield in Week 4. Rafael Bauman returned a kickoff 84 yards for a touchdown with 2:22 left for the winning score. That came right after Ridgefield took a 24-21 lead on a field goal. The win boosted Hudson's Bay to 4-0 for the first time since 2001. It set the tone for a seven-win season and the program's first postseason berth since 2017.



Kiggins Bowl

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

Eagles hope more to come after 2023 success

After breaking through into the top tier of the 2A GSHL last year, the Hudson's Bay Eagles believe they're here to stay.

A 5-0 start paved the way for a 2A district playoff berth and a seven-win season, their best since 2001. That experience served as a source of motivation during the offseason. Now, the Eagles are aiming to take another step forward in 2024.

"It's exciting," Eagles head coach Mark Oliverio said. "There's no doubt, I think, this group has another notch, another step of expectations that are higher. I think any time you have some success, nobody certainly wants to go backwards."

In the process of finishing in a three-way tie for second in 2023, the Eagles established a clear identity built around their physical play at the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball.

The majority of that group brings multi-year starting experience to the fold, headlined by seniors Taiese Telea, Jake Hildebrand and Jeremiah Moen. Fellow senior Amari Gilbert also brings veteran experience to the line.

"Our line continues to be the strength of our team," Oliverio said. "We've got a lot of returning guys up front that love



DYLAN WILHELM/Centralia Chronicle

Aqeel Bauman of Hudson's Bay is among the team's most dynamic playmakers.

football, know football, take the weight room seriously and I think that's really the foundation of what we try to build around."

Behind the line, a breakout sophomore campaign from Aqeel Bauman could lead to even bigger things as a junior. The hybrid receiver/running back accumulated more than 800 all-purpose yards last season playing alongside older brother Rafael Bauman, who's now playing college football at Hawai'i. Aqeel Bauman will step into the starring role and

will also be a key part of the Eagles' defense at safety.

"He's a special player, there's no doubt," Oliverio said. "You get a lot of different kinds of athletes, but he's a football player through and through. He comes to work every day, and I think he's going to play an important role for us on both sides of the ball."

Elsewhere, Bay has less varsity experience than it did last year, but it also means an opportunity for several players to step into larger roles.

As the Eagles saw firsthand

last year, their key to success was often not beating themselves by limiting mistakes and capitalizing on their opponents' miscues to perform in clutch moments. Bay was 3-0 in games decided by seven points or less.

"The main thing for us is continuous improvement," Oliverio said.

"When you look at where we were last year and how that went, I think our collective mindset is continuing to take positive steps forward."

FRI., SEPT. 6



Napavine

5 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Heritage

4:30 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



R.A. Long*

5 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



at Washougal*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



Woodland*

5 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Hockinson*

7 p.m.

THU., OCT. 31



Columbia River*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



MARK MORRIS MONARCHS

LAST SEASON

3-6, 2-5, seventh in 2A GSHL.

BEST STATE FINISH

Second in 1979

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Kenneth Mullen	6-0, 190, sr.	RB/LB
Mac West	6-2, 225, sr.	TE/DE
Brady Schlecht	5-10, 180, sr.	WR/DB
Deker Bartell	6-2, 175, jr.	WR/DB
Daniel Kobayashi	6-1, 180, soph.	WR/DB
Dalton Stevens	6-3, 280, soph.	OL/DL
Jacob Trotter	6-1, 250, jr.	OL/DL
Bradlee Lewis	6-0, 165, jr.	OL/DL
Aimen Flemens	5-9, 175, sr.	RB/LB
Luke Bilger	5-10, 175, soph.	RB/LB

Coach: Mike Peck (first year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• The Monarchs sent longtime coach Shawn Perkins out on a winning note with a 48-14 victory over R.A. Long in the annual Longview rivalry game. Seven different players scored touchdowns as the Monarchs successfully capped Perkins' 21 years as head coach.



Longview Memorial Stadium

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

New coach brings innovative passing scheme

It's a given the Mark Morris Monarchs will have a new look and feel this season under first-year head coach Mike Peck compared to the previous 21 years with Shawn Perkins at the helm.

Regarded as an offensive savant in coaching circles, Peck's teams are known for their spread formations and high-flying passing attacks. Mark Morris offenses of old were typically built around the run game first and foremost.

Peck's style is well-established from his prior stints at Battle Ground, Prairie and most recently, Burley High School in Idaho, but it isn't entirely rigid. Rather, he believes an offense should be flexible to fit the personnel of a given team. That philosophy has guided Peck and his staff while teaching an entirely new system to players over the offseason.

"It's a whole new set of skills required to play in a spread system compared to what they were in," Peck said. "They've steadily gotten better and better throughout the summer and it's been really impressive to see how quickly they've picked up not only the terminology, but the skills necessary to be successful within the system."

The Monarchs' offense has multiple weapons led by senior running back Kenneth Mullen,



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Former Prairie coach Mike Peck is back in Southwest Washington as coach of Mark Morris.

who earned all-league first team honors as a junior after eclipsing 1,000 rushing yards.

Fellow seniors, tight end Mac West and receiver Brady Schlecht, highlight an experienced group of pass-catchers that also features junior Decker Bartell and sophomore Daniel Kobayashi.

Mark Morris returns multiple starters on the offensive line including juniors Jacob Trotter, Bradlee Lewis and sophomore Dalton Stevens.

The quarterback battle is

between two seniors, Nathan Stephens and Carter Huhta, the latter of whom did not play organized football prior to this year, but, according to Peck, is an avid follower of the sport with a high football IQ. Both players routinely text and call Peck to ask questions.

"It's been really impressive with what they know and how badly they want to learn more," Peck said.

The Monarchs' defense is coached by Peck's father, Larry Peck, a Mark Morris

alumnus. During Larry Peck's seven-year tenure as Battle Ground's coach (2010-17), Mike Peck served as his offensive coordinator. Now, the roles are reversed on a Monarchs team aiming to contend for a 2A GSHL title.

"We as coaches are really proud of the kids and how hard they're working," Mike Peck said. "We don't know what the season holds, but we know they're doing everything they can to be successful. That's all we can ask as coaches."

FRI., SEPT. 6

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

FRI., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



at Kelso

Seton Catholic

at Columbia River*

at Washougal*

Hudson's Bay*

Ridgefield*

at Hockinson*

Woodland*

R.A. Long*

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



R.A. LONG LUMBERJACKS

LAST SEASON

1-8, 0-7, eighth in 2A GSHL.

