



OHSAA Division II football playoffs preview: Can Avon three-peat?

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Avon Eagles running back Michael Colburn celebrates after running for a touchdown against the Berea-Midpark Titans in the first half of play. Joshua Gunter, cleveland.com



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CLEVELAND, Ohio — Will Walsh repeat as the Region 5 champion?

Avon has won the last two Division II state titles, but will the Eagles come out of Region 6 or could a team like Toledo Central Catholic ruin Avon's bid at a three-peat?

Region 7 is completely stacked. Will it be two-time reigning Division III state champion Bishop Watterson winning the region? Can Massillon get through the region after losing to Big Walnut the last two years? Could Big Walnut do it again? Or will someone surprise the rest of the region?

Can Anderson win Region 8 and return to the state championship game for the third straight year?

The Ohio High School Athletic Association released its pairings Sunday for the Division II football playoffs. Here are the first-round games, scheduled for Friday, with a look at the favorites, best games, players to watch and predictions. The top four seeds in each region receive a bye.

The higher seeds will serve as playoff hosts for the first two rounds. Games will be played at neutral sites from the regional finals through the state championships, which are Dec. 3-5 at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton. The Division II championship game is scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 3.

REGION 5 PAIRINGS

No. 1 Highland (0-1). first-round bye. hosts winner of No. 8 vs. No. 9

No. 1 Highland (9-1), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 6 vs. No. 7

No. 2 Walsh Jesuit (7-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 7 vs. No. 10

No. 3 Nordonia (9-1), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 6 vs. No. 11

No. 4 Mayfield (10-0), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 5 vs. No. 12

No. 12 North Royalton (4-6) at No. 5 Wadsworth (8-2)

No. 11 Brush (6-4) at No. 6. Eastlake North (9-1)

No. 10 Archbishop Hoban (3-5) at No. 7 Villa Angela-St. Joseph (8-2)

No. 9 Brecksville-Broadview Heights (6-4) at No. 8 Riverside (7-3)

Favorite

Highland: After a Week 1 loss to Walsh Jesuit, the Hornets never lost again and went undefeated in the Suburban League National Division. Since taking over as the starting quarterback in week 3, sophomore Colton Wadle has completed 72 of 106 passes for 1,329 yards and 13 touchdowns with just three interceptions. He has also scored five rushing TDs.

Walsh Jesuit: The Warriors started the season 4-0 before a 30-0 loss to rival Archbishop Hoban. They also lost 32-0 to Bishop Watterson in Week 9 before bouncing back with a 35-8 win over Trotwood-Madison to end the regular season. If Walsh is to defend as the regional champions, it will be on the arm of freshman quarterback Kinzy Shea, who played in relief of injured David Ternosky against Ursuline in Week 8 and then started the final two games.

Underrated or underdog?

Archbishop Hoban: Don't let the record fool you. The Knights played one of the toughest schedules in the state and still have the talent to make a deep run in the region. When Hoban plays its best, the Knights can beat

deep run in the region. When Hoban plays his best, the Vikings can beat anyone, as evidenced by its 30 road win at Walsh in Week 6. In that game, quarterback Major Cribbs was 10 of 17 passing for 104 yards and a touchdown and ran the ball 17 times for 137 yards and a score.

Best first-round game

Hoban at Villa Angela-St. Joseph: Both teams come in battle-tested, as Hoban has played one of the toughest schedules in the state and VASJ owns wins over the likes of Garfield Heights and St. Francis DeSales. The Hoban offense is led by junior dual-threat QB Major Cribbs, the son of former Browns star Josh Cribbs. VASJ sophomore WB Julian Harris has thrown for more than 1,100 yards this season with his favorite target being Louisville commit D'Angelo White at TE. Running backs Ronnie Taylor, Leontae Wright and Braylon Boyd have combined for more than 2,000 yards rushing.

REGION 6 PAIRINGS

No. 1 Toledo Central Catholic (8-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 8 vs. No. 9

No. 2 Olmsted Falls (8-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 7 vs. No. 10

No. 3 Avon (8-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 6 vs. No. 11

No. 4 Clay (8-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 5 vs. No. 12

No. 12 Sylvania Northview (5-5) at No. 5 Fremont Ross (7-3)

No. 11 Rhodes (6-4) at No. 6 Lakewood (8-2)

No. 10 North Olmsted (5-5) at No. 7. Findlay (6-4)

No. 9 Waite (6-4) at No. 8 Avon Lake (5-5)

Favorites

Toledo Central Catholic  cleveland.com After winning the Division III title in 2023 and finishing runner-up in 2024 and 2025, the Fighting Irish have moved to Division II this season. Their only two losses have come to Walsh Jesuit in Week 2 and an undefeated Detroit Catholic Central. Running back Jeremiah Fuller has carried the load offensively, rushing for 1,316 yards and 31 TDs.

