

# Prosser's season reminiscent of first-year coach's own state-championship run

First-year Prosser coach Corey Ingvalson leads the Mustangs to their first state-championship appearance since 2008

The Mustangs will play Tumwater for a shot at a fifth state title

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Prosser has a 2-2 all-time record against the T-Birds

Corey Ingvalson's reference to the 1995 flick, "Apollo 13," is telling of just how long it's been since he played in a state championship football game.

The first-year coach at Prosser High School was a junior, and starting at wide receiver, when the Mustangs won their second state title in 1999.

"We kind of had a motto during the season, which was, 'Failure is not an option,'" Ingvalson said. "We kind of adopted that as our mindset and were able to get it done in the end."

Now, 16 years later, the script is looking mighty familiar.

Ingvalson has noted plenty of similarities between the team he played on, and the one he's coached to Saturday's Class 2A state final between sixth-ranked Prosser (12-1) and first-ranked Tumwater (13-0).

One is the imperfect record.

Prosser's one blemish this season came in 27-26 loss to Ellensburg in October. The 1999 squad lost two games, while the Mustangs' other three title-winning teams (1992, 1993, 2007) went undefeated.

Another similarity is the strength of the senior class after losing a game that cost them the league title.

“It can zap a team,” Ingvalson said. “It’s very reminiscent of ’99 in our seniors and senior leadership — that we have to kind of rally up.”

And, a catch phrase along the same lines.

“I don’t know what movie, but our motto (this season) has definitely been ‘find a way,’ ” Ingvalson said. “And, who knows? Maybe at the end, if we get it done, we’ll have to match a movie with the slogan.”

But they’ll be hard-pressed to find a place to watch one in Prosser. The city’s only theater, the Princess Theatre — which caters more to live performances — is a one-screener at best.

No megaplex is to be found. The city of about 6,000 tucked away in the Yakima Valley has other priorities.

It’s a football town.

There’s a mustang painted on the water tower, and Art Fiker Stadium seats about 3,000.

“During the school week, you go to school and just wait for Friday,” said senior Kason Blair, a wide receiver and defensive back. “As a young kid, I always sat in the same spot and watched the Mustangs, whether it was a close game or 7-0. We always pack the stands.”

The only high school in the city, Prosser commands much of the attention.

“The schools are the focal point of the town,” Blair said.

Which is yet another similarity Ingvalson has noticed between the two seasons.

“That’s the thing that’s the most cool about the 2015 run is it’s similar in that way,” he said. “I really see the Mustang pride and the community coming together.”

Ingvalson estimated that 40 alumni showed up to practice on Thanksgiving Day. And Cody Bruns, former University of Washington wide receiver and Prosser product, showed up to watch the 33-21 state semifinal win against defending state champion Sedro-Woolley.

“He just said, ‘I’ve been around some high schools, but it’s different here,’ ”  
Ingvalson said. “You’ve got the community support. Everyone rallies together.”

Now the town is rallying around a team that has posted six shutouts this season — including two in the playoffs, against Clarkston (14-0) and Ellensburg (31-0) — and heads to the Gridiron Classic looking for its fifth title.

“It’s kind of that feeling that hasn’t quite hit yet because we’re still practicing here in the valley,” Blair said. “It just feels like another game. I know as soon as we hit the bus (Friday) and especially when we practice in the Dome, it’ll really sink in that we’ve actually made it to the state final.”

In his first season leading the program, Ingvalson said he hasn’t yet stepped back to recognize the accomplishment.

“Our expectation is to play into November,” Ingvalson said. “It just so happens this year we made it back into December. But when you grow up in Prosser, play at Prosser and coach at Prosser, in the back of your mind, you’re thinking, ‘Oh, yeah. We can get to the state championship game.’ ”