BEST STATE FINISH

First round in 2010

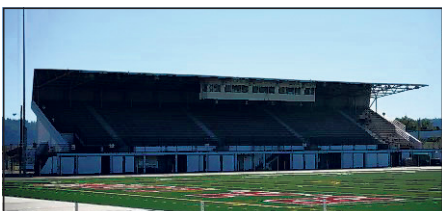
PLAYERS TO WATCH

TraMayne Jenkins	5-11, 200, sr.	WR/DB
Franklin Pihl	5-11, 175, sr.	RB/LB
Devon Harris	5-9, 165, sr.	RB/LB
Gage Hintsala	5-8, 200, sr.	OL/DL
Nick Niday	6-0, 165, sr.	QB/LB
Jaxson Rivenes	5-10, 165, jr.	QB/LB
Taijon Reagins	6-0, 185, sr.	WR/LB
Kolby Knudsen	6-1, 170, sr.	WB/LB
Adam Silvia	5-6, 150, sr.	WB/DB

Coach: Jon Barker (fifth year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Last season started on a high note when TraMayne Jenkins threw three touchdown passes in a 19-14 win over Castle Rock. That included an 85-yard strike to Koynn Williamdyke in the first quarter.



Longview Memorial Stadium

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

Lumberjacks use lessons of last year to grow

R.A. Long went all in on 'Plan A' by putting the ball in the hands of TraMayne Jenkins at quarterback last season.

The problem was, when the multi-threat junior suffered a season-ending injury in the second week of the 2023 campaign, the Lumberjacks were caught flat-footed without an immediate backup plan in place.

A season that began with a promising win over Castle Rock to snap a 15-game losing streak was followed by eight more losses, including seven 2A GSHL games, and took the wind out of the team's sails, R.A. Long head coach Jon Barker said.

It was a valuable lesson for a program now focused on finding a more balanced, complementary approach in all three phases entering a new year. An encouraging sign, according to Barker, is that players have shown a willingness to accept whatever roles best fit the team.

"Our program is pretty selfless right now as far as we're doing what we need to do to make it work," Barker said. "There's no Keyshawn Johnson (saying) 'Throw me the damn ball.' Whatever it takes to win."

Jenkins, now a senior, returns to his more natural position at receiver, in addition to starting safety. The Lumber-



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

R.A. Long players, right, have embraced a selfless mentality to help the program succeed.

jacks plan to move him around a lot within the offense and unleash his athleticism.

"He just has that innate body awareness to go up and just battle with people in the air," Barker said. "At times, that can help bail us out; we don't have to throw a perfect pass. If we put it inside of his catch radius, he's going to go up and find a way to get it."

The attention Jenkins attracts from opposing defenses should free up more space for a group of skill players featuring seniors Taijon Reagins, Franklin Pihl and Devon Harris.

Senior Nick Niday and junior Jaxson Rivenes are in contention for the starting quarterback spot. Niday was thrown into the fire after Jenkins went down and took the majority of the team's snaps for the rest of last season.

"In the spring they split (snaps) 50-50, so we're kind of going with a depth chart mentality of who shows up and who puts in work," Barker said.

The Lumberjacks also have veteran experience to build around up front with the return of starting center Gage Hintsala.

Pihl, an all-league second team selection at middle linebacker, is the leading tackler returning to a position group that also has experience with linebackers Kolby Knudsen, Reagins and Harris. The defense's recipe for success is having an offense that can consistently put together long drives and score points, Barker said.

"Defensively, we played a lot better (last year), we just played too much defense too often," Barker said. "So, we're going to keep the defense where it was and try to help out on the offensive side."

FRI., SEPT. 6



Castle Rock

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Centralia

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



at Hudson's Bay*

5 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



Hockinson*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Columbia River*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



at Woodland*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



Washougal*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game



RIDGEFIELD SPUDDERS

LAST SEASON

6-4, 5-2, tied for second in 2A GSHL.

Reached district playoffs.

BEST STATE FINISH

Champions in 1995

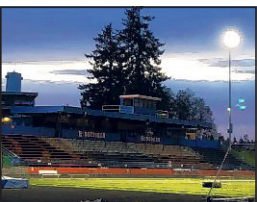
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Cly Stephens	5-10, 180, sr.	RB
Jared Gottsch	6-2, 200, sr.	LB/OL
Clint Couch	5-11, 195, sr.	LB/OL
River Leeling	6-0, 210, jr.	OL/DL
Vincent Dollens	6-0, 180, jr.	WR/DB
Noah Stomberg	6-2, 185, sr.	WR/DB
Landon DeBeaumont	6-1, 170, jr.	QB
Talon Sosky	6-3, 175, soph.	WR/DB
Elias Farley	6-1, 205, soph.	TE/LB
Brian McLemore III	5-10, 175, jr.	WR/DB

Coach: Scott Rice (sixth year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

- The Spudders bounced back from a Week 4 loss to Hudson's Bay with one of the most impressive rushing performances of the 2023 season. Ridgefield rushed for 301 yards to beat reigning 2A GSHL champ Washougal 38-28 on the road. Rocco Wright and Cly Stevens each tallied more than 135 yards on the ground.



Ridgefield Stadium

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

Spudders focus on little details in title quest

The Ridgefield Spudders were just a few plays away from a much better outcome in 2023.

One-score losses to 2A GSHL foes Hudson's Bay and Woodland — the latter deciding the league champion in Week 9 — followed by a loss in a three-team tiebreaker sunk the Spudders to fourth place in the final league standings.

They drew a matchup with 2A power Tumwater in the District 4 playoffs and suffered a season-ending 55-13 loss. Ridgefield head coach Scott Rice called the final weeks a frustrating experience.

As a result, Ridgefield's motto going into a new year is "champion caliber," a commitment to focusing on and polishing all the details that can make or break a team in pursuit of a league title.

"To win a championship requires a tremendous amount of work that isn't just playing on Friday nights," Rice said. "In five seasons, we've finished second in the league four of five seasons and won a league title in the other year (2021). In my humble opinion, there should be three more league championships on that wall and we've stubbed our toe in the process. So, we've gotta fix that."

Football is often a numbers game, and Ridgefield has an advantage over its 2A GSHL



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Ridgefield senior Noah Stomberg, left, leads a talented group of Spudders receivers.

counterparts with 118 players who participated in spring ball. Nearly 90 players and counting are registered for fall. As the program's numbers continue to grow, so too have the expectations.

"We're at a point now where being an OK football program, at some point, has to be no longer acceptable to our guys," Rice said. "The standard has been raised over five seasons."

Ridgefield is a young team on paper, though Rice believes

they'll look older on the field.

Building around junior starting quarterback Landon DeBeaumont, who primarily played slot receiver last year while taking quarterback reps at the JV level, the Spudders have a talented group of receivers in Noah Stomberg, Vincent Dollens and Talon Sosky who can pose matchup problems on the perimeter.

Senior Cly Stephens takes over as the team's workhorse running back after splitting

time over the last two seasons. As a junior, Stephens rushed for more than 1,000 yards and was an all-league first team selection.

Ridgefield's defense, which has switched from a 3-5 to 3-4 base scheme, is led by senior inside linebackers Jared Gottsch and Colt Couch, plus Dollens at safety.

