

Hood River, The Dalles play for Gorge 5A football bragging rights

■ **By Joe Petshow**
For Columbia Gorge News

Extended pandemics have a way of adding perspective into a lot of things in life, especially those of double-masked football players. But there's nothing like a high school rivalry to provide a needed respite in otherwise trying times.

Hood River and The Dalles get such a chance Friday at HRV's Henderson Stadium, where they will square off in a Special District 1 contest starting at 7 p.m. April 2. Twenty miles separate the schools, but there are plenty of crossover activities in the Gorge linking players on both teams. Many of those involved in Friday's game started toeing the line against each other in grade school, playing for the Hood River "Blue" or The Dalles "Red" teams. Hood River Coach Caleb Sperry played in this rivalry game, as an all-state wide receiver for The Dalles in the early 1990s.

"I think for the kids it is a rivalry; they know each other pretty well from this and other sports," Sperry said.

Hood River has won the past four meetings in the series, including the last time the two played in 2019, 36-22. The two schools did not play in 2016 and 2017, as The Dalles had an independent schedule to try and build participation numbers in its program.

Andy Codding's first year (second stint) as head coach in 2018 had the Riverhawks back playing in a league — the Class 4A Special District 2. The Riverhawks were 2-6 that season followed by a turnaround year in 2019, when The Dalles went 7-5 behind a large group of 18 seniors and advanced to the Class 4A semifinals. Codding, who also coached The Dalles from 2008-10 when players wore an Eagle Indian logo, probably remembers that the 2019 season began with a

two-touchdown loss to HRV, a game also played at Henderson Stadium. The Dalles, which was hurt by 145 penalty yards in the 2019 contest, last beat HRV, 28-20, in 2013.

The Dalles (2-1) is coming off a 34-0 shutout win Saturday over visiting Wilson, while Hood River (2-2) lost 46-26 at home to Redmond's Ridgeview. Against Wilson, The Dalles eliminated some of the costly mistakes that plagued the Riverhawks the week before in a 41-6 league loss to La Salle. Hood River opened its 2021 spring season with a 30-14 win over the Falcons.

"We're going in the right direction heading into the rivalry game against Hood River," said Codding after his team's defensive gem last week. "It's good to go into rivalry week on a positive note. We can't look too far ahead though, because we have lots of work to do in preparation for facing Hood River."

Hood River, on the other hand, will try to plug some defensive holes that Ridgeview exposed last week, especially during the third quarter when the Ravens outscored the Eagles, 16-0. Ridgeview rushed for more than 300 yards against HRV, which also had lost the prior week at Pendleton.

The Eagle defense will have to be aware of the Riverhawks' fly-sweep attack. When The Dalles needs a little speed and deception, it often will call upon fleet Jaxon Pullen to run horizontally along the line of scrimmage until he can find a seam to head up field. The fly-sweep system helped a Codding-coached Ridgeview team recover from a 17-0 second-quarter deficit and win the 2013 Class 4A state championship.

If the run game isn't working, Riverhawk senior quarterback Skyler Leeson has proved adept at play-action passes. He is coming off his best performance, an 8-for-11 passing effort for 120 yards against Wilson.



The Dalles' senior Jesse Larson (7) breaks out of one tackle and responds to a second during Saturday's game against Wilson in The Dalles. Next up is Hood River Valley, which has defeated the Riverhawks for the past four years.

Mark B. Gibson photo

Hood River counters with a run-based offense, but one that is steadily becoming more balanced behind junior quarterback Trenton Hughes. His favorite targets include senior tight end Zac Wells and junior wide receiver Ryles Buckley, who had a 50-yard TD reception against Ridgeview last week.

Senior Tanner Fletcher is the go-to back in the Eagle offense. The sturdy, quick Fletcher doesn't need much of a hole created by Hood

River's big, physical offensive line, to get loose in the defensive secondary. Fletcher had 120 rushing yards in the first half against Ridgeview.

"We've got to do a better job of taking care of ourselves," Sperry said. "(We have to) eliminate bad penalties; get back to making first-contact tackles.

"We've got to get back to playing physical and fast. Those were the trademarks that helped us get out to our first two wins."

(Mike Weber contributed to this story.)

