



**HIGHLAND 29,
WADSWORTH 28**



RUSS GIFFORD / GAZETTE

Highland's Colton Wadle, Jake Weber and Nathan Capotosto, left to right, celebrate after Weber's game-winning touchdown.

Never, ever give up

Weber's touchdown on final play gives Hornets unreal comeback win

Albert Grindle
The Gazette

FRANKLIN TWP. — A share of Suburban League National Conference championship came down to fourth-and-goal on the 6-yard line with two seconds remaining and the Highland football team trailing Wadsworth by five points. That's when Jake Weber's redemption story played out all the world to see as light, misty rain glistened off the



Weber



Wadle



King



Dishauzi

North Gateway Tire Field turf.

Colton Wadle took the shotgun snap from Spencer Marquis, play-faked to running back Evan Foust, rolled right and found a

diving Weber in the front corner of the end zone Friday as time expired. The referee raised his arms to signal a touchdown, and nearly everyone else wearing

green, black and white followed suit as the Hornets completed a comeback for the ages to win 29-28.

Highland (8-1, 6-0) trailed the Grizzlies (8-1, 5-1) 28-10 through three quarters but scored 19 unanswered points over the final 11:50. Weber's TD capped a second half in which he had seven catches for 79 yards, atoning for a lost fumble that set up Wadsworth's final score and put Highland

into desperation mode.

"You look at our season and we started off losing by 34 (to Walsh Jesuit). That lit a fire under our (butts), and everyone has been working hard, making sure that we can play with these good teams," Weber said. "Wadsworth's a great team. We've faced a lot of adversity — me personally, I've faced a ton of adversity — but we didn't give up just because we were losing by 18 or whatever. We just fought."

Down by three scores after Grizzlies quarterback Bryser Hall (19-for-36, 239 yards, 2 TDs, 3 INTs) found Kolbey Ostervich for 10-yard TD with 5:49 left in the third quarter, Highland completed a 15-play, 62-yard drive capped by a 1-yard Wadle TD run. There was a lot of work to do, but the defense got a stop and Wadle (15-for-22, 176 yards, 2 TDs; 16 carries, 67 yards, 2 TDs) scored again, this time from 12 yards.

See **HORNETS**, C2



RUSS GIFFORD / GAZETTE

Highland's Ben Radigan intercepts a pass intended for Wadsworth's Donny Bettis Jr.

HORNETS

From C1

While the two-point conversion pass to Anthony DePompei (14 carries, 81 yards) in the flat was batted away by Wadsworth's Braydan Todd to keep the score 28-23, the night became truly wild after that.

Sticking with their aerial attack after leading rusher Jude Haller exited with an injury, the Grizzlies finally had a hiccup in pass protection on the ensuing play from scrimmage. Medina County sack leader Lukas Grillis pushed his man into Hall's legs and Marquis hit Hall high as he threw, leading to a floater into no-man's land was picked off by a diving Foust on the Grizzlies 31 with 6:35 left.

The game became stranger when Marquis was forced to exit for a play after vomiting on the field and his backup's third-down snap was wide, forcing a punt.

Hall later rolled right to avoid pressure from Grillis on third-and-11 and tried to find Ostervich along the Highland sideline, only to be picked off by defensive end Isaac Demming, who dropped deep into coverage to set up a zone blitz. That gave Highland the ball on the Wadsworth 40 with 2:58 remaining.

Wildcat QB DePompei converted fourth-and-2 from the 32 when everyone knew a sweep left was coming. Wadle entered the red zone after keeping an option, and Wadle found Ben Radigan at the sticks on

Highland 29, Wadsworth 28

WADSWORTH	HIGHLAND	0	21	7	0	—	28
WADSWORTH	HIGHLAND	7	3	0	19	—	28
First							
H — Jake Weber 27 pass from Colton Wadle (Jonah Kowza kick), 4:28.							
Second							
W — Jude Haller 3 run (Braxton Wagner kick), 10:58.							
H — Kowza 27 field goal, 6:21.							
W — Jaylen King 21 pass from Drysen Hall (Wagner kick), 4:12.							
W — Braydan Todd 15 run (Wagner kick), 0:26.							
Third							
W — Kolbey Ostervich 10 pass from Hall (Wagner kick), 5:49.							
Fourth							
H — Wadle 1 run (Kowza kick), 11:50.							
H — Wadle 12 run (pass failed), 6:47.							
H — Weber 6 pass from Wadle (no conversion attempted), 0:00.							

third-and-4 from the 10 to set up first-and-goal.