An unproven spot on the field is the offensive line, where junior River Leeling is the lone returning starter.

SAT., SEPT. 7



at Prairie

4 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



Montesano

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



Hockinson*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at Hudson's
Bay*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



Washougal*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



at Mark
Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



Columbia
River*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



at Woodland*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game

LAST SEASON

8-3, 5-2, tied for second in 2A GSHL.
Reached first round of state playoffs.

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 1974

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Harrison DeShazer	6-5, 220, sr.	WR/TE/DE
Elijah Franco	6-1, 190, sr.	WR/LB
Travis Lundberg	6-2, 215, jr.	TE/DE
Ben Kellar	6-0, 195, sr.	RB/LB
Mercy Johnson	5-9, 185, sr.	RB/LB
Parker Cherry	5-10, 155, jr.	WR/DB
Brandon Austenfield	6-1, 170, sr.	WR/DB
Lucas Phillips	6-2, 240, jr.	OL/DL
Kaden Fautt	6-2, 185, sr.	QB

Coach: Dave Hajek (19th year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

Washougal won a three-team tiebreaker to determine the 2A GSHL's postseason seeding. In the final round, Holden Bea hit Sam Evers for a 24-yard touchdown before the QB rushed in a two-point conversion for an 8-7 win over Hudson's Bay. That gave the Panthers the No. 2 seed and a home district playoff game against Aberdeen. Washougal won 35-21 to reach the state playoffs for a second consecutive year.



Fishback Stadium

at Washougal HS, 1201 39th St., Washougal

Playoffs remain goal despite roster turnover

When putting together his team's non-league schedule, Washougal head coach Dave Hajek thinks back to a message he heard from Cale Piland during his time as an assistant coach on Piland's Union High staff.

"We want to play teams that make us better," Hajek said. "Beating a team 48-0 doesn't help us."

That was the thinking when the Panthers scheduled games against bigger schools in 3A, Mountain View and Prairie, for the opening two weeks of the 2024 season, in addition to an Aug. 30 jamboree against Camas and Evergreen — two title contenders in the 4A GSHL and 3A GSHL, respectively.

Any thought of the Panthers taking a step back — after graduating an exemplary class of seniors led by three-year starting quarterback Holden Bea — is nonsense in their minds. They still expect to contend for a 2A GSHL title and a Week 10 playoff game, and their early schedule says as much.

"We're not lowering expectations," Hajek said. "We're working to get to that 10th week."

Roster turnover aside, other changes in the program appear to be subtle.

While Washougal might not have the same flash with the likes of Bea and receiver



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Washougal's Harrison DeShazer, a University of Idaho commit, is a force at receiver and on defense.

Sam Evers, this group has the makings of a more hard-nosed, physical team.

Harrison DeShazer, a senior Idaho commit, will play a key role at defensive end opposite Travis Lundberg while playing at tight end and receiver on offense.

Senior linebacker and running back Mercy Johnston steps into a leading role, while senior receiver Brandon Austenfeld will be a key target after serving as a backup for Evers last season.

Another first-year starter is senior quarterback Kaden

Fautt, who coaches have lauded for his arm strength and poise under pressure.

"The worst thing you can do is compare him to Holden Bea, and I've told him that ... it would be like comparing me to Nick Saban. It's an unfair comparison," Hajek said.

"He's got a pretty strong arm, he's still learning, but he's a good athlete (and) he got a little bit of playing time last year."

The Panthers' defense has some quality depth at linebacker where Johnston, Ben Kellar and Elijah Franco, the team's

leading tackler last season, are all key players. Kellar was on his way to a strong 2023 season before a knee injury ended his junior year just two games in.

In the secondary, junior Parker Cherry has impressed coaches by "working his butt off" over the spring and summer, according to Hajek.

"We feel pretty confident with what we have coming back," Hajek said. "Now, obviously, we won't be the same team, offensively or defensively, but I feel pretty good that we'll be solid."

FRI., SEPT. 6



at Mountain View

4:30 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



Prairie

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



at Woodland*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



Hudson's Bay*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



at R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Columbia River*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Hockinson*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game

W

WOODLAND BEAVERS

LAST SEASON

8-3, 6-1, first in 2A GSHL.

Reached first round of state playoffs.

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 1974

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Elijah Andersen	6-2, 190, sr.	RB/WR/DB
Karson Northcut	5-11, 165, jr.	RB/LB
Seth Popp	6-0, 195, sr.	OL/DB
Charles Elkinton	5-11, 195, sr.	OL/DE
Chase Hall	6-0, 180, sr.	WR/TE/DB
Mike Belvin	6-2, 190, soph.	QB/LB
Logan Busig	6-0, 235, sr.	DT

Coach: Glen Flanagan (first year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• In wrapping up its first league title since 2007, Woodland relied on its go-to guy. Elijah Andersen accounted for three touchdowns and rushed for 156 yards as the Beavers beat Ridgefield 28-21 in a winner-take-all Week 9 game. Andersen rushed for two scores and caught a 28-yard touchdown pass as Woodland leapt to a 28-6 halftime lead. He then broke up a pass on the game's final play to seal the win.



Beaver Stadium

at Woodland HS,
1500 Dike Access
Rd. Woodland

Beavers are believers after winning league title

To capture their first league title since 2007, nearly everything broke right for the Woodland Beavers last season.

They made timely plays in close games. They remained healthy with limited depth. They often had the best player on the field in now-senior Elijah Andersen, who was named The Columbian's All-Region Player of the Year. And, they believed in themselves.

"It's just about believing. If you think you can or you think you can't, you're probably right," Woodland head coach Glen Flanagan said. "... I just think they have a new belief in themselves and their abilities. So, as long as they execute, take care of the small things and (have) discipline, I think they realize they have the talent to be league champions."

Woodland's run, which ended in a Class 2A state round of 16 loss against Clarkston, gave players invaluable experience. As they enter a new season trying to defend their 2A GSHL crown, the Beavers also have continuity.

Flanagan, who's been on Woodland's football staff since 1995, took over as the team's head coach following Sean McDonald's move to Mountain View in April.

A longtime defensive coordinator, Flanagan will continue to lead that side of the ball



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Woodland players celebrate after a 28-21 win against Ridgefield that clinched the 2A GSHL title.

with eight returning starters, including Andersen at safety, linebacker Karson Northcut, the team's reigning defensive MVP, plus defensive linemen Seth Popp, Charles Elkinton and Logan Busig.

With those pieces in place, Flanagan said the team's focus has been building its offense with sophomore quarterback Mike Belvin and newly hired coordinator Stephen Short, also Camas' head baseball coach.

A big help for the first-year starting quarterback is the

dynamic, do-everything Andersen, who lines up at wideout, slot receiver, running back and quarterback. Opposing defenses can expect similar game plans involving Andersen this season.

