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Ellensburg football prepares for Prosser earlier than in years past

By RYAN KUHN sports editor

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a rivalry as a state or situation in which people or groups are competing with each other.

If you ask members of the Ellensburg High School football team to define a rivalry, they will tell you to just watch their football game against No. 3 Prosser High School. For the past 10 years, Ellensburg and Prosser high schools have battled to see who is the best among 2A schools in Central Washington.

That battle will take place once again at Ellensburg's Andreotti Field Friday night. Over the last nine meetings, Prosser holds a slim 5-4 advantage and is coming off a 2015 2A state championship. "It's a good rivalry game," said Ellensburg head coach Randy Affholter. "It's a fun game to play in and it's a fun game to prepare for. Everybody knows it's a big game."

While both teams prepare for each other each season, their paths are crossing earlier than normal. The last three seasons, the rivalry game was played in October. "I don't know if it is good or bad (to play them this early in the year)," Affholter said. "I do like playing them later because there is a build up to it."

But Affholter also said whatever the outcome, a lot will be learned after Friday night. "It'll give both schools a good picture of where they are at," Affholter said. "If we need to make any changes, we will know. "

Weeks of preparation

After losing the season opener to the defending 1A state champion Royal High School, the Bulldogs have shut out their last two CWAC opponents Grandview and Wapato by the combined score of 131-0. Over the last two weeks it has also given Ellensburg senior quarterback Bryce Helgeson more time to get comfortable at his new position. During the offseason, he moved from wide receiver to quarterback.

“I’m feeling confident and a lot more comfortable,” Helgeson said, who has thrown for a combined six touchdowns the last two weeks. “This game is going to show a lot about us and it’s going to be a battle.”

The defending champs

While Ellensburg will send out its first-year quarterback, Prosser features two-year varsity quarterback Tanner Bolt. Last year Bolt was selected as the Washington 2A state player of the year when he threw for 3,294 yards, 43 touchdowns and completed 62 percent of his passes. “He does a real good job of really seeing those openings,” Affholter said. “He understands not only the offensive schematics but also the defensive schematics that is coming at him.”

Under Bolt, the Mustangs’ offense looks to play uptempo with a run-pass option that has averaged 50.7 points per game but Affholter said he will look to slow down the speed of the game. “You have to force them to go to the handoff,” Affholter said. Affholter has been coaching Ellensburg football players for the past 20 years against Prosser and all week in practice he has been preparing his players just for another CWAC game. “Obviously it’s a rivalry game but really we are rivals with everybody in our league,” Helgeson said. “We just want to go 1-0 this week.”

Kickoff is at 7 p.m. and at halftime, the 2016 inductees to the Ellensburg Athletic Hall of Fame will be recognized.