

Class 2A state final notebook: Prosser defense picks off several Tumwater threats

By Scott Spruill

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TACOMA, Wash. — Kolby Swift's strip and Riley Lusk's fumble recovery were certainly the show-stoppers at the end of Prosser's 22-15 victory over Tumwater on Saturday.

But the Mustangs' defense came up with four interceptions for the third time during Prosser's playoff run, giving the ball-hawking secondary 14 picks in four weeks.

Seniors Kason Blair, Thomas Niemeyer and Roy Borrego, and junior Michael Kernan stopped Tumwater drives with interceptions, a wave made possible because Prosser's front defense was effective enough against the vaunted Wing-T to force the T-Birds to throw.

"I'm shocked," Kernan said. "That's a great team and some great players. We knew it was going to be a big challenge against a team like that, and we just came out and did a better job. We read their receivers and made the plays."

Kernan's pick came in the end zone early in the third quarter, and Borrego's came on the goal line at the end of the same period. Kernan was playing free safety when Tumwater managed to complete just 2 of 9 passes on its last two possessions.

"A lot of those guys have played together for three years, through some ups and downs, but they stuck together," said coach Corey Ingvalson. "We've come to expect it from them. Sometimes expectations can be tough, but these guys rise to the challenge. Coach (Kevin) Gilman had a great plan on defense and they made it happen."

All the more impressive was that Niemeyer, a first-team all-CWAC linebacker, was unable to play in the second half because of a hand injury.

Tumwater came in with a turnover ratio of plus-11, but Prosser got the better of it on Saturday, 5-2. And Mustang quarterback Tanner Bolt was sure glad to have his defense after his one interception with 8:29 left in the game.

“When you turn it over like that, it’s nice to know you’ve got the best defense in the state backing you up.”

IN THE GROOVE: Prosser’s offense made its decisive push during its final two possessions of the first half and Bolt was completely locked in, completing 9 of 9 passes for 130 yards and two touchdowns to take a 22-8 lead into the intermission.

While Blair and Noah Flores finished off the drives with touchdowns, Bolt’s favorite target was clearly Borrego. The senior wideout had all seven of the other receptions in that flurry and finished with a game-high eight catches for 91 yards.

NOT AGAIN!: When Tumwater’s 6-foot-5, 215-pound linebacker Cade Otton blitzed over the center to force and recover a fumble with 1:09 left in the game, that was some flashback for the T-Birds.

Last week in the semifinals, at the same venue and same time of day, Otton forced a fumble with 1:42 left while trailing Archbishop Murphy 21-17. Tumwater then scored the winning touchdown at 1:15 to escape with a 24-21 victory.

This time, however, the T-Birds were stopped short of their sixth state title when Swift and Lusk teamed up for the game-winning stop.

STATE-TITLE TALLY: While Prosser's official number of state football championship is now five, the Mustang faithful are counting six with the addition of 1968.

Before the start of the state playoffs in 1973, coach Dennis Rath's 1968 team posted a 9-0 record behind the exploits of quarterback Bucky Bruns. The Mustangs finished the season ranked No. 1 in the Associated Press state poll.

ON THE SIDELINE: Bolt wasn't the only Prosser player to complete a pass. Logan Hamlin connected with JR Coleman on a swinging-gate two-point conversion pass after Prosser's first score. ... Kernan finished with 163 all-purpose yards, rushing 21 times for 86 yards, catching two passes for 55 yards and returning a kickoff 21 yards. His 56-yard catch over the middle in the first quarter set up the first score. ... Prosser is now 3-2 against Tumwater with a 145-139 scoring advantage in the tight series.