"He'll play everything except for probably center or o-line — I don't think we'll put him on the o-line," Flanagan quipped.

"He's dynamic. It's nice, because when you have a team that doesn't have that dynamic guy, you've got to grind out possessions and it's hard in high

school football to execute 70, 80-yard drives without making a mistake. ... When you can score some long (touchdowns), it helps you out a ton and makes you a better coach in a hurry. He has that game-changing ability."

Aside from Andersen, who churned out nearly 2,500 all-purpose yards last season, Northcut, a junior running back, and senior tight end/receiver Chase Hall will be key playmakers in the Beavers' offense.

FRI., SEPT. 6



at Kalama

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



La Center

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



Washougal*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



Columbia River*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Hockinson*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 11



R.A. Long*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



at Hudson's Bay*

5 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Mark Morris*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Ridgefield*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 2A Greater St. Helens League game

1A TRICO LEAGUE

PROJECTED FINISH

Picks by Columbian sports staff

1



SETON CATHOLIC: The Cougars had a lot of firsts in program history last season. But one first they missed out on was a first Trico League title. Is this the year for that?

2



LA CENTER: The Wildcats are the five-time reigning league champs, and they aren't giving up that title without a battle. Circle the Nov. 1 date against Seton Catholic on your calendar.

3



KALAMA: The Chinooks are back in the Trico League for the first time since 2016 with a talented roster.

4



CASTLE ROCK: The Rockets reached the playoffs despite injuries. Building better depth in 2024 will be the key to a return to the postseason.

5



COLUMBIA - WHITE SALMON: Many league coaches predict Bruins could be the most improved team in the league in 2024.

6



KING'S WAY CHRISTIAN: The Knights played a lot of freshmen and sophomores last year. That experience and a large senior class could help them make a jump.

7



STEVENSON: The Bulldogs will lean heavily on the development of a large sophomore class after losing several key players to graduation.

8



FORT VANCOUVER: The Trappers don't have big numbers on the roster, but the numbers first-year coach Will Ephraim have are committed to making Fort competitive in the Trico.



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

The Seton Catholic football team celebrates a win against Tenino last season in the Cougars' first home playoff game.

Could Seton finally dethrone La Center?

La Center and Seton Catholic are the top two teams heading into the 2024 season in the Trico League.

The league coaches agree about that.

But which team is the overall favorite is a matter of contention.

"Seton's got all of their dudes coming back," La Center coach John Lambert said. "I think they have to be considered the league favorite."

But Castle Rock coach Cody Warner says not so fast Coach Lambert.

"As far as I'm concerned, everything still runs through La Center until somebody knocks them off," Warner said. "They've kind of held that crown for

the last 10 or 15 years. So they're as tough as anybody."

For the record, La Center has won the last five Trico League titles and nine of the last 11 Trico League titles (Stevenson won it in 2018, Kalama in 2015).

But Seton Catholic is coming off an 11-2 season in which the Cougars reached the 1A state semifinals.

Seton graduated one senior off its 2023 team. La Center graduated four. So both teams are loaded with talented and experienced players.

But Kalama also returns to the Trico League after winning three Class 2B state titles since 2017. The Chinooks are led by all-state quarterback Aiden Brown.

"That Aiden Brown kid up at Kalama, we've got them right off to kick off league," King's Way Christian coach Dale Rule said. "That's a different kind of young man playing football. He's so much fun to watch, just instinctually an incredible athlete and football player."

The Trico League will get four berths in the Week 10 playoffs, and a mad dash for that last spot is shaping up between Castle Rock, Columbia-White Salmon and King's Way Christian.

Castle Rock looks to rebound after making a late playoff push last season following an injury-filled campaign.

Columbia-White Salmon could be the most improved team in the league.

"I see Columbia-White Salmon as a team that's going to surprise some people," Rule said. "They were physical and attacking last year. They really got after it."

And King's Way Christian brings back 14 seniors mixed in with sophomore and juniors with loads of experience.

Stevenson and Fort Vancouver are working to build some depth, but they both have some talented playmakers.

"It's possibly the toughest Trico League that we've seen in many, many years," Seton Catholic coach Dan Chase said. "There's a lot of teams that have their sight set on the postseason. So it's going to be a lot of fun."



CASTLE ROCK ROCKETS

LAST SEASON

4-6, 3-2, third in Trico League.
Reached district playoffs.

BEST STATE FINISH

State champion in 1988

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Trevor Rogen	5-10, 190, sr.	QB/DB
Owen Langdon	6-2, 175, sr.	WR/DB
Logan Engkraf	6-1, 165, sr.	WR/DB
Wyatt Orth	5-8, 190, sr.	RB/LB
Owen Keatley	6-1, 225, jr.	OL/DL
Noah Shulke	5-9, 230, sr.	OL/DL
Thatcher Heller	6-1, 165, jr.	WR/DB

Coach: Cody Warner (second year)

Experience at skill positions boosts Rockets

Cody Warner's first season as the head coach at Castle Rock in 2023 did not get off to a great start.

Stephen Ibsen, the Trico League's reigning player of the year and the focal point of Warner's offensive attack, suffered a broken foot in the season opener. More injuries followed, and it took time for the Rockets to find their stride, eventually ending in a tough playoff loss at Eatonville.

Warner wants to be better prepared for any eventuality heading into 2024.

"That time really helped me in understanding how to get through that, making adjust-

ments and changing up your whole playbook once your best athlete goes down," Warner said. "It taught me on being more prepared, more balanced and not so dictated and focused on one guy."

The Rockets return several key skill players who spread talent around the field. Senior Trevor Rogen returns at quarterback, as do two big targets in Owen Langdon and Logan Engkraf.

Engkraf also figures prominently on defense.

"He's a leader," Warner said. "He's a heck of a hitter. Hopefully, we can get him through a full season. He had some injuries last year that cut short

his season."

Senior Noah Shulke and junior Owen Keatley lead on the offensive and defensive lines, but Warner will lean more on younger players up front.

But he was impressed with their development in the offseason.

"Our lines on both sides of the ball were coming together really nice in our spring camp," he said. "They were a real pleasant surprise. Hopefully, they can continue to grow and build. There were a lot of names and faces that maybe didn't see a lot of time last year. But, boy, they were doing some nice things in the spring."

Injuries last fall forced Warner to use players he had not expected to use at the varsity level.

"But on the positive side, that builds depth," Warner said. "It builds a program that's kind of ready for that next-man-up mentality."

And that, Warner hopes, will get the Rockets back to playing Castle Rock football.

"We're working on changing a little bit of cultural things," Warner said. "We want to get back to the way that Castle Rock used to be — hard, physical football guys hustling everywhere. We started doing that late last year, but we need to continue building on that."



