

**PRESEASON FOOTBALL:
HIGHLAND VS. MENTOR
LAKE CATHOLIC**

Strong start

Impact plays spark Hornets

John Urchek
The Gazette

GRANGER TWP. — The Highland football team was able to shake off early jitters Friday to defeat Mentor Lake Catholic 17-6 in its first scrimmage.

The action didn't start out how either the offense or defense would have preferred, with quarterback Johnny Prucha throwing an interception on his first pass of the morning and a blown coverage in the secondary leading to a 47-yard Cougars touchdown.

However, Highland cleaned up mistakes quickly as it prepares to welcome Division II state semifinalist Walsh Jesuit to North Gateway Tire Field for the Aug. 21 season opener.

"I feel like it was a pretty good scrimmage," All-Gazette linebacker Evan Foust said. "We made some mistakes and we've got to learn to fix them, but I feel like the team played well overall. I'm pretty happy with how we played today."



Foust

In addition to leading the rapidly improving first-string defense, Foust ran the ball twice for 9 yards and caught one pass for 4 yards while splitting time in the backfield with Colton Winston (7 carries, 13 yards, TD; 2 receptions, 38 yards).



Weber

The scrimmage was played with teams alternating offense and defense for 10-minute periods.

Following Prucha's interception, he led the Hornets on a 47-yard drive that ended with a 40-yard field goal by All-Gazette kicker Jonah Kowza for a 3-0 lead.

The first string closed its final period with a pair of touchdowns. After Prucha hit Ben Radigan for a 10-yard gain on a fourth-and-4 from the Highland 36-yard line, he found Jake Weber down the seam for a 55-yard bomb that was the highlight of the day.

"I felt like we started slow, but we bounced back and looked great out there," Prucha said. "I connected with Jake, who ran a great route. It all came together, and we did great."

Though this is Prucha's first year starting after the graduation of Grady Gibb, Weber said it felt like old times with fellow receivers Radigan, Frankie Ian-naggi and Anthony DePompei.

"The chemistry has kind of been there," Weber said. "We've grown up playing together. Obviously, it's kind of a new offense, but we've been playing quarterback and receiver for a while now."

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HORNETS

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"We've got good chemistry, and it's only going to get better with more scrimmages and practices."

Winston capped the first string's final drive with a 1-yard touchdown run. Earlier on the drive, he caught a 38-yard wheel route to keep the drive moving.

Highland is coming off a D-II,

Region 6 final appearance, while the Cougars were D-IV, Region 13 semifinalists.

Following Lake Catholic's touchdown, which did not end with an attempted conversion, the Cougars moved the ball again but stalled on downs at the 10-yard line. That red-zone stop seemed to fuel Highland's defense, which forced two simulated punts and a turnover on downs over its final three first-string possessions.

The punts came after Lake Catholic

went backwards from the initial line of scrimmage of the 30.

Foust had a sack, another tackle for a loss and would have had an interception if not for the play being blown dead for a simulated sack. End Lukas Grillis also made a couple impact plays with a couple of hard hits defensively.

"We came out a little slow," Foust said. "We came together and started to figure it out. When we work as a team, our defense is unstoppable."

While the Hornets have plenty to

work on as they get ready for Walsh Jesuit, there also was plenty to like for coach Mike Gibbons and his staff.

"It's the first scrimmage, so you see some good things and some things you definitely need to correct if we want to be a good team," Gibbons said. "I thought the physicality was good on both ends. It's the first step in a long journey. I'm proud of our kids."

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