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HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Avon advances to OHSAA Division II semifinals with 36-19 win over Highland

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Avon head coach Mike Elder talks to his team after Friday's regional final win over Highland. Austin Opfer, special to cleveland.com



By Austin Opfer | special to cleveland.com and [Advance Local Express Desk](#)

BRUNSWICK, Ohio — Avon punched its ticket to the Division II state semifinals with a 36-19 victory over Highland in the Region 6 final at Brunswick Auto Mart Stadium on Friday.

The Eagles built a commanding lead with a balanced offensive attack before their special teams delivered the decisive blow. With Highland attempting to mount a comeback, Lance Dawson blocked a 41-yard field goal attempt in the fourth quarter. Nathan Peters scooped up the ball and returned it 70 yards for a touchdown, sealing the victory.

Avon, now 12-1, will face Walsh Jesuit in the state semifinals. The Warriors improved to 11-1 with a 35-7 victory over Archbishop Hoban.

The Eagles' offense totaled 336 yards, including 239 on the ground, and scored touchdowns on four of their first five possessions to build a 29-12 lead midway through the third quarter. Running back Quiante Smith led the way with a game-high 176 yards and a touchdown on 23 carries. Senior quarterback Blake Elder completed 12 of 15 passes for 122 yards and added 17

rushing yards and a score on three carries.

“We pride ourselves on being balanced,” said Avon coach Mike Elder. “I felt in the first half we really did that well, and in the second half the weather kind of dictated that we were going to be a little more conservative and run the football.”

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Highland showed fight throughout the game, particularly from running back Casey Myser, who totaled 149 yards on 11 touches. He scored on a 44-yard touchdown reception and rushed for 105 yards and another score on 10 carries. His 57-yard run in the third quarter cut Avon’s lead to 10 points before the blocked field goal shifted momentum back to the Eagles. Senior quarterback Grady Gibb completed 7 of 11 passes for a game-high 167 yards and a touchdown.

Dawson proved to be a force on both sides of the ball for Avon, recording 2.5 sacks on defense while also blocking a point-after attempt in addition to the field goal.

“We work hard at blocking extra points. We practice that and our guys take pride in that,” said Elder. “Tonight we had an extra point block and a field goal block which was the turning point in the game. The momentum was on their side, and that was a huge play with the block.”

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