A spike and Foust run for no gain led to third-and-goal, where Wadle threw wide left to a diving Radigan. That set up essentially the same concept the other way to Weber (8 catches, 106 yards, 2 TDs), who initially ran a slant before flipping his hips and running the double-move known as a zig route to haul in the catch of his life.

"It was kind of a similar play call to the other side that we ran the play before," Weber said. "I knew I made mistakes throughout the game, so I knew that was my moment to make up for that."

"It's such a big moment, you know? Being able to clinch the Suburban League, that's what we've been looking forward to all year, and that's what was going through my mind right there."

For most of the middle quarters, the Grizzlies appeared on the verge of pulling away. Hall was masterful

W	H
First downs	23
Rushing	21/121
Rushing average	3.0
Passing	19/36
Passing yards	239
Total offense	57/360
Punting	2/49 0
Punt return	5/34
Fumbles	0/0
RUSHING: Wadsworth — Hall 9-71, Todd 6-30, Heller 5-18, Noah Nixon 1-2, Highland — Anthony DePompei 14-81, Wadle 14-67, Colton Winston 9-41, Levi Clark 4-15, Evan Foust 6-12, Jake Weber 1-7, Sam 1-15.	
PASSING: Wadsworth — Hall 19-36-239-3, Highland — Wadle 15-22-176-0, DePompei 1-1-25, Team 0-2-0-0.	
RECEIVING: Wadsworth — King 8-113, Kyle Schmetzer 4-52, Alex Porter 2-26, Ostervich 3-25, Nixon 1-13, Donny Bettis Jr. 1-10, Highland — Weber 8-108, Radigan 2-40, Foust 1-27, Winston 2-11, DePompei 2-11, Frankie Iannag 1-6.	

against a three-man rush, avoiding pressure, finding second and third reads with ease and running nine times for a career-high 71 yards, a stunning development considering he had just 31 attempts for 45 yards on the season.

Wadsworth fell behind 7-0 when Wadle hit a leaping Weber for a 27-yard score on an extended triple option but responded when Haller crossed the goal line from 3 yards. The Grizzlies defense held and forced a 27-yard Jonah Kowza field goal, then Wadsworth took all momentum into the locker room after a 21-yard Hall-to-Jaylen King (8 catches, 113 yards) connection and a Braydan Todd 15-yard run on sprint draw.

Up 21-10 and with the ball to start the second half, the Grizzlies stalled when Radigan (4 pass breakups) intercepted a deep Hall attempt that was knocked down by the wind. Undeterred, Wadsworth got another stop when Brandon Dishauzi forced

a Weber fumble that was recovered by Bryson Bupp at the Grizzlies 39-yard line.

Wadsworth gained what initially appeared to be a commanding lead on Ostervich's TD before the wheels fell off.

Everything needed to go Highland's way from that point. Somehow, the Hornets made sure it did.

"This is probably one of the best moments of my football career," Foust said. "I'm so proud of the boys for coming out here, playing a good Wadsworth team and coming out in the second half to really put the pressure on them and come back like that."

While a tie remains in play if Hudson (7-2, 4-2) downs Highland and Nordon (8-1, 5-1) edges Wadsworth next week, the Hornets' title was unforeseen after they graduated 17 starters and had to face much tougher competition than the American Conference. That belief was certainly reinforced after an embarrassing 34-0 home loss to Walsh Jesuit in the season opener.

Weber and Co. never stopped believing. They now can call themselves champions.

"It shows our character," Weber said. "Everybody's doubting us in the offseason, in the season saying that ever since we lost 34-0 (to Walsh Jesuit) that we're not going to be able to compete with these big teams. We proved everyone wrong and proved ourselves right."

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