

KICKOFF 2016

Second term: Prosser's Bolt focused on another title run

PROSSER — Tanner Bolt started grooming himself to be a Prosser quarterback a long time ago, even in subtle ways.

Like picking out his first car. A vintage Ford Mustang. Red, of course.

As comfortable in that 1966 classic as helming the Prosser offense, Bolt nevertheless enters his senior season in a daunting situation. He's the reigning Class 2A state player of the year, having steered the program to its fifth state championship as a junior, and now he's got to break in a new crew with all the same aspirations.

It can't be easy to live up to the remarkable legacy of Prosser quarterbacks, even when you're already a big part of it. But this, too, he's comfortable with and understands the task ahead. "It's a blessing and a big challenge, coming back from a season like we had," Bolt said before Prosser's first practice. "We were state champions but that was 2015. I heard a quote that I thought was pretty cool — 'There's a reason the rear-view mirror is smaller than the front window.' That's got to be the mindset and that's the challenge."

For nearly three decades, Prosser quarterbacks have defined prolific. Since 1988, the full-time starter has averaged 1,915 yards and 25 touchdowns in the regular season. On the state's all-time list of most touchdowns in a season, Kellen Moore set the still-standing record twice and Jordan Durbin ranks third and fifth. "In Prosser it's pretty easy to stay humble, especially at quarterback," Bolt smiled. "We've had some great ones here, and I've had guys come up after a game and say, 'hey, watch those interceptions.' It feels great being a part of that history."

That history watches him closely every day with quarterback coach Aaron Sonnichsen, who had the job in 1993 when Prosser won the AA state title. Sonnichsen presided over a job share two years ago when Bolt and Kasen Blair split reps and then shepherded Bolt through a full junior season with a sharp spike at the end.

How's this for a finish: At the end of the regular season Bolt earned honorable mention in the CWAC. A month later he was 2A player of the year after throwing for 280 yards and all three of Prosser's touchdowns in a 22-15 victory over Tumwater in the state finale.

But, as previously stressed, that was last year's news. The ground game remains in good hands with the return of Michael Kernan, but gone are three all-league receivers. "We've got some new guys — juniors who had to wait their turn behind that great senior class we had," Bolt said. "The potential is there to be really good top to bottom. We had new guys last year — I bet nobody thought Kason and Roy (Borrego) would put up the numbers they did. All the 7-on-7s we do and the work we put in, I think we'll get them dialed in pretty quick."

As for himself, Bolt freely acknowledges there's more dialing in for him to do. Even with a 62-percent completion rate and 43 touchdown passes a year ago, the 6-foot-1, 190-pound senior has worked diligently at advancing his skills. His team needs it, and his future as a college quarterback requires it. "The most important thing for me is always decision making," he explained. "The ability to pick up on things quicker, be a step ahead of the defense, have a greater grasp of our offense and have better footwork — those are all things I think about and work on all the time."

A three-sport athlete also involved in basketball and track, Bolt got his skills out on the recruiting trail, attending several elite quarterback camps and playing for a Bellevue 7-on-7 all-star team. All of his predecessors have dealt with the perception that Prosser QBs and their hefty numbers are mostly products of the up-tempo, high-scoring system. "There's some of that I guess," he said. "That's why it's important for me to get out there and show what I can do. Going to camps and getting all this input — everything gets thrown at you and you have to sift through it. You take out what you want and what works with your offense. I just want to learn and get better, and these camps really open your eyes to all the talent that's out there."

Bolt resides among the inner circle of Prosser's quarterback lineage, joining Durbin (2007), Tali Ena (1999), Sonnichsen (1993) and Neal Bybee (1992) as state champions. And add Bucky Bruns, who led Prosser to a 9-0 season in 1968 with a state-poll title.

Now he wants to give this team its best chance to shine under the ultra-bright lights at Art Fiker Stadium. It starts Friday night against Kennewick, a 3A state quarterfinalist last year. “From all the camps and film, hopefully I’ll be able to take a pretty big step forward from last year,” he said. “I feel like I will be a lot better and that will help our offense. We know 2015 was special but it’s over. We don’t get to start games 7-0 because we won state last year.”

“The bar is set high for Tanner,” said Prosser coach Corey Ingvalson. “All those passes and all those touchdowns in 2015 were thrown to some very good seniors and playmakers. He’s got the right mindset that it’s a completely new year, and he’s holding kids accountable. I think he’s ready to lead this program.” And so starts another season with all the prestige and pressure that comes with his position. Likeable and easy-going, Bolt has the ideal demeanor to handle the heat and is, in fact, well suited to help a new team find its footing.

“When I was a kid back when Kellen and Jordan played, they were like Dan Marino in my eyes,” he said. “They were huge big-time celebrities to me. It’s weird because I don’t think kids see me that way, but sometimes you surprise yourself. Maybe they do, and that would be great.” Nonstop inspiration — that’s how these Prosser quarterbacks keep rolling through. This one just happens to have a little flair for style, cruising down Wine Country Road in that vintage red ’Stang.