COLUMBIA BRUINS

LAST SEASON

1-8, 1-4, sixth in Trico League.

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1996, 1998

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Matthias Posini	6-2, 240, sr.	OL/DL
Kai Brasuell	6-3, 180, sr.	WR/DE
Wyatt Stelma	5-9, 180, sr.	QB/DB
Bryce Wang	6-0, 160, sr.	WR/DB
Lucas Yarnell	5-10, 250, sr.	OL/DL
Wongani Schlegel	5-6, 145, jr.	RB/DB
Humberto Pulido	5-9, 165, jr.	WR/DB

Coach: Shawn Friese (second year)

Bruins on rise after near-misses last season

Columbia-White Salmon went 1-8 last season. But in a way, it didn't feel like that. The Bruins lost 13-7 to Gorge rival Stevenson.

They trailed Seton Catholic 21-20 in the second half before the Cougars pulled away with an 88-yard kickoff return and a 90-yard touchdown run.

Then there was 7-6 loss at King's Way Christian when the Bruins scored a touchdown with nine seconds left, only to be turned away on the two-point conversion.

"I think there were only two games that we weren't in a position to win," second-year head coach Shawn Friese said. "It was a really encouraging season. Even though we were 1-8,

it didn't feel like that. We were competitive in a good number of our games. That's a part of what we've been trying to do this summer and going into this season. How are we going to now take some of those close games and turn them into wins?"

The first step toward that game came in the form of a meeting before the team's summer camp, where the team set some standards for the season ahead.

"One of those standards was summer weights attendance, and it went really well," Friese said. "We had really, really good attendance throughout the summer. ... I think that is not only physically preparing us for

the season, but it also feels like we've all been together all summer, and I think that's really kind of helped build the culture of our team as well."

Success generally starts up front, and there the Bruins are anchored by senior Matthias Posini.

"He is the captain of our line," Friese said of Posini. "He kind of runs that group. He's so critical to our offensive and defensive line, so that's going to be a big part of our success this year, having a guy like him."

The Bruins also return several key performers from quarterback Wyatt Selma, running backs Wongani Schlegel and Humberto Pulido and receivers Kai Brasuell and Bryce Wang.

"Our skill guys we have coming back had a lot of success for us last year," Friese said. "They've been practicing prior to going to summer camp, and they really haven't stopped throughout the summer. That's going to be a big thing for us this year."

And that's why many Trico League coaches say the Bruins are a team on the rise this fall and a contender to return to the postseason for the first time since 2018.

"We feel like we should be in that mix, to be a playoff team," Friese said. "We feel like we can be competitive with every team in our league. Like I said before, it's just a matter of turning some of those games into wins."



FORT VANCOUVER TRAPPERS

LAST SEASON

1-8, 0-6, seventh in Trico League.

BEST STATE FINISH

Quarterfinals in 1973

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Denis Zayets	6-2, 265, sr.	RB/DE
Dylan Duenas	5-4, 200, jr.	RB/DB
Caleb Hyde	5-9, 175, sr.	QB/DB
Kayden Taylor	5-11, 180, sr.	WR/DB
Kyler Smith	6-0, 190, sr.	QB/WR
Javeer Brunell	5-11, 180, soph.	WR/DB
Geziah Biou	5-11, 225, sr.	LB/DE
RJ Antonio	5-9, 180, jr.	DB
NJ Churo	6-0, 275, sr.	OT
Austin Mokis	5-9, 180, sr.	OL

Coach: Will Ephraim (first year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• The Trappers earned their first win in a season-opening game since 2005 by beating Vashon Island 20-7 on their on-campus field. Caleb Hyde threw two touchdown passes to Kyler Smith as Fort Vancouver led wire to wire.



Kiggins Bowl

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

New coach wants players to have football fun

Like many other football coaches, Will Ephraim likes to have players with experience.

But the experience that the first-year coach at Fort Vancouver yearns for his players is not time spent playing in games, but time spent with each other. "When I got here, the first thing I wanted to do was basically sell myself and convince these young men that I'm here to make you better," Ephraim said. "All I need you to do is show up. I want to give them the opportunity to experience a football program. Because a lot of our kids have never had that experience before. ... All this comes before wins and losses."

While Ephraim has several players on the roster who are in their first year of football, he wanted those players to get the full football treatment, which included spring workouts.

"I think they tried to have spring in the fall, but couldn't get the numbers," Ephraim said. "But we did spring. We had two scrimmages. We scrimmaged four teams. Then we gave the opportunity to go to George Fox for summer camp.

"They loved it. They did not know what to expect. I told them 'you're going to have to fun, but you're going to be sore.' But I told them the most



WILL DENNER/The Columbian

Fort Vancouver senior wide receiver Kyler Smith is a returning team captain.

important thing was to have fun. And they did, and they experienced some success. It kind of opened our eyes and showed us that we can compete."

The Trappers do return some experienced varsity players from last season, led by seniors Caleb Hyde, Kyler Smith, Denis Zayets and Dylan Duenas.

Now Ephraim is working to develop depth on his roster that will allow players to find the right spots on the field for them to excel.

Duenas is a perfect example

of that. Ephraim said Duenas, who played on the offensive line last season, wanted to get a shot at playing running back this fall.

Ephraim said he always allows players to try new positions in the offseason before having a talk with players about what positions best fit them and the needs of the team.

"But Dylan, he stepped up," Ephraim said. "He's actually really athletic. He's not the biggest kid in the world. But in the offseason, 7-on-7s and camp, he's impressed me. He's really impressed me."

Ephraim said the turnout at Fort is not what he had hoped for, but added "the numbers we do have are committed."

He just needs to find more players to trust him that playing football at Fort can be a positive experience.

"If we can get the numbers out, we'll be bound to find talent in there," he said. "Fort has had that bad rap, and they've had a tough history of not being successful. Hopefully, we can change that and get them to believe they can compete. We've got some athletes here. They just need to come out."

SAT., SEPT. 7



Heritage

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Toutle Lake

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



Stevenson*

5 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at Kalama*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Seton Catholic*

7 p.m.

SAT., OCT. 11



La Center*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



Castle Rock*

8 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Columbia-White Salmon*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



at King's Way Christian*

6 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game



KALAMA CHINOOKS

LAST SEASON

8-4, 3-0, first in 2B Central South.
Reached state quarterfinals.

