

# Column: Tradition isn't just lip service for Mustangs

**By Scott Spruill**

[sspruill@yakimaherald.com](mailto:sspruill@yakimaherald.com)

---

TACOMA — On the bottom of the itinerary sheet posted in the hotel hallway were these precepts:

Tradition.

Who we represent.

Find a way.

No idle chatter there. In Prosser, these ideas mean everything and now more than ever. On Saturday, they were all instrumental in bringing another state championship to a community that embraces its football heritage like few others.

When the Mustangs took the field in the Tacoma Dome on Saturday morning, none of them had ever played there before. But after defeating Tumwater 22-15 in the Class 2A finale with the flair of a seasoned, unflappable crew, none of them felt like rookies because of all that came before them.

The three consecutive appearances and back-to-back titles in the Kingdome from 1991 to 1993 when Tom Moore's regime quickly hit full stride, the memorable rally to beat Sammamish in 1999 and the 35-point victory in the 2007 championship game. This was Prosser's ninth trip to the finals since 1991 — a legacy emblazoned on their jerseys — and these kids felt it.

"The connection in this program from the past to the present and into the future is huge," said first-year coach Corey Ingvalson, who played in the 1999 title game.

"Honestly, I feel it drives us. I know that's the case for me personally, and for our

coaching staff and throughout the community. It's a special bond and these kids are forever a part of it."

The pressing question when Moore stepped down in 2009, ending a 23-year run that produced a 234-38 record and four state titles, was would the program continue its dominance? The Mustangs retained the bloodline with former quarterback Benji Sonnichsen, who coached six years and reached the semifinals three times. Sonnichsen's 2012 and 2013 teams were both turned back by this same Tumwater juggernaut and Sid Otton, the state's all-time winningest coach.

Once again staying within the Mustang nation, Ingvalson took over for Sonnichsen last summer and the question is now answered: Yes, the red horses charge on.

"Winning a state title is where the bar is set," said junior quarterback Tanner Bolt, who owns a vintage red Ford Mustang. "All the people who come out and all the former players you meet and talk about — the tradition is phenomenal. Thinking of the older guys, you don't want to let them down. Tradition is a big, big thing for us and it's basically what Prosser football is all about."

There's no doubt Tumwater is awash in tradition as well, having won five state championships and with Otton, who started at THS in 1974, rolling up a remarkable 351-110 career record.

But Saturday was entirely Prosser's day, both in the affirmation of its status as one of the elite programs in the state and the way it won the game, making two separate defensive stops in the final two minutes.

These Mustangs also paid homage to the 1999 team, which regrouped from a humbling regular-season loss to Ferndale, made wholesale changes and then charged to the 3A state title.

In Week 7 of this season, the Mustangs lost an overtime game at Ellensburg, the nemesis that had ended Prosser's postseason in each of the last two years.

"The best thing about that game was that all of us seniors got together the next day and we all said, 'Look, we need to get this together,'" said defensive stalwart David Ledesma. "It pulled us closer and got us more focused. Now look where it got us — state champions."

"I can't stress enough how great this team is because of the way we play together," added senior Riley Lusk. "It never falls on one guy, and that's like the stories you hear about the past teams. The only reason we won today is because we played together as a unit, all together, and that's the tradition. To add to that, it's indescribable."

But there is a road map. Right there on the wall.

Tradition.

Who we represent.

Find a way.