Avon: After a 1-2 start, the two-time defending Division II state champions have not been challenged, winning their last six games by a combined 320-94, including 128-19 over the last three. QB Trevor Sykora has thrown for 1,516 yards and 19 TDs and 10 interceptions, while running back Michael Colburn missed the final two weeks of the season but has run for 708 yards and 15 TDs. Adrian LaBianca leads the defense with 40 tackles, Cody Canning has 39 and Bryce Chura has 36. Nolan Robke leads the team with five sacks and seven tackles for loss.

Underrated or underdog?

Fremont Ross: The Little Giants had a forfeit in Week 1 but the only games they lost on the field were to the top two teams in Division I, Region 2 – Perrysburg and Whitmer. They finished the season on a six-game winning streak.

Best first-round game

North Olmsted at Findlay: Both teams finished the season by winning their final two games after a downturn in the schedule. North Olmsted began October with losses to Rocky Rover and Buckeye, but came back with wins over Normandy and Lakewood, while Findlay righted the ship after four straight losses to four of the best teams in NW Ohio (Ross, Clay, Perrysburg, Whitmer) by defeating Northview and Anthony Wayne.

REGION 7 PAIRINGS

No. 2 Big Walnut (10-0), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 7 vs. No. 10

No. 3 Massillon (8-1), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 6 vs. No. 11

No. 4 New Albany (8-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 5 vs. No. 12

No. 12 Ashland (6-4) at No. 5 Canal Winchester (7-3)

No. 11 Watkins Memorial (6-4) at No. 6 St. Francis DeSales (7-3)

No. 10 Hoover (5-5) at No. 7 Louisville (8-2)

No. 9 Hamilton Township 7-3) at No. 8 Whitehall-Yearling (8-2)

Favorites

Bishop Watterson: The two-time defending Division III state champions have continued to roll despite the move up in division. That included a 21-0 win over Walsh in Week 9. The Eagles have held opponents to an average of just 4 points per game (36 in 9), including five shutouts.

Big Walnut: The two-time defending regional champion in Region 6, the Golden Eagles hope to keep that crown this season. They have held opponents to seven points or fewer in six of 10 games this season, including four shutouts. Northwestern commit Nolan Buirley has 172 carries for 1,753 yards and 26 touchdowns and 26 catches for 428 yards and seven scores. Quarterback Eli Stumpf has completed 74.8% of his passes (131 of 175) for 1,909 yards and 25 TDs with just one interception and has 396 yards rushing and five touchdowns.

Massillon: The last half of the season has been surrounded by off-field noise regarding transfers and eligibility, but will all of its players be available?

If so, Massillon would put its roster up against anyone not only in Division

It so, Massillon would put its roster up against anyone not only in Division

II, but in the state.



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Underrated or underdog?

DeSales: With Northwestern commit RJ Day at quarterback, the Stallions offense can be potent. The key is to score 20 or more points, as all three losses came when the Stallions score 17 or fewer – Villa Angela St. Joseph (20-17), Bishop Watterson (32-0) and Steubenville (20-14). In two of those three losses, Day has started slow but has almost pulled off the comeback with good second halves.

Best first-round game

Hoover at Louisville: A rematch of a Week 5 Hoover win, the two teams have gone in opposite directions since. Louisville has reeled off five wins in a row while Hoover has dropped three of five games since, including three of the last four.

REGION 8 PAIRINGS

No. 1 Anderson (9-1), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 8 vs. No. 9

No. 2 Harrison (8-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 7 vs. No. 10

No. 3 Trotwood-Madison (7-2), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 6 vs. No. 11

No. 4 Lima Senior (9-1), first-round bye, hosts winner of No. 5 vs. No. 12

No. 12 Butler (7-3) at No. 5 Troy (8-2)

No. 11 Edgewood (6-4) at No. 6 Columbus West (10-0)

No. 10 La Salle (5-5) at No. 7 Talawanda (8-2)

No. 9 Withrow (6-3) at No. 8 Badin (7-3)



Anderson: The two-time defending stat runners-up have not slowed down this season, as quarterback Owen Scalf has thrown for 3,099 yards and 38 TDs, including a performance against Winton Woods in Week 9 where he was 29 of 35 for 458 yards and six touchdown passes to help the Raptors claim their third straight Eastern Cincinnati Conference title. He has plenty of weapons, as Tysin Weaver (54 catches, 1,190 yards, 19 TDs), Jordan Davis (42 catches, 712 yards, 4 TDs), Cooper Kathman (37 catches, 598 yards, 9 TDs), Brody Poetter (34 catches, 426 yards, 6 TDs) and Logan Jallick (33 catches, 370 yards, 3 TDs) all have at least 33 catches and 370 yards.

