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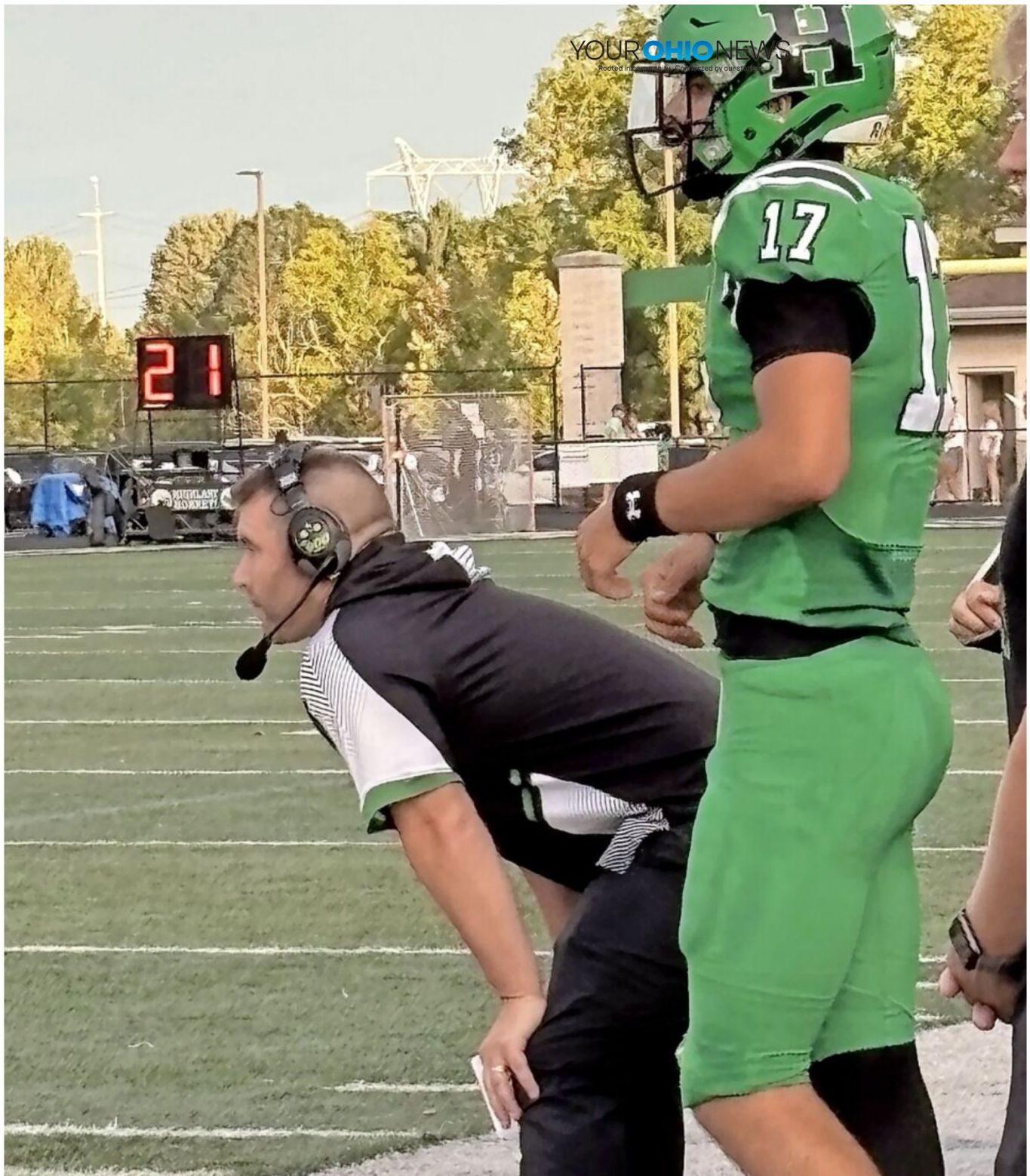
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Wadle delivers near-perfect debut as Highland's starting quarterback

Sophomore accounts for six touchdowns as Hornets roll past Avon Lake 55-20





Highland sophomore quarterback Colton Wadle, 17, has the full confidence of Hornets coach Mike Gibbons, left, following Wadle's six-touchdown performance against Avon Lake. Tanner Stumpf

Todd Stumpf

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After his first game as a starting varsity quarterback, nobody would have blamed Colton Wadle if he had just walked off into the sunset. The Highland sophomore had the ultimate mic-drop game to kick things off.

The youngster now has most of three seasons left to try to top himself. Nobody's saying he can't. It just won't be easy.

That's how good Wadle's opener was.

Facing a solid Avon Lake team Sept. 4, Wadle completed all 11 of his passes, including four for touchdowns, and ran 11 times for 39 yards and two more scores. All of which contributed mightily to Highland's 55-20 nonleague win over the Shoremen.

"It's just my teammates, and coaches, and the practices, all of them believing in me and giving me a chance to throw it," Wadle said. "It means a lot."

Things got going quickly for the sophomore, who would still be playing on Saturday mornings if not for an injury to starter Johnny Prucha, who was injured in the second half of the Hornets' Week 2 win at Strongsville.

After a completion on his first play for no gain, Wadle launched a deep throw down the right hash, which hit Ben Radigan in stride and turned into an 80-yard touchdown.

"That got me going," Wadle said. "It got the nerves out instantly."

By the latter stages of the second quarter, Wadle had connected with Radigan again, this time on a 45-yard score, hit Evan Foust for a 63-yard TD and had touchdown runs of 8 and 7 yards. Highland, with its defense contributing Jake Weber's 21-yard interception-return TD, took a 42-0 lead.

Wadle added a 17-yard TD pass to Weber in the fourth quarter, a minute before the defense struck again, this time on Nate Painter's 29-yard pick-6.

It quite possibly was the best game ever played by a Highland quarterback. The 6-foot-4, 200-pounder did just about everything right.

Hornets coach Mike Gibbons knew Wadle was capable but likely would not expect that kind of output — from anybody.

"We knew he was very talented," Gibbons said. "Colton's a kid that loves the game. He's obviously got good size, great arm talent, so the sky's the limit for him. It was obviously terrible to see Johnny go down last week. We were able to pull away with the win there. I'm just excited for him."

While there's work to be done, the Hornets appear to have righted their ship since a 34-0 loss to Walsh Jesuit on opening night.

While Prucha couldn't play, he could still be a factor. Wearing a sling on his passing arm, Prucha could be seen throughout the win over Avon Lake in Wadle's ear.

"He helped a lot keeping me confident, knowing where my reads are and just keeping my head in the game," Wadle said of his senior teammate.

And just like that, Highland, which looked lost against Walsh, looks ready to regain its place as one of the best teams in the state in Division II. The Hornets have a new field general and a lot of swagger.

"Colton stepped up in a really tough opportunity," senior jack-of-all-trades Evan Foust said. "I'm really proud of him. I think he has a really high ceiling and for him to step up with that, this is great motivation going into league play against a really good team like Nordonia."

And beyond. Highland has come to expect to be playing well into November. After losing to Walsh, that almost seemed like a pipe dream.

When you expect to win, though, you win.

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“We just believe,” Foust said. “We win and we believe. We don’t lose hope. We just keep battling to the end. This was super-important. We see how the offense and defense can play. We did a lot of really good things that we can celebrate.”

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