

The Blitz Week 10

THE BEST OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



**NORDONIA 42,
WADSWORTH 33**

Returns matter

Punt, kickoff for touchdowns spark Knights

Albert Grindie
The Gazette

WADSWORTH — Two weeks ago against Hudson, Wadsworth played well for two quarters and survived Hudson.

Last week, the Grizzlies played well for three quarters before imploding in a one-point loss to Highland.

On Friday, Wadsworth played well enough to beat Nordonia in the Suburban League National Conference finale, but multiple special teams meltdowns loomed large in a 42-33 loss that dropped the Grizzlies to third place after starting the season 8-0.

Brock Barwidi returned a punt 77 yards for a touchdown in the first quarter for the Knights (9-1, 6-1). Then, as the Grizzlies were gaining steam in the fourth, Dominick Jackson took back a kickoff 78 yards to effectively end any comeback hopes.

That's not including a blocked extra point in the closing seconds of the first half that Wadsworth spent the rest of the night chasing.

"Special teams, it got us tonight," Grizzlies coach Justin Todd said. "I thought our kids played hard enough and well enough offensively to win the game."

"We've had kicking woes all year. Everybody knows that. Our coverage units have been relatively good, and tonight when I went back and watched it on the iPad, it was an effort thing on special teams. These are guys who are trying to earn more reps. I learned tonight we've got to have full-on competition on our coverage units because they're not very good right now."

Wadsworth (8-2, 5-2) ran 74 plays to Nordonia's 49 and outgained the Knights 433-273. The Grizzlies also had more net yards



Schmeltzer



Kinn



**HIGHLAND 13,
HUDSON 10**



NICK GAMMET / GAZETTE

Highland's Chatham Phillips returns one of his two interceptions.

Flair for dramatic

Hornets force five turnovers, hold on at buzzer to clinch outright title

John Urchek
The Gazette

HUDSON — Led by four combined turnovers by seniors Evan Foust and Chatham Phillips, the Highland football team turned in a clutch performance for the ages Friday night.

The Hornets wrapped up sole possession of the Suburban League National Conference championship and the top seed in the Division II, Region 5 playoffs with a 13-10 victory over Hudson.



Foust



Phillips

"It's huge," Foust said. "We came into the National Conference this year, and we set a tone. I'm really

proud of the team and how far we came this season."

Foust recovered a fumble by Explorers running back Reno Ferri (29 carries, 157 yards, TD) in the third quarter and forced another against Hudson receiver Anthony Paolucci that was recovered by Ben Radigan in the fourth.

Foust also hurried Explorers quarterback Hayden Lipinski (8-for-19, 121 yards, 2 INTs) on a fourth-and-7 from the Highland 31-yard line in the

second quarter to force an incomplete. That led to a 69-yard, 3:59 drive for a touchdown with 38 seconds left in the half when quarterback Colton Wadley hit Foust over the middle for a 13-yard score and a 13-0 lead.

"(The touchdown) was huge, but it wouldn't have happened without the O-line being able to push us down the field like that," Foust said. "Props to them. Us being able to get into the end zone was huge."

See HORNETS, C2



Highland's Evan Foust and Jake Weber celebrate a touchdown by Foust.

NICK GAMMETT / GAZETTE

HORNETS

From C1

Getting that touchdown proved pivotal, as Hudson limited the Hornets to just 85 of their 251 yards in the second half. Levi Clark (7 carries, 55 yards), Wadle (9, 53) and Anthony DePompei (15, 51) led a balanced running attack for Highland, though 21 of Clark's yards came on a run in which the Explorers recovered a fumble in the first quarter. Wadle finished 5-for-15 for 67 yards and an interception.

Hudson rallied in the second half, getting a 26-yard field goal from Xavier Pallo with 4:31 left in the third before Ferri cut the Hornets' lead to 13-10 with a 7-yard touchdown following Keswick Ritley recovering a muffed punt on the Highland 29.

Foust's forced fumble followed on the ensuing drive.

Hudson got one last chance when it forced Highland's fifth punt and started on the Explorers 35. On third-and-10, Lipinski found Gavin Hitchcock for a 40-yard diving catch along the sideline that set up a 42-yard field goal attempt by Xavier Pallo, but he missed wide left for the second time on the evening.

Highland 13, Hudson 10

HIGHLAND 0 13 0 0 - 13
HUDSON 0 0 3 7 - 10

Second

Hi — Jonah Kowza 32 field goal, 4:48.
Hi — Kowza 38 field goal, 7:33.
Hi — Evan Foust 15 pass from Colton Wadle (Kowza kick), 9:38.

Third

Hu — Xavier Pallo 26 field goal, 4:31.

Fourth

Hu — Reno Ferri 7 run (Pallo kick), 7:21.

	Hi	Hu
First downs	16	17
Rushing	41/184	43/134
Rushing average	4.5	4.8
Passing	5/15	8/20
Passing yards	67	121
Total offense	56/201	63/155
Punting	5/32.8	3/42.0
Penalties	6/55	4/40
Fumbles	2/1	2/2

RUSHING: Highland — Levi Clark 7-55, Wadle 9-53, Anthony DePompei 15-51, Colton Winston 8-20, Frankie Iannaghi 1-8, Team 1-11. Hudson — Reno Ferri 28-157, Hayden Lipinski 12-30, Anthony Paolucci 2-7.

PASSING: Highland — Wadle 5-15-67-1, Hudson — Lipinski 8-18-121-2, Team 0-1-0-0.

RECEIVING: Highland — Jake Weber 2-26, Iannaghi 1-21, Foust 1-13, DePompei 1-7, Hudson — Gavin Hitchcock 2-61, Mark Salem 1-25, Paolucci 2-21, Benjamin Hagedorn 1-8, Ferri 1-4, Keswick Ritley 1-5.

MISSED FIELD GOALS: Highland — Kowza 48 (BLK), Hudson — Pallo 24 (WU), 42 (WU).

That set up Highland's fourth win of the season by four points or fewer.

"In those games, we're always prepared for when the situation comes," Phillips said. "It helps us all build trust in one another."

After Clark's fumble, Phillips intercepted Lipinski for the first time to stop that drive. His second interception set up a 38-yard field goal by Jonah Kowza for a 6-0 lead.

"We stress every week, staying in the right position at safety," Phillips said. "It felt amazing to do my job and be in the right spot."

"I've got to give props to our scout team. I'm going against the best receivers, Anthony DePompei, Jake Weber, Ben Radigan, so they always get me prepared."

Kowza hit from 32 yards earlier in the second quarter. With 10:48 left and a chance to expand the lead to 16-3, Kowza's 46-yard attempt was blocked off the edge by William Sutton.

Hudson moved into Highland territory 10 times, but only came away with 10 points due to the Hornets' propensity to make big plays. The Explorers threw an interception, missed two field goals, turned the ball over on downs, fumbled twice, punted once and had a drive end by halftime on the Highland side of the field.

"Words can't even explain it," Hornets defensive end Lukas Grillis said. "Starting the season, we're in a new league and hearing every talk that we're going to go 6-4, which I thought was B.S. Going 9-1 and winning the Suburban League is probably the best thing we did all year."

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