

Strongest of the strong: Ranking Northeast Ohio's best by position

There's no shortage of top recruits anchoring their teams as the first kickoff of the regular season is days away.

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Leading up to the start of the 2025 high school football season this week, cleveland.com published watch lists of the top individual players at each position in Northeast Ohio.

A look at the unit rankings for each position:

QUARTERBACKS

1. Wadsworth: Few quarterbacks throw the ball with as much zip out of the pocket as Brysen Hall, who finished his freshman year with 2,137 yards and 22 touchdowns. Wadsworth won 11 games, plus a Suburban League title. Hall competed for the job last year with Ryan Stoops, who remains on the roster as a junior linebacker.

2. Maple Heights: Luke Anzlovar threw for 2,451 yards and 33 TDs last year in leading Maple Heights to eight wins and a first-round upset of Kenston in the OHSA Division III playoffs. The Mustangs will begin this season with him sidelined by injury, but they have depth behind him — and that factors into this ranking — as seniors Mike Banks and Kindall Brown have experience at the position. Brown started for coach Shaq Washington as a sophomore, and Banks played quarterback before high school and is likely to be the choice to hold the position until Anzlovar's return.

3. Kirtland: Pound for pound, Jake LaVerde is cleveland.com's pick for best quarterback in Northeast Ohio. He is a fourth-year starter for father and coach Tiger LaVerde, guiding Kirtland to the Division VI state finals every season they have been together. A broken bone in his arm kept him out for the second half of the regular season and well into the playoffs last season, but LaVerde still rushed for 1,135 yards and 11 TDs. He is 38-3 as Kirtland's starting quarterback.

4. St. Edward: Again, depth matters and that is what St. Edward has behind center. Senior Jonny Evanchick and junior left-hander Langston Lucas took most of the snaps in the preseason, competing for the starting job to replace graduated quarterback Thomas Casyni. Senior Caden Yondo also would start on most teams, and junior transfer Jack Sanders started last year at Solon, although he has since moved to line-backer.

5. Archbishop Hoban: The arrival of Nick Kinsey, an Eastern Michigan commit, elevates the Knights after they alternated two quarterbacks last season en route to another run at the Division II final four.

6. Rocky River: Ryan Taylor threw for 2,009 yards and 25 TDs as a junior. He also rushed for 586 yards, and the Pirates have depth behind him with sophomore Carter Atwater. Senior linebacker London Hoyer also has experience at the position, where Rocky River needed graduated standout Josh Mommers to step in for a game last year.

7. Hawken: Starter Donovan Moorhead is a Jacksonville State commit and has a football pedigree as the son of University of Akron coach Joe Moorhead.

8. Amherst: Talk about depth and options ... Amherst coach Tom Thorne considered sophomore Jack Coleman. Receiver Nick Wilkinson also played the position. But Cy Christensen comes in as the starter after leading Clearview for the last two years.

9. Avon: Blake Elder was Avon's depth the last two years, backing up cleveland.com Offensive Player of the Year and Kent State recruit Nolan Good for the defending Division II state champions. He also started multiple games as a sophomore and now finds himself as the man behind center for father and coach Mike Elder.

10. Glenville: Arvell Nelson Jr. returns as the starter at Glenville, where he previously alternated with Ruel Tomlinson Jr. as a sophomore and then LaMarques Greenwood II. Nelson is now atop the depth chart with freshman Chase Youngblood as one to watch. As for Greenwood, he is now at Cleveland Heights, where first-year coach Bryce Young saw a quarterback competition between Greenwood and returning starter Asher Wilson. The Tigers also were considered for this list with Benedictine, St. Ignatius and Madison.



Glenville senior linebacker Cincere Johnson awaits the snap during a scrimmage this month. Johnson committed to Ohio State this summer. Matt Goul, cleveland.com



Brandon White was injured for most of last season and is back to lead the Eagles as a senior. John Kuntz, cleveland.com



Wadsworth's Brysen Hall threw for 2,132 yards last season as a freshman. Joshua Gunter, cleveland.com



Harvey senior running back Shahn Alston is committed to play at USC next season. Matt Goul, cleveland.com

RUNNING BACKS

1. Archbishop Hoban: Brayton Feister rushed for 2,096 yards and 26 TDs as a sophomore last year for Hoban. He has since moved to linebacker, where he is being recruited at the next level, but junior Jance Henry has arrived as the new lead back. He played at Central Valley in Western Pennsylvania last year and has a slew of scholarship offers, including from Pittsburgh, Michigan State, Mississippi, West Virginia and Wisconsin. Hoban also can still use Feister when needed.

2. St. Edward: Brandon White held multiple Mid-American Conference scholarship offers after a sophomore season in which he rushed for 1,913 yards and 23 TDs. A torn ACL knocked out his junior year after Week 3, and Tyrese Buchanan emerged in his absence. Both are back as seniors.

3. Harvey: USC commit Shahn Alston and Chris Burt Jr. lead the Red Raiders, who will find ways to get both the ball as they share time on the field.

