

College

A complete list of known athletes from Medina County.

Page B4

Sports

WWW.MEDINA-GAZETTE.COM

Business

Page B5

Classified

Page B6

B

Thursday,
August 6,
2026

HIGH SCHOOL

Embracing stiffer competition

Highland excited to officially join SL National after dominating American in recent years

Ryan Isley
The Gazette

Highland is going National.

After being a part of the Suburban League American Conference since the introduction of divisions prior to the 2015-16 season, the Hornets will now compete in the SL National Conference. Medina also will be switching from the Greater Cleveland Conference.



Bailey

While the move may seem big, the wheels have been in motion for several years and have allowed Highland to get ready for the switch.

"In all reality, this has been a few

years in the making because there are teams who are leaving that had to remain in the league for another season and a half or two years," athletic director Jon Bailey said. "We've had a lot of time to plan and prep, so the transition's been very smooth, and we're excited."

The move had initial intentions, but at the end of the day it did not matter, as schools such as Cuyahoga Falls, Kent Roosevelt and Tallmadge left the league, anyway, with Medina (National), Mayfield (American) and Kenston (American) joining.

"In all reality, when we first were having these conversations, this was more of an idea that was brought to the league to keep our schools intact and not have teams leave," Bailey

said. "And they ultimately still didn't feel that whether Highland moved up, it didn't change their opinion. They wanted to leave."

The Hornets will join the big-school division with Hudson, North Royalton, Solon, Stow and Wadsworth, as well as Medina. Brecksville is in the National in all sports except football, while Nardon is in football only.

One of the benefits of moving up will be that more schools in the National have multiple levels of teams in various sports. Having more than just varsity teams to compete against will help the Hornets develop athletes further.

"We're going to have a lot of similar schools in regards to competition to us that actually have freshman teams

and have JV teams," Bailey said. "Our fundamental focus is always skill development for all of our sub- varsity sports, so it's going to only help maximize that."

It will also increase the level of competition at the varsity level, where Highland is coming off several SL American titles, including football, boys cross country, baseball, boys basketball, girls tennis, girls soccer, girls golf and girls volleyball.

"We're going to be playing a higher level of competition week to week for all of our teams," Bailey said. "That's for everyone. That's golf, it's tennis. Our soccer and volleyball teams also need to be pushed, as well as our football teams. So, we're excited. That's going to be really awesome."

The Hornets made an extremely similar move in 1976, joining the SL after a decade of football dominance in the Inland Conference that at the time included Buckeye, Keystone, Columbia, South Amherst, Firelands, Lutheran West and Avon. Highland initially had an agreement to join Wadsworth, Brunswick, Cloverleaf, Orrville, Triway and West Holmes in the Chippewa Conference, but the three Medina County schools in that league left to form the Pioneer Conference.

"In sharing that with our coaches, they were excited. All of them were," Bailey said. "They're excited for the challenge, and they think that it's time for us to level up in terms of the National side and play stiffer competition."

See HORNETS, B4

HORNETS

From B1

A move up also means restricting expectations. While the Hornets may not

take home as many conference titles, the constant grind of a tough regular season should help in the postseason.

"The week in week out of tougher competition, we're

looking forward to it," Bailey said. "We have a full understanding we might not win as many conference championships or have a 20-2 basketball season, right? But these games are going to be tougher

throughout the week, so that when we hit district finals and regional opportunities, we're going to be more battle tested, and that's across the board."

Contact Ryan Isley
at sports@medina-gazette.com.