

PREP FOOTBALL

Prosser, Tumwater are prep football

heavy hitters

Two teams have combined to win nine state titles in 15 appearances

By Scott Spruill

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YAKIMA, Wash. -- Two years ago, when Prosser and Tumwater last met on a football field it's remarkable that the scoreboard survived. Or the statisticians, coaches, fans and players.

Twelve touchdowns, 85 points and 973 yards resulted in the Thunderbirds hanging on for a 45-40 victory at Kennewick's Lampson Stadium. The Mustangs were fingertips away from recovering an onside kick with two minutes left.

When the two vaunted programs clash again on Saturday for the Class 2A state championship in the Tacoma Dome, obviously the personnel will be different. But not entirely.

Illustrating how young that Prosser defense was, Javier Diaz, David Ledesma and Riley Lusk were sophomore starters two years ago. Now they are senior co-captains on a veteran defense that has produced six shutouts, including two in the playoffs against Clarkston and Ellensburg.

Prosser's first-year head coach Corey Ingvalson was the defensive coordinator in 2013, so there's considerable experience to draw off even before looking at film.

"Maybe those kids got forced to the fire a little early in their careers, but the leadership and experience that came out of it has been huge for us," Ingvalson said. "Long term it's paid off. When you need a play to be made, you can count on those guys to make it."

Prosser and Tumwater, who together have nine titles and 15 championship appearances, have crossed paths four times in the playoffs and the aggregate differential is one point. The outcome of Round 5 will hinge heavily on how Prosser's stout defense handles Tumwater's prolific Wing-T.

That ground-based attack, which averages 325 yards a game, took a notable turn in last week's 24-21 semifinal win over Archbishop Murphy, when the T-birds rallied from a 14-point halftime deficit and scored the go-ahead touchdown with 1:15 left. Tumwater actually gained more yardage in the air as two quarterbacks combined for 264 yards and two touchdowns. Two weeks ago THS threw seven passes against Squalicum and last week that number shot up to 30.

"They present a lot of problems and challenges because they know what they're doing and they execute at a high level," Ingvalson said. "Eye discipline and reading our keys will be crucial against that offense."

And specifically two juniors — tight end Cade Otton, the grandson of Hall of Fame head coach Sid Otton, and all-everything Noah Andrews.

The 6-foot-5 Otton was his league's defensive MVP and the top passing target, and Andrews basically took over when Tumwater trailed for the first time this season last week. He ran 25 times for 121 yards and a score, caught the go-ahead touchdown pass and threw for 142 yards.

"Typically Tumwater has a beast and they feed it," Ingvalson noted. "If we want to be victorious we definitely have to limit those guys and their explosive plays."

Prosser got the ideal tune up last week by facing Sedro-Woolley, which used its Wing-T to win last year's state title. The Mustangs yielded 319 total yards but 200 of that came on five plays.

“That’s the first Wing-T we’ve seen this season and I thought we did really well,” Diaz said after the 33-21 semifinal win. “We gave up a few big plays but other than that we shut them down. I’m glad we’ve seen that kind of offense.”

The Mustangs’ Mister O-Line

John Bell, a Spokane native who spent his entire teaching career in the Prosser School District, is moving back to his hometown next year. But not before one more trip to the state football championships and a wonderfully timed bookend to a coaching career that spans 32 years with the Mustangs.

Bell, whose first coaching assignment was the freshmen team under Roy Abshire in 1983, took over the offensive line for Tom Moore in 1991 — the year Prosser reached the Class AA state final for the first time. After falling to O’Dea 21-14, the Mustangs returned to the Kingdome the next year and beat the highly touted Irish 26-0 — the first of four state titles during the Moore era with Bell in charge of the O-Line.

Having retired from teaching and wanting to move closer to family, Bell decided this would be his last season and the Mustangs responded by returning to the title game for the first time since 2008.

“After last season I wanted to stay one more year because Anthony (Wiley) and Riley (Lusk) were seniors and I’d have them for three years,” Bell said. “I’ve been so blessed. I still thank Tom for letting me be a part of this.”

Prosser’s early teams were known for having undersized but athletic and tenacious linemen, especially the 1992 team that blanked a much bigger O’Dea team. Sound fundamentals and tough country kids has always been a winning combination at Prosser.

“It’s much simpler than you think — stay balanced, stay in an athletic position and act like it’s tackling without wrapping up,” Bell said. “I enjoy the Xs and Os of the game, and I always wanted the kids to be as prepared as they could be. To be a part of this program in this community, a coach couldn’t ask for anything more.”

Sideline to sideline

- The 1992 semifinal game between Prosser and Tumwater was a classic in a driving rain at Richland’s Bomber Bowl. The T-birds had a 415-210 advantage in total yards but a 96-yard fumble return by Randy Carter and a 69-yard punt return by Nick Shaw helped the Mustangs prevail 38-31.
- Tumwater coach Sid Otton is the state’s all-time winningest coach with a 351-109 career record over 48 seasons. He has been at Tumwater since 1974. Pat Alexander has been Otton’s defensive coordinator for 40 years.
- Hunter Haggerty, a 6-3, 235-pound senior linebacker for Tumwater who moved in from a small town in Minnesota last year, has committed to Central Washington.