Underrated or underdog?

La Salle: Sure, the Lancers went 5-5. But three of those losses came to high-level Division I opponents in the Greater Catholic League in Archbishop Moller, Elder and St. Xavier. But La Salle showed in Week 9 what it can do against similar competition, knocking off Harrison, who is the No. 2 seed in the region.

Best first-round game

Withrow at Badin: After a 0-3 stretch in the middle of the season, Withrow has won four in a row, averaging 38.2 points per game. Badin is coming off a 14-0 loss to Archbishop McNicholas and went 3-3 down the stretch after a 4-0 start. Both teams like to keep the ball on the ground, with Withrow averaging 210 yards per game rushing and Badin running for 181 yards per game.

TOP PROSPECTS

Chuck Alexander, WR, Withrow: The Iowa State commit has hauled in

28 passes for 496 yards and six touchdowns this season for the Tigers. He held multiple Power 4 offers, including Northwestern, West Virginia, South Carolina, Kentucky, Indiana and Pittsburgh.

Ace Alston, CB, Anderson: The Notre Dame commit has made 39 tackles for the Raptors this season and has two interceptions and seven pass breakups. He has also returned two punts for touchdowns. He held more than 40 Division I offers, including Ohio State, Michigan, Indiana, Miami (FL), LSU and Ole Miss.

Nolan Buirley, ATH, Big Walnut: The Northwestern commit has led the Big Walnut offense this season, running 1,753 yards and 26 touchdowns and adding 26 catches for 428 yards and seven scores.

Asa Burch, Edge, Warren G. Harding: The junior leads the Raiders with 67 tackles and five sacks this season. He has also forced two fumbles and has two interceptions. He has yet to commit and has offers from schools such as Michigan, Indiana, Oregon, Penn State and Ohio State.

Brayton Feister, ATH, Massillon: The Oregon commit held offers from plenty of Power 4 schools, including Georgia, Ohio State, Florida State, USC and UCLA. Despite playing limited time at points this season due to injury and eligibility questions, he still led the Tigers in tackles.

Brydon Feister, ATH, Massillon: Like his brother Brayton, he dealt with issues of eligibility in the second half of the season. Also like his brother, he is a highly sought after prospect, already holding more than 15 Power 4 offers, including Ohio State, Georgia, Oregon, Indiana and Auburn. He has made is second on the team in tackles and leads the team in sacks and tackles for loss.

Antwoine Higgins, LB, Anderson: The Kentucky commit has led the Anderson defense with 66 tackles, 5.5 sacks and 17 tackles for loss. He also has two interceptions. He held more than 20 Division I offers, including

has two interceptions. He held more than 30 Division I offers, including

Ohio State, Notre Dame, Alabama, Michigan and Oklahoma.



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Tristin Hughes, ATH, Rocky River: The Kentucky commit does it all for Rocky River. This season, he has 597 yards and nine touchdowns rushing, and 40 catches for 736 yards and eight touchdowns receiving. He also has 115 kickoff return yards and 140 punt return yards. Defensively, he leads the team with 77 tackles and has six tackles for loss, four interceptions and two fumble recoveries from his safety position. The No. 11 player in Ohio's senior class according to 247Sports, he also held Division I offers from schools such as Michigan, Auburn, Iowa State and Miami (FL). He recently added an offer from Ohio State.

Rowan Kennedy, WR, Rocky River: The junior wide receiver has made 27 catches for 627 yards and a team-leading 13 touchdowns this season for the Pirates. His list of offers includes schools such as Cincinnati, Louisville, Pittsburgh and Illinois.

Munir Lewis, Edge, Brush: The Louisville commit also had offers from schools such as Ohio State, Wisconsin, Michigan State, Cincinnati and Illinois.

Deontay Malone, CB, Massillon: The Ohio State commit held offers from nearly 20 Division I programs such as Michigan, Michigan State, West Virginia and Pittsburgh.

Thomas Minor, DL, Big Walnut: The No. 13 overall prospect in the class of 2028 in Ohio, the 6-foot-3, 275-pound defensive lineman holds multiple Power 4 offers, including Ohio State, Michigan, Penn State, Indiana and Tennessee as well as Notre Dame.

Davis Seaman, OL, Bishop Watterson: The No. 13 overall prospect in Ohio's 2027 class [according to 247Sports.com](https://www.247sports.com), he committed to Ohio State in April. He also held offers from more than 20 other Division I schools,