

Running mate - Prosser Mustangs

Michael Kernan's versatility makes him a top weapon for Prosser

By Roger Underwood

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PROSSER — Michael Kernan plays for a Prosser program known for throwing the football. The Mustangs always have been, it seems, dating back to the days of the late Bucky Bruns, and perhaps always will be. That said, Prosser would probably not have celebrated its sixth state championship last December, claimed via a 22-15 conquest of Tumwater, without a running back like Kernan.

But there is more to the 6-foot, 180-pound senior ballcarrier than meets the ground, if you will. And the Mustangs figure to once again deploy his versatility in a CWAC that, once again, seems loaded at the top. Kernan's contributions in last year's title game offer evidence as to what coach Corey Ingvalson can expect this season.

He carried the ball 21 times for 87 yards. He caught two of Tanner Bolt's passes for 55 yards. Kernan also returned a kickoff 21 yards and, as a safety on defense, made an interception near the goal line.

His defensive assignment, which came during a midseason reshuffling, speaks to Kernan's athleticism and reliability. "They wanted me to go to safety because I could move to the ball," said Kernan, who moved to it to the tune of 11 — that's right, 11 — interceptions. "On offense I was asked to do what the offense needed. I've been pretty much everywhere on the field except quarterback, I guess."

He expects similar responsibilities this year, along with the added authority of being a senior. Other final-year players in Prosser's storied system have handled their status graciously, Kernan said, enough so to have set a positive example for him and others.

"Just playing with all the seniors who graduated last year is one of my favorite memories," Kernan said. "We'd played with those guys pretty much our whole lives, and they never treated us like lower classmen." Or lesser competitors.

"People said we were too small and didn't have the right players," Kernan said of the pregame buzz regarding the Mustangs' 31-0 state quarterfinal defeat of Ellensburg, a team it had lost to 27-26 in overtime during the regular season. "So we just came out with a different attitude, and we were able to shut them out and totally dominate the whole game, not just sections of it." And the play that defined and quite possibly decided last year's title game — Riley Lusk's late fumble recovery, which was followed on the same play by his own fumble and subsequent recovery deep in Prosser territory — will stay with Kernan for the rest of his life.

"When I saw Kolby (Swift) hit the ball out and Riley recover it with 13 seconds left, my heart was racing," he said. "Then when Riley fumbled, my heart just dropped. Then he got it back, and I had the first emotion all over again."