

High school football: Highland dominant, efficient in SL American win over Aurora



[Albert Grindle](#)
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GRANGER TWP. — Since the founding of the Suburban League American Conference in 2015, the Highland-Aurora football game has been must-see theatre.

This one, however, was like when Grandpa falls asleep in his recliner while watching a movie.

The Hornets were that dominant and efficient in the final league meeting between the schools Friday — Highland will move to the National Conference next season — as they obtained their third running clock in four attempts this season with a 41-7 blowout that was never in doubt.

Aurora (1-3), which has won 212 games under 25th-year coach Bob Mihalik, has sustained its two worst SL American losses in consecutive games against Highland (4-0), which won last

season's showdown 34-0. It was a quiet ending to a series that has had its fair share of classics, with the Hornets holding a 6-4 edge (the teams did not play in 2020).

"We've been playing them for 11 years, so we know their stuff and they know our stuff," said Highland wide receiver/safety Nick Dobkowski, who caught a 63-yard touchdown and snared his Medina County-leading fifth interception. "We practiced everything. We had to stop the running back (Xavier Board). We had to stop the quarterback (Ryan Ziegler). We did a great job of that."

Highland's defense went three-and-out, interception, three-and-out to set up scoring drives of 47, 43 and 50 yards for a 21-0 lead just 12:45 into the beautiful 68-degree night. Casey Myer's second short touchdown with 18 seconds left before halftime pushed the score to 28-0 after a 14-play, 86-yard drive that actually covered 121 yards due to penalties, while Dobkowski's bomb against man coverage initiated the running clock 65 seconds into the third quarter.

The Hornets' scoring was completed after a Jonathan Prucha 11-yard pass to Ben Radigan, and Aurora scored on a 10-yard TD pass from Marc McGovern to tight end Drew Scott with 2:28 remaining. The latter was the Greenmen's sixth first down of the night.

"We know Aurora is a very talented, well-coached team," Highland right guard Cody Bendau said. "They got our cards. We got their cards. I think we were just dealt the better hand today, honestly, to be real with you."

"We were relentless, especially at home. We were really excited because this is a really cool environment to be in. We had to win it for our brothers out there. They may have already graduated, but they know how important this game is."

Myser finished with 13 carries for 74 yards, continuing his season-long trend as first-team All-Ohio decoy that sets up big plays for teammates. Grady Gibb rushed 10 times for 59 yards and completed 7-of-7 passes for 155 yards and TDs to Dobkowski and Jake Weber (36 yards) — the senior has completed a ridiculous 32-of-35 passes this season — while Dobkowski finished with three catches for 81 yards and Lucas Gerding had four scrimmage touches for 55 yards.

Starting left tackle Josh Messina and left guard Wyatt Sitz left with minor injuries last week in a 34-7 win at Avon Lake, but both were in action Friday. The line that also includes center Spencer Marquis, Bendau and right tackle Thomas Fearn has been a bright spot after losing All-Gazette picks Carson Noonan, Ryan Zywiec, Ben Coyne and Brady Bendau to graduation, as the Hornets are now averaging 39.0 points on 448.8 yards against what is, on paper, their stiffest four-game stretch of the regular season.

"I definitely got to say, throughout the entire offseason all we would hear about is, 'Oh, you guys aren't going to be the same as you were last year,'" Cody Bendau said. "I think we took that really personally. I know I did, and I was just thinking about it every day. I'd hear about it and I

just knew we had to work our tails off every play. That mentality has really carried over and has shown that regardless of our size, it's all about effort on every play and what we can do."

The Highland first-team defense, which had seven tackles for loss and allowed only one first down, was just as good. Aurora had seven plays for minus-17 yards after one quarter — fumbles were not a part of the equation — and completed only 2-of-4 passes for 9 yards before the backups came onto the field. Board, clearly the team's top threat coming in, was limited to 24 yards on eight carries, with 22 coming on the team's initial first down of the game in the second quarter.

As Dobkowski alluded to, there were no secrets. These programs run the same offenses down through the middle school level, so both knew exactly what was coming.

The Hornets simply executed better in all three phases of the game.

"All the preparation our coaches put into our game plan, it really helps out," Dobkowski said. "In past years, this was late in the season so we'd have more film. This year it is Week 4, so that's probably more preparation for our coaches. They just do a great job."

Contact Albert Grindle at (330) 721-4043 or agrindle@medina-gazette.com.

Highland 41, Aurora 7

AURORA 0 0 0 7 — 7

HIGHLAND 14 14 13 0 — 41

First

H — Grady Gibb 1 run (Jonah Kowza kick), 4:05.

H — Casey Myser 7 run (Kowza kick), 2:09.

Second

H — Jake Weber 36 pass from Gibb (Kowza kick), 11:15.

H — Myser 4 run (Kowza kick), 0:18.

Third

H — Nick Dobkowski 63 pass from Gibb (Kowza kick), 10:55.

H — Ben Radigan 11 pass from Jonathan Prucha (kick failed), 0:57.

Fourth

A — Drew Scott 10 pass from Marc McGovern (Mathew Huth kick), 2:28.

A H

First downs 6 18

Rushing 22/37 34/184

Rushing average 1.7 5.4

Passing 4/6 9/9

Passing yards 47 191

Total offense 28/84 43/375

Punting 4/37.5 0/0.0

Penalties 0/0 6/52

Fumbles 0/0 1/0

RUSHING: Highland — Myser 13-74, Gibb 10-59, Lucas Gerding 2-27, Anthony DePompai 1-12, Dylan Lazar 2-5, Frankie Iannaggi 2-7, Colton Winston 2-2, Team 2-(-2). Aurora — Xavier Board 8-24, Carter Romancak 5-15, Chase Peterson 2-12, Alex Killian 2-3, Huth 1-1, Luke McGovern 1-(-1), Ryan Ziegler 3-(-17).

PASSING: Highland — Gibb 7-7-155-0, Aiden Price 1-1-25-0, Prucha 1-1-11-0. Aurora — Ziegler 2-4-9-1, M. McGovern 2-2-38-0.

RECEIVING: Highland — Dobkowski 3-81, Weber 1-36, Gerding 2-28, Iannaggi 1-25, Radigan 1-11, Myser 1-10. Aurora — Scott 2-38, Quincy John 1-7, L. McGovern 1-2.

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