BEST STATE FINISH

State champions in 1998, 2017, 2018, 2021

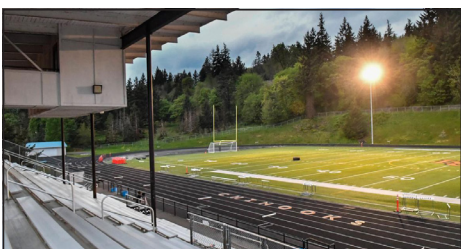
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Aiden Brown	5-10, 185, sr.	QB/DB
Drew Schlangen	5-10, 200, sr.	RB/LB
Reece Achen	5-11, 255, jr.	OL/DL
Johnny Martinez	6-0, 155, jr.	WR/K
Quin Hahn	6-0, 170, sr.	WR/DB
Henry Sigfridson	6-1, 160, soph.	WR/DB
Elijah Fox	6-0, 180, sr.	OL/DL
Erik Schulson	6-1, 190, sr.	DL

Coach: Mike Phelps (third year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Kalama went 7 for 7 on their home turf with a 32-14 win over Friday Harbor in the first round of the Class 2B state playoffs. Drew Schlangen rushed for three touchdowns and caught another TD. Aiden Brown threw for 302 yards and two touchdowns.



Chinook Stadium

At Kalama High School,
548 China Garden Road, Kalama

Brown, Schlangen could terrorize Trico

Kalama's offense goes through all-state quarterback Aiden Brown, and the senior is certainly a player who draws attention from opposing coaches.

But Kalama coach Mike Phelps wishes Brown would get more attention from college coaches.

"He's not getting as much attention I think he deserves as far as offers from colleges," Phelps said. "But he does have some offers."

Brown, who has an offer from Idaho State, is a dual-threat running back who passed for 46 touchdowns and more than 4,000 yards, leading the Chinooks to the 2B state quarterfinals last year.

As good as Brown is, Phelps doesn't want you to forget about another key player for the Chinooks — senior running back/linebacker Drew Schlangen.

"He is definitely an athlete and a dude on both sides of the ball," Phelps said. "He's going to be our running back and a little bit of wide receiver. He's definitely got the talent to play at the next level. Aiden is our No. 1 guy on offense, but Drew is not as far behind him as a lot of people think."

But it's defense where Schlangen really shines.

"There's literally not a spot on my defense that Drew can't



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

Kalama's Drew Schlangen is a talented running back but really shines on defense.

play," Phelps said. "He's played almost everywhere in the past. That's what I tell college recruiters. I said get this kid to come play for you on the defensive side of the ball. He's coachable. He's hard-working and he is definitely an athlete."

While talent at the top of the roster is undeniable, Phelps would like to see more of his players step up this fall, especially up front.

"We've got some work to do up front," Phelps said. "And it's not because we don't have guys

who are capable. We need more guys to commit to the level I would like them to commit at."

Junior Reece Achen and senior Elijah Fox anchor the line. But the spots up front after that are very much up for grabs as Kalama opened fall camp.

"If you were to ask who my next three guys starting up front were going to be, my honest opinion is I don't know yet," Phelps said. "We're going to find out in about 2½ weeks, because it's going to be the guys that show up and work hard."

The Chinooks return to the Trico League for the first time since 2016. And with Brown and Schlangen leading the way, the Chinooks figure to be in the mix for a league title along with La Center and Seton Catholic.

"It's always an adjustment when you move up," Phelps said. "Of course, (the Trico League) is a very tough and highly competitive league. The league is very capable of producing three teams that could make a good run in the playoffs."

FRI., SEPT. 6

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

SAT., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



Woodland

7 p.m.



at Tenino

7 p.m.



King's Way
Christian*

7 p.m.



Fort
Vancouver*

7 p.m.



at Stevenson*

7 p.m.



Seton
Catholic*

7 p.m.



at Columbia-
White Salmon*

7 p.m.



La Center*

7 p.m.



at Castle
Rock*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game



KING'S WAY CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS

LAST SEASON

2-7, 2-4, fifth in Trico League.

BEST STATE FINISH

1B (8-man) quarterfinals in 2011

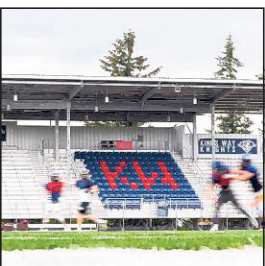
PLAYERS TO WATCH

Grayson Bagley	6-1, 200, sr.	TE/DL
Ryan Charlton	5-11, 175, sr.	RB/LB
Asher Wycoff	5-11, 160, sr.	WR/DB
Gray Boys	6-2, 220, sr.	OL/DL
Austn Klotzer	6-4, 265, sr.	TE/DL
Jace Barnes	5-10, 180, sr.	RB/LB
Noah Jimerson	5-8, 210, sr.	OL/DL
Rylan Richter	5-10, 165, jr.	WR/K
Sam Somarakis	6-0, 210, jr.	QB/LB
Luke Scott	5-11, 240, jr.	OL/DL
Owen Paulson	6-3, 205, soph.	QB

Coach: Dale Rule (second year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

King's Way stopped a two-point attempt with nine seconds left to beat Columbia-White Salmon 7-6. After starting 0-5, the Knights used a strong defensive effort to earn the win. King's Way took the lead on a Sam Somarkis 3-yard touchdown run on the first drive of the second half.



S.R. Preece Memorial Stadium

On the campus of King's Way Christian 3606 N.E. 78th St., Vancouver

Strong senior class has Knights optimistic

Dale Rule spent the better part of his first year as head football coach at King's Way Christian working the hallways trying to lure players to come out for football.

"We've got some athletes at our school, and we have about 95 percent of them playing football," Rule said. "Overall, we'll have 45 to 50 players out this year. That's a solid 40 to 45 percent of the male population at our school. I can't complain about that."

Anchoring the roster is a senior class that is 14 players deep.

"And all of them, every one of the seniors, is going to have an impact on the field," Rule said. "And that's a good problem to have. All of the kids are going to play a role, and athletically and competitively, they can play."

The top returning senior is running back/linebacker Ryan Charlton, a second-team all-Trico League pick last season.

"Ryan is just a monster on both sides of the ball," Rule said. "He brings everything every single play, and the same way in practice. He's a real quiet leader who doesn't have to say much because the kids respect him so much."

Jace Barnes will join Charlton in the backfield. The senior missed the football season last year because of an injury.



TIM MARTINEZ/The Columbian

King's Way Christian senior Ryan Charlton is a returning second-team all-league player.

"He is dynamic," Rule said of Barnes. "He is pound-for-pound the first or second strongest kid in the weight room."

At quarterback, Rule will have some options with junior Sam Somarakis and 6-foot-4 sophomore Owen Paulson.

"Owen is about as good as it gets in the county as a sophomore quarterback," Rule said. "He and Sam will be locked into just an absolute war there

at quarterback. So it's really nice to have that."

Both players got extensive playing time last year as a sophomore and freshman, respectively.

That's one thing Rule prides himself on — giving young players a chance to see what they can do on the field.

"We played a lot of young kids last year no matter what," Rule said. "I started (freshmen and sophomores) in almost

every single game. That's a big push of mine — to develop depth. We did that a lot last year, and I think it's really going to pay off a lot this year."

The Knights also will return a junior-heavy line that has experienced.

