

SELLING OUT FOR GREEN AND BLUE



Michael Robertson at the Pro Image sports shop in the Lewiston Center Mall sells many types of Seattle Seahawks football shirts, caps and other championship and Super Bowl-related items.

Tribune/
Barry Kough

Retailers are riding the Seahawks' bandwagon

By MATT BANEY
OF THE TRIBUNE

The Seattle Seahawks played in the Super Bowl eight years ago, but for some reason, the Hawks team that will appear in Sunday's NFL title game seems far more popular than its predecessor.

Just ask Michael Robertson. The owner of Pro Image sports apparel in the Lewiston Center Mall said he's seen the demand for Seahawks gear "just explode over the last couple of years."

And why is that?

"They have more characters on the

team, more personality, than they did the first time around," Robertson said this week. "They were kind of vanilla compared to ... Ben and Jerry's ice cream now, because they're just so much more exciting, so much more fun."

As fans in the Inland Northwest have jumped on the Seahawks' bandwagon — some newcomers, some who had been in hiding — they've looked for ways to display their enthusiasm. And Robertson and his fellow retailers are happy to sell them a dizzying array of clothes and novelties.

At Pro Image, which Robertson opened in 1995, there are Seahawks

jerseys, shirts, hats and jackets. But that's just the standard stuff. You can also find the Seahawks logo on shot glasses, posters, garbage cans, bibs, freezer mugs, lanyards, wristbands, temporary tattoos, beer koozies, key chains, blankets, flags, lamps ...

"Anything and everything you can think of, they'll make it," Robertson said.

After Seattle beat San Francisco in the NFC championship game two weeks ago, a few local stores immediately started offering officially licensed gear declaring the Seahawks

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NFC champions. Robertson — who had customers waiting at his door the day after the game — said he sold 90 T-shirts right out of the box they were delivered in.

Sports Authority in Lewiston actually had the Seahawks NFC championship items a few days *before* the game, store manager Jay Bowen said.

“And so the second they won the game, I called my store and said, ‘OK, put it on the social media and get the product out,’” Bowen said.

Seahawks Super Bowl champions shirts are now sitting in Bowen’s office. If Denver wins, the shirts must be returned to the vendors; if Seattle wins, Bowen plans on putting the shirts on sale right after the game ends Sunday evening.

Bowen is the only one allowed to see the advanced merchandise before the game is over.

“It’s actually really quite secretive,” Bowen said. “We basically almost get threatened that

if any of it gets put out on the media or in social media, we can lose it and not get the licensed product anymore.”

Sports Authority has only sold Seahawks gear for about a year, Bowen said, after the chain became an official retailer for the team.

“It’s like Christmas every day for us, because we don’t know what’s coming in,” he said. “New stuff is coming in every day.”

Bowen and Robertson both said that interest in Seahawks merchandise has never been higher. One reason for that: Nike became the NFL’s official uniform designer two years ago. It has redesigned the Seahawks uniforms, and the gear they have inspired is “more fashionable,” Robertson said.

And everyone likes a winner, of course.

“The bad thing about us, sports stores in the Northwest, we haven’t had a lot to cheer about,” Robertson said. “This is probably the biggest thing that’s happened in the Northwest.”

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