

# Tigers roar into state final



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

The La Grande Tigers celebrate their 68-0 win Saturday evening over The Dalles at Kennison Field in Hermiston in the semifinals of the OSAA Class 4A state playoffs.

## ■ Tigers control every aspect of the game, maul The Dalles, 68-0 in state semifinal

By **Ronald Bond**  
The Observer

HERMISTON — The fog in Hermiston made it a bit tricky to see Saturday night's state semifinal game.

One fact, though, was unmistakable — the La Grande Tigers didn't have any issues finding the end zone.

Nathan Reed rushed for 185 yards and three touchdowns and caught a fourth, Parker Robinson threw three touchdown passes, and the Tigers controlled every facet of the game on the way to a 68-0 win over The Dalles Riverhawks in the Class 4A semifinals.

"This is everything," said senior defensive back Josh Zollman, who had an interception return for a touchdown in the win. "I've been dreaming of this since freshman year. This is everything to me. I'm so excited I can't think."

Next up, the state championship game, where La Grande will face the defending state champion Banks Braves — who won Saturday's other semifinal game over Marist, 56-31 — in next Saturday's 4A final, which will be played at 6 p.m. in Hermiston.

The Tigers (11-0 overall) quickly made it apparent it would be their night, forcing a 3-and-out on The Dalles' first series and getting on the board shortly after on a 42-yard TD reception by Payton Cooper for a 7-0 lead.

The wave of blue and white kept coming non-stop as the Tigers basically did whatever they wanted. La Grande found the end zone in the running game — Reed scored on running plays of 1



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La Grande's Nathan Reed turns upfield during Saturday's win over The Dalles in the 4A state semifinals in Hermiston.

and 29 yards in the first half and added a 62-yard run on the second play of the third to make it 45-0, Robinson added a 56-yard TD run in the first half, and Brody MacMillan had a 61-yard touchdown run in the fourth — and through the air — Robinson added a 46-yard deep pass to Blaine Shaw and a 40-yarder to Reed on a screen to help the Tigers build a 39-0 halftime lead.

"We're so dangerous at running and passing, so we keep defenses on their toes," Reed said. "If they start

keying on the run game and slowing that down, Parker will go and throw a touchdown and that will open up the run game again. It's super hard to stop our dominant run game and dominant passing game."

Even the defense and special teams got in on the scoring act. Shaw returned a punt 57 yards for a touchdown early in the third quarter, and Zollman returned his interception 17 yards to make the score 61-0 midway through the third quarter. "Coach (Matt) Wolcott did

a phenomenal job of getting the kids dialed in on defense," head coach Rich McIlmoil said. "(We) knew what to expect. We had a couple ideas of what they were going to try to do. We had a feeling they would probably try to pass it on us more because we have a pretty solid run defense."

The Tigers scored on their first ten possessions and weren't stopped on offense until the final minute of the game. La Grande piled up 499 yards of total offense and

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## ■ Dominant win somewhat of a shock, but shouldn't be after a second glance

Saturday's state semifinal outcome shocked me. It wasn't that I didn't expect the La Grande Tigers to win, and even won convincingly.

Rather, it was the apparent ease of the Tigers as they dominated every facet of the game

in their 68-0 thumping of The Dalles Saturday night in Hermiston.

Stop to think of that for a minute. Sixty-eight to nothing. In a semifinal game.

The game, from start to finish, was a thorough whipping of a team that has been hot the last six weeks. The Dalles had won five of its last six contests to get to the semifinals, and itself was putting up some gaudy numbers on offense (see a 55 point-per-game average in three postseason games coming in).

The Riverhawks' defense was suspect, especially after giving up 51 points in their quarterfinal win.

But as I looked at it, I felt The Dalles, not only being an improved team from the first matchup against La Grande, but being healthier, would put up more of a fight than it did the first time. La Grande, I told myself and a couple others prior to the game, was still going to win, but probably by three touchdowns — say, 35-14 or 28-7.

The score was 39-0 by halftime, and the running clock was in place a minute into the second half.

Did I sell La Grande

short? Did I overplay The Dalles?

Perhaps both are true to an extent.

Here's what I think really happened — this La Grande team was not going to be denied Saturday.

The team thoroughly scouted The Dalles,

as it has every opponent this season, and shut down the Riverhawks' offense.

Defensive coordinator Matt Wolcott deserves a ton of credit for the game plans he has come up with all season long, but especially during the postseason.

The Tigers have allowed 16 points in three playoff games — that's 5.3 points per game — and shut out back-to-back teams. They have the best defense in Class 4A and the third-best in the entire state, regardless of classification. Only 2A Heppner and 3A Burns have a lower point-per-game average than the 7.91 allowed by the Tigers this season — and Heppner is playing for the 2A title. No team at any level has been better in the playoffs on defense.

For a good picture of how good the defense has been, look no further than what La Grande did in two games to The Dalles receiver Okean Green. Green has been difficult for teams to stop as the Riverhawks' leading rusher out of the fly sweep with 1,104 yards on the season.

But nearly all of that

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