4. Glenville: C.J. Newell rushed for 1,000 yards as a junior, but is concentrating on safety first for Glenville, which also brings back senior Romell Phillips after he gained 750 yards, mostly down the stretch and into the playoffs.

5. Mentor: Jackson Farley is a complete back for defending Greater Cleveland Conference champion Mentor, which also returns senior Dominic Burns. Farley rushed for 1,925 yards and scored 22 TDs as a junior.

6. Wadsworth: Gavin Madigan and Cooper Gray are a one-two punch that give the defending Suburban League champions plenty of options. Gray rushed for 1,697 yards and 21 TDs, relieving Madigan because of an injury last year as juniors. Madigan still put up 726 yards and 12 TDs.

7. Cleveland Heights: The super sophomores, Elijah Harris and John Morris, are back for Cleveland Heights. First-year coach Bryce Young saw a third option in senior Tyler Todd, who might be needed with Harris expected to miss the start of this season because of an injury.

8. Walsh Jesuit: Marty Tobin and Carlos

Smith emerged last year as juniors when starter Lucas Weaver went down with an injury. Tobin rushed for 975 yards and nine TDs, while Smith gained 558 yards and scored eight TDs on only 60 carries.

9. Highland: Casey Myser scored 46 TDs last year for Highland, which won the Suburban League's American Conference and didn't lose a game until meeting Avon in the Division II regional finals. He gained 2,688 all-purpose yards, which alone vaults the Hornets high in this ranking.

10. Villa Angela-St. Joseph: No more Lamar "Bo" Jackson Jr., who is at Ohio State, but his midseason injury last year opened the door for T.J. Moore and Ronnie Taylor. Moore, now a senior, rushed for 1,359 yards and 13 TDs. Taylor holds a Kentucky offer as a junior. This position is one of Northeast Ohio's deepest and other teams considered include: Avon, Streetsboro, Olmsted Falls, Strongsville, Riverside, Willoughby South, North Ridgeville and Bay.

WIDE RECEIVERS

1. Glenville: Pauly Sadler is a Bowling Green commit for Glenville, which also boasts DeAnthony Crittenden and added Joseph Saffold from St. Edward. Sophomore Emiere Lemons also is one of the area's most highly regarded talents in the Class of 2028. Question is, how much will Glenville throw the football, considering it traditionally runs a lot?

2. Walsh Jesuit: Milan Parris is one of the area's biggest targets at 6-foot-5. He also is an Iowa State commit. Campbell Lann is another big receiver opposite him at 6-4 for junior quarterback David Ternosky. Ohio cornerback commit James Brewer III also could figure into this group.

3. Archbishop Hoban: Louisville commit Payton Cook is a fourth-year starter for coach Tim Tyrrell, whose Knights also play USC cornerback recruit Elbert "Rock" Hill IV as a receiver, often on reverses to get him in the open field. Both are among the state's fastest players, and this group is deeper with senior Jackson Callaway and junior basketball standout John Johnson.

4. Maple Heights: Don't expect the Mustangs to throw as much until Luke Anzlovar's return, but this room has as much

speed as anyone with Kindall Brown, Mik Banks (expected to be the quarterback until Anzlovar's return) and Enrique Robertson. All three factored into the passing game last year, and coach Shaq Washington also is high on junior Marlon Brown and freshman Jaire Harris.

5. Avon: Grant Barr's catch radius is big and he proved that with critical first-down receptions in the snow during Avon's run to the Division II state title as a junior. North Carolina cornerback recruit Jakob Weatler also will factor into this receiving group.

6. Euclid: Ky/Mari Friesen has offers from Purdue and Akron. Junior cornerback Kei'Shuan Telfair is expected to take on bigger offensive role, while junior Sincer Hamilton's stock is rising. James Tisan and Colby Orr also came up with big play a year ago.

7. St. Edward: The loss of Saffold is a hit to this group, which returns record-setting receiver Zach Hackleman (857 yards, 10 TD on 51 receptions). St. Edward's balance will lead to opportunities for this unit, which also has senior Ryan Mikovsky and will likely have a steady diet of tight end usage with junior Joe Moore.

8. Mentor: Justen Hodge is a Miami (Ohio) recruit and leads a position that is always a strength for Mentor. He had 922 yards and nine TDs while catching passes last year from West Virginia recruit Scotty For Hodge has a new quarterback in junior Brian Jones and mostly new receivers around him.

9. St. Ignatius: Luke Simms could get up and get footballs for whoever threw last year for St. Ignatius, and junior Tre Haddad has college interest from school including West Virginia.

10. Norton: Buddy Willig returns to his natural position after serving as quarterback for much of last season. He's not all coach Glen Kruger has for this Metro Athletic Conference contender, as Isaac Hunter brings big-play ability with the addition of 6-junior Cortes Everett.

Norton gets the nod for the 10th spot here over Cleveland Heights, Wadsworth, Solo and Avon Lake.

SEE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL, D9