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KRISTIN BAUER/ CHRONICLE North Ridgeville High School's Cole Miller (10) throws the ball while get...

H.S. Football Playoffs: North Ridgeville can't keep up with No. 1 Highland



Chris Sweeney
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GRANGER TWP. — Highland's defense didn't even let North Ridgeville kick the hornet's nest.

The Hornets showed why only one team has scored 10 points against them all season as



6 semifinal Friday evening.

"They're great and they came in with a great game plan," said senior quarterback Cole Miller, who was limited to 152 yards passing and 2 yards rushing after rushing for at least 100 yards in each of the last seven games. "Shoutout to them, their coaches got them prepared and ready to go. They're athletic and they were flying all over the field. We just couldn't find an answer to that and that's why we got the result we had today."

No. 1-seeded Highland (12-0) will play in its third straight regional final against No. 3 Avon (11-1), which defeated No. 2 Wadsworth (11-1) in its semifinal Friday to reach its ninth straight regional final.

No. 4 North Ridgeville ends its season at 10-2, with its only losses to the Region 6 finalists – Highland and Avon. The Rangers won 10 games for the first time since 1978 and made their first appearance in a regional semifinal.



"I told them don't worry about the score tonight," North Ridgeville coach Bryan Morgan said. "What we did this year was create history for North Ridgeville. At halftime I told them that there are a lot of people sitting in the stands who this season meant a lot to them and to this community. You can see it, there's pride here, there's kids who are excited playing football for North Ridgeville. This senior class deserves that respect and that pride because they're the winningest class to come through North Ridgeville."



North Ridgeville quickly found out why Highland's defense ranks among the best not just in Division II, but all of Ohio. Since allowing 10 points to McDowell (Pennsylvania) in Week 1, the Hornets have allowed seven points or fewer in all but one game with four shutouts (not counting Barberton's forfeit).

The Hornets have allowed less than a touchdown per game, holding opponents to 5.4 points.

"They were just really strong," said North Ridgeville junior receiver Cole Allison, who finished with 81 yards on five catches while running for 16 more. "They were really strong

on season and come for them next year.

Highland's offense is pretty good, too, as it has scored at least 40 points in all but three of its games and at least 32 in the others. The Hornets scored touchdowns on their first seven drives Friday. The only drive that didn't result in six points was the final one with backups.

The Hornets spread the ball around to five receivers, three of whom caught touchdowns. Standout running back Casey Myser piled up 108 yards and a touchdown on 13 carries while quarterback Grady Gibb threw for 217 yards and four touchdowns and rushed for 54 yards and two more.

North Ridgeville had a chance to get back into the game down 14-0 with its most promising drive of the evening. The Rangers faced a third-and-1 from the Highland 2-yard line, but were stuffed on back-to-back attempts. Highland scored five plays later.

"When you're that close and you have two tries at it, you've got to put the ball in the end zone there," Morgan said. "We've got to get the job done as coaches to get them in the right position to score there. You score there, and you make it close, but we never had an answer for them defensively tonight. I'm not sure how long that would have lasted."

Contact Chris Sweeney at 329-7135 or ctsports@chroniclet.com. Follow him @CSweeney1686 on X.



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