

12th man lives in Prosser, Royal City, too

Mustangs, Knights each battle for sixth state title Saturday

Small communities come out in full force to support teams

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The Prosser football team's rooting section was as strong as ever Saturday during their 33-21 win over Sedro-Woolley in the Class 2A semifinals in Yakima.

But Mustangs' first-year head coach Corey Ingvalson found out after the game just how many people there were backing his team's latest run to the state championship game.

"Oh my gosh, I had 74 (voice mail) messages after the game. You look (at your phone) and see 74 next to the (message) icon and think, 'Is this correct?'" said Ingvalson, a former Prosser player now experiencing life as a coach. "Jeff Place does radio for our games, and he said there were over 1,000 listeners Saturday.

"The alumni was in full force."

That's how Prosser has done it for the last several decades, building their program not only on the strength of a dedicated youth football program but of a community devoted to the red-and-white warriors that take the field every weekend in the fall.

The same goes in Royal City, where a small town of just over 2,000 people has shown that there is strength in numbers, especially on Friday nights.

Both teams will be playing for state championships Saturday at the Tacoma Dome, and both sides expect to bring the noise in their bid to add another championship trophy to their collection.

Prosser (12-1) will face Tumwater (13-0) for the Class 2A title at 10 a.m., while Royal (13-0) will take on King's (12-1) in the Class 1A contest at 1 p.m. Both teams will be vying for the sixth state title in school history.

The top-ranked Knights will get an added bonus of getting to practice in the Seattle Seahawks facility on Friday, an added thrill for a truly special team that scored more points (659) and tied for the fewest points allowed (56) of any Class 1A team in the state.

Royal coach Wiley Allred was named USA Today's "Best High School Coach" in the state of Washington in 2013 on the strength of his 187-25 career coaching record and four state titles, but he's loved by his players and Knights fans. He loves them right back, of course, and does his best to absorb much of the pressure of winning a state title. Allred, along with Knights athletic director Andrew Perkins, has a hand in travel plans, arranging hotels and team dinners, leaving the players to worry about just one thing.

"I try to remind the kids they shouldn't have to feel any pressure. Just play ball," Allred said. "The coaches, there's always a lot of stress we put on ourselves, but I don't feel like it's on the kids."

Even if there is pressure on the players, they'll have every opportunity to get a boost from their hometown crowd, which — in the case of both Prosser and Royal City — is expected to represent itself well.

"When we had our first game at Ellensburg, we filled the rooter bus and could have filled a second. We had so many fans that we took over the stands and spilled into the grass," said Ingvalson, who is the first coach in Prosser history to lead his team to the state final in his first year. "We've always traveled well. The Prosser Mustang nation is going to come out."