"I think our young players are solid," Rule said. "I'm super excited for our future, but I'm super excited for this year with all those young kids blended in with all those seniors."

FRI., SEPT. 6



at Rochester

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



Hoquiam

6 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



at Kalama*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



La Center*

6 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



at Columbia-White Salmon*

7 p.m.

SAT., OCT. 11



Stevenson*

6 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



at Seton Catholic*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



Castle Rock*

6 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Fort Vancouver*

6 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game



LA CENTER WILDCATS

LAST SEASON

10-1, 5-0, first in Trico League.
Reached first round of state playoffs.

BEST STATE FINISH

Semifinals in 2016, 2017

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Houston Coyle	6-2, 185, sr.	QB/DB
Isaac Chromey	5-11, 185, sr.	RB/DB
Jack Tyler	6-2, 235, sr.	OL/DL
Kaden Emerson	5-9, 170, sr.	WR/LB
Lincoln Cooley	5-10, 265, sr.	OL/DL
Max Cooke	6-3, 230, sr.	OL/DL
Parker McKinney	6-3, 200, sr.	WR/DB
Tyson Grove	5-10, 215, sr.	OL/LB
Wyatt Eiesland	6-2, 208, sr.	TE/LB

Coach: John Lambert (26th year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• La Center wasn't ready to give up the Trico League throne. Trailing 13-0, the Wildcats scored twice in the final five minutes to beat Seton Catholic 14-13. La Center went on to win its fifth straight league title.



La Center Community Stadium

On the campus of La Center High School,
725 N.E. Highland Ave., La Center

Seasoned seniors ready to play big roles

In his 26 seasons as the head coach at La Center, John Lambert says that every four or five seasons he gets a roster filled with experienced seniors.

This season is one of those seasons for the Wildcats.

"This is a special group of kids who have grown up playing together," Lambert said. "And they got a ton of playing time last season."

The 2023 Wildcats only had four seniors on the roster, but they were four special seniors.

One, lineman Ryan Kawalek is playing this fall at Idaho, and another, running back Jalen Ward, is playing at Feather River Community College in California.

"Ryan was a generational player for a small school like us," Lambert said. "He was the kind of player that would be very hard to replace. But last year, we had a couple of younger guys who rotated in and out playing beside Ryan. And this year, they will both be full time, so that won't be as bad as it might normally be."

At running back, senior Isaac Chromey steps in for Ward, a four-year starter.

"In any other year, Isaac would have been our starting running back all year," Lambert said. "But we had Jalen. Now, we'll be able to turn



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

La Center's Houston Coyle, left, earned first-team all-league honors at quarterback last season.

to Isaac. He's a bit bigger than Jalen, which gives us a different dimension to our running game."

Houston Coyle replaced another senior, Garrett Maunu, at quarterback after the senior was injured in Week 3. Coyle went on to be a first-team all-Trico League pick at quarterback.

But Lambert said Coyle and senior Wyatt Eiesland are both in the mix to play quarterback

this fall. Eiesland was the Trico's defensive player of the year at linebacker.

"We're going to wait and see on that one," Lambert said. "Both guys will be on the field no matter what. Houston is a pretty darn good receiver when he's not playing quarterback. I think after last year we saw how important it is to have two quarterbacks."

After a quarter century as head coach at La Center, Lam-

bert still gets excited for the new season.

"There's always new things to do as a head coach, more so than there were 25 years ago," Lambert said. "But once you get started each fall, there are new challenges, new kids to get to see grow and learn. And it's really great when you've built the trust between players like we have with this group of seniors. We're excited to see where that takes us."

FRI., SEPT. 6



at Montesano

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 13



at Woodland

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 20



Columbia-
White Salmon*

7 p.m.

FRI., SEPT. 27



at King's Way
Christian*

6 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 4



Castle Rock*

7 p.m.

SAT., OCT. 11



at Fort
Vancouver*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 18



Stevenson*

7 p.m.

FRI., OCT. 25



at Kalama*

7 p.m.

FRI., NOV. 1



Seton
Catholic*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game



SETON CATHOLIC COUGARS

LAST SEASON

11-2, 5-1, second in Trico League.
Reached state semifinals.

BEST STATE FINISH

State semifinals in 2023

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Joe Callera	6-0, 190, sr.	RB/WR/DB
Kolten Gesser	6-1, 175, jr.	QB
Jacob Williams	5-11, 210, sr.	RB/DB
Ryker Ruelas	6-2, 170, sr.	WR/DB
Austin St. Amour	6-7, 375, jr.	OL/DL
Roman Tabile	5-7, 200, so.	RB/DL
Garrett Nebels	5-8, 180, sr.	RB/LB
Thomas Clute	6-0, 170, sr.	P
Teddy Wiczorek	5-9, 150, jr.	WR/DB
Alex Dayoob	6-5, 250, jr.	OL/LB
Aeven Napoleon	6-0, 190, sr.	RB/LB
Xavier Crank	5-9, 170, sr.	P

Coach: Dan Chase (seventh year)

2023 HIGHLIGHT

● Seton Catholic scored three touchdowns in a five-minute stretch of the fourth quarter to rally for a 42-35 win over Cashmere in the Class 1A state quarterfinals. Joe Callera capped a 94-yard game-winning drive with a 9-yard TD run before Ryker Ruelas sealed the victory with an interception.



Seton Catholic

9000 N.E. 64th Ave., Vancouver

History-making squad hungry for more

Seton Catholic had a season of firsts in 2023.

The Cougars won a program-high 11 games, hosted a playoff game for the first time, advanced to the state playoffs for the first time, eventually leading to a berth in the state semifinals.

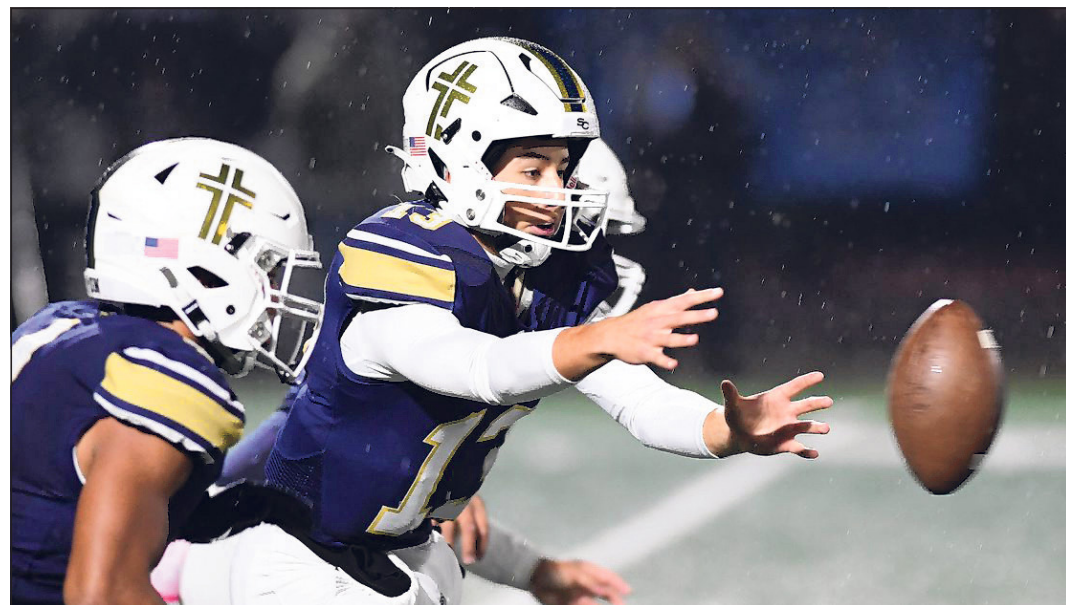
All that leads to high expectations in 2024.

