

## PREP FOOTBALL

# Riley Lusk savoring the experience of Prosser's football tradition

After watching numerous Prosser title games, senior two-way lineman preparing to play in his first

**By Scott Spruill**

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YAKIMA, Wash. -- Riley Lusk's visit to the Tacoma Dome for a state championship football game this weekend will be nothing new.

Prosser's never-leave-the-field two-way senior lineman was there when he was 11 years old.

And 10, and 8 and 2.

He witnessed the heartbreaking 2008 loss to Lynden in double overtime, the romp over Burlington-Edison the year before and the Jake Locker-fueled Ferndale victory two seasons before that. Albeit just a tyke, Lusk was also there in 1999 when the Mustangs rallied for perhaps the program's most memorable victory — a 42-38 thriller over Sammamish with his father, Kevin, on the coaching staff.

Prosser football and its history have weaved all through Riley's life, and now he gets to experience it firsthand along with senior teammates who have strived for years to get there.

The Mustangs will take a crack at the school's fifth state title when they face top-ranked Tumwater — which is chasing its sixth gold ball — in the Class 2A finale on Saturday at 10 a.m.

“It’ll be a great battle, and I love the pressure,” Riley said before practice on Tuesday. “Both schools have so much history, it’s a classic. A game like this brings the best out of you, and it’s so exciting to be a part of that. I’ve been thinking about this basically my whole life.”

Riley, a co-captain with Javier Diaz, David Ledesma and a weekly pick, has plenty invested with this team, its core of seniors, the program’s tradition and the game itself. As a defensive end and offensive guard who earned all-CWAC first-team honors both ways, Riley will be in the trenches for 120 to 140 snaps and rarely on the sideline.

Against the formidable Wing-T offense of Tumwater, holding down the strong side defensive end position will be crucial. When they met in the state semifinals two years ago, the Thunderbirds held on to win a 45-40 shootout.

“They like to rush the edge a lot, coming right at us, and I’m excited to play defense against these guys,” said Riley, who’s 6-foot-1 and weighs 245 pounds. “I’ve been so impressed with our defense — from where we started to where we are now. You’ve got to fill your spot and do your job, and we have faith in each other to get that job done. We’ve been striving to get even better each week and we’re trying to take it one more step forward.”

Offensive line coach John Bell has had Riley for three years and at every position. Last year he used Velcro numbers so he could split time at guard (No. 70) and tight end (No. 92).

“Riley’s incredibly versatile. He’s played center, guard, tackle and even tight end,” Bell said. “He can handle that physically but especially mentally. Riley really understands each position because he has great football intelligence.”

It doesn’t hurt when your father, Kevin, was a quarterback at the University of Oregon and was the Mustangs’ defensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach before becoming

Prosser's principal in 2001. Or does it? That's a lot of on-campus influence from a parent who knows your every move in school and every aspect of your favorite sport.

"I couldn't ask for a better situation with my dad," Riley said. "He's always helped me through every sport I've done, and never pressured me about football. Having the higher knowledge he does, being successful at the collegiate level, that's great to have. He's always taught me about being a good student athlete."

Riley said after last week's semifinal win over Sedro-Woolley that he "would never forget this for the rest of my life." That's because his wave of Mustangs — he's a three-year starter on defense with Ledesma and Thomas Niemeyer — broke through to the semifinals and enjoyed all the trimmings of the holiday week. For a Prosser football player, there's nothing quite like Thanksgiving Day practice with visits from the alumni.

And with the 33-21 victory over the defending champs, this team will be Prosser's ninth to play for it all.

Not just more memories. The ultimate memories.

Like the ones first-year head coach Corey Ingvalson has. He was a junior wide receiver on Prosser's 1999 title team when Riley made his first appearance in the Tacoma Dome as a toddler.

"It's just team chemistry," Riley said of Prosser's latest playoff run. "I'm not saying the last couple years we didn't have chemistry — those guys are great friends. There's just this coming together for us where everything clicks. We found it together and that's an amazing feeling."