

EXTRA



Highland punt returner Lucas Gerding gets positive yards on a punt return as he's chased by Hudson's Gavin Hitchcock in the first half Friday at Highland. *Photos by John Kuntz, cleveland.com*

Hornets turn takeaways into shutout

Highland's big-play defense leads to two Casey Myser TDs in the second quarter.

Matt Goul mgoul@cleveland.com

Highland coach Mike Gibbons passionately reminded his football players Friday night after they shut out Hudson of the work they put in this offseason.

He reminded them of how many times they heard about the players they lost from their Suburban League championship team that made it back to the OHSAA Division II regional finals.

He reminded them of who they had and pointed to the scoreboard at Highland's North Gateway Tire Field: a 32-0 victory served the biggest reminder.

"If you have a good season, they're always going to talk about the kids who graduated," Gibbons said. "I love those kids more than anything, but you feel for the kids who have to hear about it all offseason. I'm just proud of those kids for coming out and showing what they could do."

Four takeaways, each leading to points.

Highland (2-0), ranked No. 12 in the cleveland.com Top 25, didn't get on the scoreboard until the 5:06 mark in the second quarter when Casey Myser scored the first of his two touchdown runs. Myser, a senior, capitalized on two fumbles scooped



Highland running back Evan Foust is tackled by Hudson linebacker Nathan Judy in the second half.

up by his defense to make their scoring drives possible.

Evan Foust started it by forcing the first fumble, recovered by senior defensive end Dan Miller. Hudson's next possession ended with the second turnover after a hard hit on a completed pass, as the football popped loose near midfield.

"The defense made some huge plays there to get us the ball back," Gibbons said. "Offensively, we started out a little bit slow. Had a turnover early, but we were able to capitalize on those turnovers."

Myser rushed for 99 yards on 18 carries. Highland gained 332 yards as a team, including 237 yards on the ground. Foust and receiver Lucas Gerding gobbled up chunks to keep the defense of No. 15 Hudson (1-1) on its heels.

"All offseason, these dudes were hearing, 'You lost this guy on the D-line, you lost this guy on the O-line,'" Myser said. "I guess they took that personally because they did really well against this great Hudson team."

The Explorers, coming off an opening-week win vs. Austintown Fitch and heading Friday to St. Vincent-St. Mary, found some success in the short and intermediate passing game. Junior quarterback Hayden Lipinski completed 12 of 23 passes for 135 yards, but Highland defenders sacked him six times.

Three of them came in the second quarter, as Highland took a 14-0 lead into halftime.

Little changed in the second half of this Suburban League crossover. The Hornets, who won two of the last three American Conference championships, will move next year to the Suburban's National Conference with Hudson. For now, they will look ahead to next week's trip to No. 16 Avon Lake.

"We made a statement that no matter what, we're coming, ready to play," Foust said.

"We're going to keep getting better, every game and every week."



Highland running back Evan Foust finds running room on a rush in the second half against Hudson. John Kuntz, cleveland.com