“The expectations our players have for themselves is high, which is good,” Chase said. “It’s going to motivate them to work hard in practice and do the kinds of things we’ve always done.”

“But this year is what the expectations of everybody else has, but we’re going to focus on the expectations we have for ourselves. And our goal is beat our next opponent, execute our game plan and play the best game that we can each week.”

The Cougars only graduated one senior off the 2023 team and return 13 all-leaguers, topped by seniors Joe Callera and Jacob Williams, junior quarterback Kolten Gesser, senior receiver Ryker Ruelas and junior lineman Austin St. Armour.

“We have 13 seniors coming back, and those guys are going to have great seasons,” Chase said. “You talk about all of those all-leaguers coming back. We have seniors coming back who



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Seton Catholic quarterback Kolten Gesser has many options on a team that returns 13 all-leaguers.

weren’t all-leaguers, and I think those seniors are going to have pretty exciting seasons as well. So all that combined is going to make for an exciting season.”

There’s an old adage that says defense wins championships. But the Cougars showed last year they could also win with a potent offense that scored 42 points or more in seven games last season, including all their final five wins.

But Chase says he doesn’t weigh one part of his team over another.

“We focus on the whole-team

aspect and being a family,” Chase said. “For example, we witnessed what a game-changer our special teams can be. You talk about those playoff wins (against King’s and Cashmere), there were some very key special teams plays that our players made that made a difference in the game.”

“Every time our players are on the field, we’re giving 100 percent, whether that’s on the field or on the sideline. That’s where our mentality has been, and we’re not going to change that.”

And although the Cougars have a bevy of special playmakers, Chase said the offensive line is the heart of the team.

“They’re the guys that are putting the most work in every single play,” Chase said of his line. “They don’t get a lot of the accolades. You know, when somebody’s scoring in the end zone, all eyes are on the end zone. But those players don’t get there without the work of our offensive line. And our whole offensive line is back. That’s one of the most exciting things about the offense for this year.”

FRI., SEPT. 6

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

SAT., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



at Columbia River

7 p.m.

at Mark Morris

7 p.m.

at Castle Rock*

7 p.m.

Columbia-White Salmon*

7 p.m.

Fort Vancouver*

7 p.m.

at Kalama*

7 p.m.

King's Way Christian*

7 p.m.

at Stevenson*

7 p.m.

at La Center*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game



STEVENSON BULLDOGS

LAST SEASON

3-6, 3-1 fourth in Trico League.
Reached district playoffs.

BEST STATE FINISH

First round in 2010, 2018

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Derek White	5-8, 145, sr.	WR/DB
Nate Kick	5-9, 160, sr.	WR/DB
Jackson Anderson	6-1, 215, sr.	OL/DL
Kasen Polzel	5-6, 165, sr.	RB/LB
Payton Shirk	6-2, 200, sr.	OL/DL
Coach: David Waymire (14th year)		

2023 HIGHLIGHT

• Stevenson won its fifth Gorge Bowl rivalry game in six years, beating Columbia-White Salmon 13-7. Derek White hauled in a 56-yard touchdown pass from Kacen Bach to break a tie in the third quarter. White also caught a 42-yard TD pass in the first half.



Stevenson Football Field

At Stevenson High School,
390 NW Gropper Rd., Stevenson

Bulldogs eager to be fully back in Trico League

Stevenson lost several key starters to graduation from the 2023 team that advanced to the playoffs for the first time since 2018.

But coach David Waymire also leaned on a lot of very young players last season.

“We’ve got certainly some younger kids who are going to contribute again this year,” Waymire said. “But we also had 11 different freshmen start on varsity last season. We had a couple who started every single game. That doesn’t happen very often, but there’s pretty athletic kids in that class that will be sophomores this year.”

Waymire said his sophomore class this season is as large as any he’s had since becoming Stevenson’s head coach in 2011.

Their development this fall will be pivotal on what type of season the Bulldogs have in 2024.

“I’m excited to see this sophomore class I have,” he said. “I’ve got a sophomore quarterback who’s probably going to be a getting quite a bit of playing time, if not be the starter, this year. Jude Travinski is his name, and he’s been putting in the work, for sure.”

But the Bulldogs also bring back experience in all-league players in senior lineman Jackson Anderson as well as receiver/defensive backs Nate



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Stevenson’s Kasen Polzel provides senior leadership on a team with a large sophomore class.

Kick and Derek White.

“Derek White and Nate Kick both impressed me with their athletic ability,” Waymire said. “They’ve been doing nothing but working, from running drills to lifting weights. These guys have put in the time, and I’m excited to see how they fill both sides of the ball for us. They are offensive and defensive weapons, for sure.”

The Bulldogs return to the Trico League as full-fledged members for the first time since 2019. They have been playing split Trico/Central 2B league schedules the past two seasons.

Waymire is eager to see how many players turn out for fall practice. Then he can start putting players into different spots on the roster.

“I don’t really have a ton

of expectations as far as how we’re going to match up against teams,” he said. “I’m just excited about the attitude of the kids that I’ve had coming out during our spring practices, camp and everything. I’ve got some kids with some pretty good work ethics who love the sport.

“So the passion is there. Hopefully, we get the numbers to back it up, too.”

FRI., SEPT. 6

FRI., SEPT. 13

FRI., SEPT. 20

FRI., SEPT. 27

FRI., OCT. 4

SAT., OCT. 11

FRI., OCT. 18

FRI., OCT. 25

FRI., NOV. 1



at Rainier
(Ore.)

7 p.m.



Elma

7 p.m.



at Fort
Vancouver*

5 p.m.



Castle Rock*

7 p.m.



Kalama*

7 p.m.



at King's Way
Christian*

6 p.m.



at La Center*

7 p.m.



Seton
Catholic*

7 p.m.



Columbia-
White Salmon*

7 p.m.

*-denotes 1A Trico League game