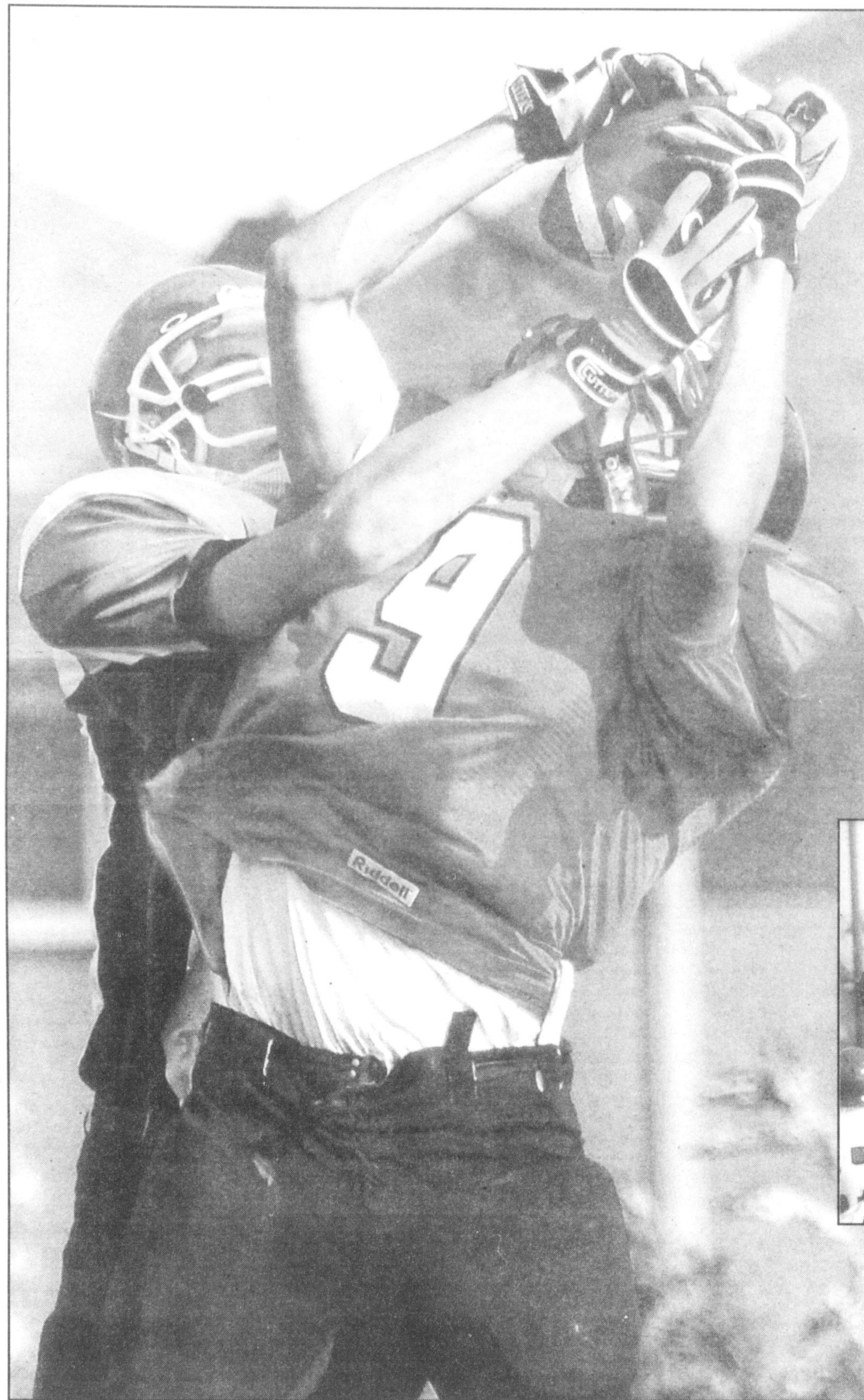


Sports

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Royals head into huge test on a roll



Second straight shutout win gives Reding momentum for Notre Dame

By STEVE LeBLANC
The Champion

There's no debating that Bishop Reding's senior football team remains an overwhelming underdog for this week's showdown with Notre Dame.

But after a second straight shutout victory, the idea that the Royals could actually keep things respectable against the powerhouse Irish doesn't seem like such a far-fetched notion.

"We're excited about facing Notre Dame," said head coach Joe Jurus, following BR's 24-0 whitewash of T.A. Blakelock Thursday. "Hey this is why we wanted back in Division 1 — to see just where we stand (against top teams)."

Reding was annihilated 59-0 by Notre Dame last season, but appears capable of significantly narrowing that gap — at least if last week's performance is any indication. While the offense was hit and miss at times, BR's defensive efforts were about as polished as they've ever been. Marcas Gray almost single-handedly wiped out the visiting Tigers' passing game, while a

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handful of other standout contributions combined to keep their ground attack in check.

"This (Blakelock win) definitely gives us momentum for Notre Dame," said linebacker Gavin Charles, who delivered two quarterback sacks and at least five other key tackles, including one in the end-zone for a third-quarter single.

Reliable rusher Ted Fair cemented the win with just over five minutes left with a one-yard touchdown push and Todd Speakman added insult to injury in the dying moments of play by picking off a pass at the 20-yard line and running it back to the house.

An interception figured in the Royals' first major as well, with Gray hauling in a Blakelock air strike just seven seconds before half-time and then snagging one in the end-zone from Craig Howse on the next play. He denied opposing receivers at least six other times on the day.

Rounding out the scoring with an 18-yard field goal, a convert and a single was kicker Ryan Fernandes.

Defensively, BR didn't allow the visitors within their 30-yard line all afternoon. Besides Charles and Gray, Mike Rego and Mike Carn provided topnotch performances — with some key plays also turned in by Jake Berry and Matt Sewell.

While two-way veteran Chris Wheelihan remains on injury reserve, the now 2-1 Royals are otherwise healthy — which offers another source of encouragement for Friday's home-field clash with Notre Dame Friday. Game time is 3:30 p.m.

Reding will need all aspects of its game functioning at an optimum level to keep things competitive with the Irish, who remain unbeaten after a dramatic 42-36 overtime win against Nelson Thursday.



At left, Reding's Marcas Gray (9) intercepts Blakelock's quarterback, which set up his touchdown on the next play. Above, Gray can't quite find the handle on a Craig Howse pass.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE



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