The Dalles-Hood River

Past Five Football Games

Year	Winner	Score
2019	Hood River	36-22
2018	Hood River	22-6
2015	Hood River	33-14
2014	Hood River	34-6
2013	The Dalles	28-20

The Dalles takes care of football, beats Wilson, 34-0

■ **By Mike Weber**
For Columbia Gorge News

THE DALLES — Inspired by Senior Day festivities while playing its final home game proved to be highly motivational for The Dalles football team last week. The Riverhawks (2-1) played nearly perfect in a 34-0 non-league victory over Class 6A Wilson Saturday afternoon at Sid White Field on the Wattonka campus.

"We just took care of the ball a little better and we won the turnover battle," said Coach Andy Codding. "That's one of the things that we've kind of been most concerned about during the first couple of games. We executed our game plan very well and we just took whatever they (Trojans) were giving us. For our defense getting a shutout is huge and it's the third week in a row that we've played really well defensively. It was a good overall effort by everyone, and our linemen took away the key part of Wilson's game, which is running the ball. We stopped what they (Trojans) wanted to do and then we also took away their Plan B."

Riverhawk seniors who were honored were introduced with their parents at midfield. Those seniors included Kenape Stewart, Jesse Larson, Dusty Dodge, Francisco Medina, Enrique DeLaCruz, Alex Gonzales, Spencer Taylor and Skyler Leeson. After the pregame ceremony, The Dalles unleashed a first-quarter offensive explosion to gain control of the 1 p.m. contest.

The Riverhawks displayed a highly effective fly offensive attack in a 10-play, 64-yard scoring drive, capped by a one-yard touchdown run by quarterback Leeson (8-for-11 passing, 120 yards). Placekicker Fabian Canchola booted the extra point and The Dalles led 7-0 with 7:13 on the scoreboard clock.

"It feels great to come out here and play so well today," said Leeson. "We were able to capitalize on Wilson's turnovers; we played together as a team and our linemen were blocking really well. Everyone just made big plays when we needed to, and our defense worked hard to recover turnovers. It means a lot for us to come out here and get the win on Senior Night, because it's the last home game for our seniors."

It didn't take long for The Dalles to extend the lead — 33 seconds, to be exact. Following Canchola's kickoff, The Dalles sophomore linebacker Riley Brock recovered a fumble on a first down Trojan play,



The Dalles' senior Kenape Stewart intercepts a pass in Saturday's game against Wilson in The Dalles.

Flora Gibson photo

giving the Riverhawks possession at Wilson's 33-yard line. Junior flyback Jaxon Pullen (11 carries, 126 yards rushing) took the ensuing handoff from Leeson and sprinted to the right side and quickly eluded Wilson defenders to put the Riverhawks in front 13-0 with 6:40 on the clock.

"We definitely played with a high energy level offensively and defensively from the opening kickoff and we had the momentum going our way throughout the entire game," said Pullen. "We made some adjustments during practice following last week's tough game and we had a good mindset today, while everyone played much better to help us get the win. I just ran as hard as I could, and I got some key blocks from Jesse Larson to help me get to the outside where I could run fast. We really wanted to get the win for the seniors, since it was their last home game."

The Dalles capitalized on another short field as Wilson again turned the ball over on its next possession. The Dalles sophomore linebacker Kade Wilson recovered a Trojan fumble on a first-down play and the Riverhawk offense was back in business at Wilson's 40. Leeson's 16-yard completion to senior receiver Larson (three receptions, 47 yards) was followed by Pullen's 24-yard TD run; Canchola's PAT made it 20-0 with 5:47 left in the first quarter.

Wilson turned the ball over on downs and The Dalles scored its fourth, first-quarter touchdown. The speedy Pullen utilized good blocking from Riverhawk offensive linemen Taylor, Malcolm I'aulualo, Evan Baldy and Riis Le Roux and scrambled past Wilson's defenders on a 51-yard TD run.

After a scoreless second period, it was The Dalles defense's turn to shine in the third quarter after the Trojans marched 49 yards to The Dalles 3-yard line. The Riverhawks' defense, led by Andrew Savaiinaea, Anthony Jara, Medina, Ian Preston and Andre Niko, stopped Wilson's fourth-and-goal play at the 1-yard line.

The Riverhawks took over possession on downs with 3:54 left in the third and proceeded on a 13-play, 99-yard scoring drive overlapping the third and fourth quarters. A highlight in the drive was a 30-yard completion by Leeson to Larson to Wilson's 40. The impressive drive was capped by Leeson's 10-yard TD toss over the middle to a wide open Pullen in the end zone.