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Class 2A state final preview

NO. 6 PROSSER vs.

NO. 1 TUMWATER

WHEN: 10 A.M. Saturday

WHERE: Tacoma Dome

TICKETS: \$17 adults, \$12 students, seniors. Tickets good for all four Saturday games (2A, 1A, 2B, 4A).

SERIES HISTORY: Tied 2-2 (Prosser won in 1992 and 1999; Tumwater won in 2012 and 2013).

LAST MEETING: Tumwater 45, Prosser 40 in 2013 at Kennewick.

TALE OF THE TAPE

PROSSER MUSTANGS

Record: 8-1 CWAC, 12-1 overall.

Coach: Corey Ingvalson (1st year, 12-1).

Statistical Leaders

Rushing

Player Att. Yds. Avg. TD

Michael Kernan 90 589 6.5 16

Passing

Player Comp.-Att. Yds. TD Int.

Tanner Bolt 197-317 3,014 40 12

Receiving

Player Rec. Yds. Avg. TD

Kason Blair 41 672 16.4 9

Javiar Diaz 38 689 18.1 8

TUMWATER THUNDERBIRDS

Record: 3-0 Evergreen, 13-0 overall.

Coach: Sid Otton (42nd year, 351-109).

Statistical Leaders

Rushing

Player Att. Yds. Avg. TD

Jarid Barrett 163 1,003 6.2 18

Dominic Jones 105 925 8.8 11

Passing

Player Comp.-Att. Yds. TD Int.

*Spencer Dowers 16-34 272 5 1

Receiving

Player Rec. Yds. Avg. TD

Cade Otton 25 477 19.1 9

*State playoffs only.

BOTH SIDES OF THE MATCHUP

MUSTANGS

OFFENSE (44.6 ppg): A week after running the ball 46 times for 164 yards in a 31-0 quarterfinal shutout win over Ellensburg, Bolt threw a season-high 46 passes for 355 yards in last week's 33-21 semifinal conquest of Sedro-Woolley. While the Mustangs have shown they can run the ball, PHS is at heart a quick-tempo passing team with Blair, Diaz and Roy Borrego all with at least 600 yards receiving and eight TDs. Prosser has scored 70 touchdowns — 29 on the ground and 41 via pass.

DEFENSE (7.1 ppg): The Mustangs recorded back-to-back shutouts in the playoffs for the first time in their lengthy postseason history. And they needed it in a 14-0 first-round win at Clarkston as a fumble return and pick-6 accounted for all the scoring. Prosser has six shutouts for the season and

10 interceptions in three playoffs games. LB David Ledesma, the CWAC's defensive MVP, is a three-year starter along with DE Riley Lusk and LB Thomas Niemeyer.

THUNDERBIRDS

OFFENSE (44.9 ppg): Tumwater's Wing-T has run for over 4,000 yards and 58 TDs with Evergreen offensive MVP Jarid Barrett and Dominic Jones accounting for roughly half of it. But last week in the semifinals, when THS rallied to beat Archbishop Murphy, junior Noah Andrews took charge with 102 yards on 25 carries. Andrews, who punts and kicks off, also split time at QB with starter Spencer Dowers. The T-birds knocked out previously unbeaten Squalicum and AM in the last two rounds.

DEFENSE (11.8 ppg): Tumwater has 27 takeaways for a turnover ratio of plus-11. Junior LB Cade Otton is the team's leading tackler and Evergreen defensive MVP. The defense gave up 293 passing yards to AM last week but had five sacks. Trailing 21-17 last week in the Tacoma Dome, Otton forced a fumble with 1:42 left and 27 seconds later Andrews scored the game winner. The T-birds had three interceptions, including one returned for a TD, against No. 2 Squalicum in the quarterfinals.

STATE TITLE GAME RESULTS

Prosser

Year Class Result

2008 2A lost to Lynden, 35-34 (2OT)

2007 2A d. Burlington-Edison, 42-7

2005 3A lost to Ferndale, 47-12

1999 3A d. Sammamish, 42-38

1995 AA lost to O'Dea, 35-14

1993 AA d. Gig Harbor, 22-20

1992 AA d. O'Dea, 26-0

1991 AA lost to O'Dea, 21-14

Tumwater

Year Class Result

2013 2A lost to Lynden, 38-28

2012 2A lost to Lynden, 41-7

2010 2A d. Archbishop Murphy, 34-14

1993 AAA d. Inglemoor, 33-7

1990 AA d. Mt. Rainier, 32-17

1989 AA d. Cheney, 27-7

1987 AA d. West Valley-Yakima, 21-14