

Prosser defeats Tumwater for its fifth state football title

By Scott Spruill

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TACOMA, Wash. — They didn't pause or hesitate or so much as blink for a second.

After what appeared to be a game-clinching stand with less than two minutes left, Prosser's defense was forced back on the field in the most dire of circumstances — backs to their own end zone, the sound and fury of Tumwater's comeback at their doorstep and precious little ground to give.

But these Mustangs did not yield.

Better still, they claimed the moment for their own.

On a second-down play at Prosser's 10-yard line with 39 seconds left, Kolby Swift stripped the ball from Tumwater quarterback Spencer Dowers and Riley Lusk recovered the fumble — not once but twice — and Prosser suddenly had itself a 22-15 victory in the Class 2A state championship game Saturday in the Tacoma Dome.

Tanner Bolt threw three touchdown passes and 213 of his 280 yards in the first half and the defense did the rest with four interceptions and Lusk's fumble recovery to hand the top-ranked Thunderbirds their first loss of the season.

"It's unbelievable, and it's hard to find words to describe it," said David Ledesma, a senior middle linebacker and CWAC defensive MVP whose crew was sent back to the field when Tumwater recovered a fumble with 1:09 remaining. "When we went back out there we were ready to go — we wouldn't want to be in any other position. To end the game with our defense on the field — I'll take that any day."

After Tumwater got new life with the fumble on a snap exchange to Bolt, the T-Birds ripped off a 12-yard run and later converted a fourth-down pass to Prosser's 10. On the next play, Swift collapsed on Dowers, reached for his arm and popped the ball out. Lusk fought off his block, grabbed the ball in midair, then lost it when he was tackled from behind. But with green jerseys flying in from all sides in desperation, Lusk pounced back on the ball to end the game.

"It's really a blur, but I saw Kolby come in and just destroy that quarterback — it was unreal," Lusk said. "It popped up into my arms and I got hit right away. The ball fell to the ground and I grabbed it again. I never held onto something that hard in my life. I saw that ball and thought, that's mine."

The Mustangs put all their points on the board in the first half, the third score being the most impressive — an 11-play drive that culminated with Bolt's 10-yard scoring strike to Noah Flores with 19 seconds left before the break. Bolt was 6 for 6 and Michael Kernan had three runs for 20 yards on the march, which extended Prosser's lead to 22-8.

While the offense wasn't as effective in the second half, there were productive drives that used a lot of clock and kept Tumwater's dangerous offense off the field. Bolt completed 21 of 35 passes for 280 yards, connecting with eight different receivers, and Kernan provided crucial balance on the ground with 86 yards on 21 carries.

"In the first half we played great, and in the second half not so great," Bolt said. "We missed some opportunities in the second half but Tumwater's a great team. They made some adjustments and you have to expect that. But we still got the win. Having Michael running that well, that was huge."

Tumwater came in with a 13-0 record averaging 45 points a game and did generate 288 yards in Saturday's title game. But 126 of that came on three plays, two of which set up its first score. Bolt's lone interception led to Tumwater's second score, which came with 6:54 left in the game and narrowed the margin to 22-15.

The Mustangs responded by converting three third-down plays on a drive that consumed 4:14 and, while it ended on downs, left Tumwater with the ball on its own 24 with 2:27 to go.

The T-Birds got close to midfield before Prosser's defense stopped the drive on downs.

"It was tough in the second half, but we did enough to get it done," Kernan said of the offense. "All three running backs did well, and Tanner ran well when he had to, and that was a game-changer. They weren't ready for our run game. Tanner's a great quarterback and I'd be worried if I had to play him, too. Our offensive line got a good push up front and that made all the difference."

Prosser finished 13-1 and earned the program's fifth state title since 1992.

"I thought we were balanced, which we needed to be, and the defense was amazing — which we've come to expect," said coach Corey Ingvalson. "Tumwater has some great players but we slowed them down enough. That was a tough situation at the end, but we expect to stop teams. Our defense has bailed us out a few times before because they can — they play at such a high level and with such tremendous effort. It's the best defense in the state — there's no argument against that now."

None at all.

Prosser 8 14 0 0 — 22

Tumwater 0 8 0 7 — 15

Pro — Kolby Swift 1 pass from Tanner Bolt (JR Coleman pass from Logan Hamlin)

Pro — Kason Blair 30 pass from Bolt (Ricardo Herrera kick)

Tum — Easton Trakel 42 pass from Noah Andrews (Cade Otton pass from Spencer Dowers)

Pro — Noah Flores 10 pass from Bolt (Herrera kick)

Tum — Jarid Barrett 3 run (Nathan Seaman kick)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING — Prosser, Michael Kernan 21-87, Flores 7-16, Coleman 6-8, Bolt 6-(minus 4), Team 1-(minus 1). Tumwater, Andrews 13-89, Dominic Jones 8-73, Barrett 9-23, Trakel 1-5.

PASSING — Prosser, Bolt 21-35-1-280, Blair 0-1-0-0. Tumwater, Dowers 5-13-1-56, Andrews 2-7-3-53.

RECEIVING — Prosser, Borrego 8-91, Blair 3-64, Kernan 2-55, Javier Diaz 2-19, Flores 2-15, Swift 2-7, Coleman 1-22, Jay Munn 1-7. Tumwater, Otton 3-27, Trakel 2-47, Andrews 2-35.