The Dalles had 375 yards of total offense, including 255 yards rushing. Because the 2020 season was canceled due to COVID-19, the win over Wilson was the Riverhawks' first home victory since Nov. 16, 2019. The Dalles won that contest, 58-51, over Tillamook in the OSAA Class 4A state playoffs.

Ridgeview breaks away from HRV in second half

■ **By Joe Petshow**
For Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER — A last-second pass play as time expired in the first half helped propel Ridgeview to a 46-26 Special District 1 football win Friday over host Hood River.

Running back Josh Biever, a workhorse for the Ravens all game, caught a 12-yard touchdown pass from Aiden Brenneman to give the visitors a 22-18 lead at intermission. The Ravens maintained momentum in the second half, outscoring HRV 16-0 in the third period en route to the win.

Biever, a 175-pound senior, ran 28 times for 209 yards and two touchdowns, as Ridgeview evened its record to 2-2. Brenneman threw for four scores, including two to Jeremiah Schwartz, as the Ravens broke open the game after the break.

The turnaround just before halftime — one of those pivotal moments that can occur when two evenly-matched teams square off — was crucial to Hood River's chances. The Eagles (2-2) were driving toward what appeared might be a two-score margin, but instead found themselves trailing. A gutsy fake punt — in which up-back Zac Wells took the snap and went up the middle on a seven-yard, first-down run — gave the Eagles a first-and-10 at the Raven 38. Quarterback Preston Hughes threw to Jack Wilson for a seven-yard gain to the 31, but then the drive stalled as HRV gave up the ball on downs.

With 14.8 seconds left before halftime, Biever ran 47 yards on a reverse to the Eagle 12 and Ridgeview called timeout with 1.8 seconds on the scoreboard clock. After the timeout, Brenneman connected with Biever in the corner of the end zone, as Ridgeview retook the lead it would not relinquish.

"That was a huge momentum swing," HRV Coach Caleb Sperry said. "On that reverse we gave up too many yards. We had a chance to tackle him ... we missed a tackle at midfield. That (score) gave them the momentum."

Up-and-down Ridgeview entered the contest on a two-game losing streak, but the Ravens showed some punch in week two when they led league-leading Pendleton by two touchdowns at halftime before losing 20-12. Ridgeview was shut out 27-0 last week by cross-town rival Redmond, while Hood River lost its first game, 26-6, at Pendleton.

Both teams looked strong offensively early, as each scored on their

first two offensive possessions. The Eagles received the opening kickoff and scored after nine Tanner Fletcher running plays covered 56 yards. Ridgeview answered with Biever, who capped the Ravens' initial drive of 58 yards in 10 plays with a 17-yard TD scamper. Biever carried on all but three plays of the drive, and his conversion run gave his team an 8-6 lead.

Conversion runs figured huge in the back-and-forth first half. Ridgeview was 2-for-3 on points-after touchdowns before intermission, while HRV failed on all three of its first-half attempts. The Eagles were hurt by costly penalties and fumbles — which they recovered, but not before the timing of the plays was thrown off.

Sperry said, "(Ridgeview) did a good job of making sure they didn't make a bunch of mistakes."

HRV all-state lineman Henry Buckles tipped his helmet to Ridgeview, which took advantage of its opportunities. "We made some mistakes defensively and a couple mistakes offensively," he said. "That cost us a couple of touchdowns."

HRV answered the Ravens' first score, this time mixing in two Hughes completions into a nine-play drive, before Fletcher ran it in from the 2 for a 12-8 lead midway through the second period. The pass plays proved an indicator of things to come, as Hughes found Ryles Buckley on a slant pattern and the junior wide receiver raced 50 yards for the go-ahead score with 4:04 remaining in the first half. Ridgeview had matched HRV's second TD with another Biever run to go ahead 16-12 before Buckley's catch-and-run had once again given the Eagles the lead, 18-16.

For his part, Fletcher had 18 carries for 119 yards before intermission, but the senior halfback was slowed by the Raven defense after the break when Ridgeview seized control.

Brenneman connected with Gannon Jeter on a four-yard touchdown pass with 9:13 left in the third period. Hood River went four-and-out on its next possession and Brenneman and Schwartz hooked up on their first TD connection — this one covering 38 yards. The Ridgeview defense forced another four-and-out, and two plays later Brenneman threw to Schwartz for a 31-yard catch-and-run score. The sophomore quarterback was an efficient 7-for-9 passing for 109 yards, registering TDs on nearly half of his throws.