

High school football: Highland defense dazzles in preseason debut against Avon Lake

[Albert Grindle](#)
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GRANGER TWP. — Even with a ridiculous standard to meet, internal expectations for the Highland football team's defense remain high.

Despite breaking in seven new starters, the Hornets looked in midseason form Friday morning during their scrimmage opener against Avon Lake. While the Shoremen were missing star wide receiver Luke Stuewe (15 Division I offers), they were basically helpless against the Highland first string.

The Hornets have allowed miniscule averages of 12.7, 8.2 and 12.3 points on 199.8, 151.2 and 182.6 yards over the last three seasons. Avon Lake gained just 43 yards on 20 plays, and that's including a 20-yard rush with All-Ohio defensive linemen Carson Noonan and Ryan Zywiec taking a breather on the sideline.

"I'd say we did pretty good today," junior middle linebacker Jameson Gordon said. "I mean, everyone was fired up for the first scrimmage, and I think we came out ready to go."

Gordon, fellow linebacker Evan Foust and monster back Kallen Whitling contributed to a unit that had a whopping six tackles for loss. Returning safety Garrett Phillips made a perfect read to intercept what initially appeared to be a long completion over the middle, and Noonan and Zywiec did their usual jobs of wreaking havoc up front.

The Shoremen couldn't have gotten off to a worse start with an errant shotgun snap and 5-yard sack on their first two plays. Gordon made a hustle play to track down a 3-yard loss from behind a mere two plays later.

Avon Lake elected to start over from its own 30-yard line after the third and sixth plays of its opening 10-play series, meaning punts would have followed in a real game. The Shoremen then went for fourth-and-5 on their 10th play and converted a quick out in the slot for their lone first down against the first string.

Phillips' interception followed on the next series for Highland's defense, and coordinator Chris Meyer began subbing liberally after that.

"They have a really big O-line, so we were looking to stay physical and make sure to keep up in the run game," Gordon said.

"Defensively I thought we were flying around and did a lot of really good things," coach Mike Gibbons added.

The Highland offense didn't fare quite as well with new skill players all over the field, though a 21-yard completion over the middle to All-Ohio running back Casey Myser put the ball on the 1-yard line to

complete a 10-play series. The Hornets were careful not to use Myser too much, as he finished with five carries for 15 yards and three catches for 38.

With first-year starter Dylan Borla at quarterback — the senior is coming off tearing his left ACL — Highland focused getting reps in the quick passing game. Borla completed 4-of-7 passes for 36 yards and one interception on a slightly high throw against zone coverage while also rushing once for 4 yards.

Senior wide receiver Luke Berkmeier had a 49-yard power read sweep, side-arming backup QB Grayden Gibb made a couple nice throws en route to going 4-for-7 for 64 yards and Foust was solid in his debut at H-back while also seeing time as a second running back next to Borla or Gibb.

The Hornets wrap up the preseason next week against returning D-IV regional semifinalist Mentor Lake Catholic, coached by Gibbons' brother, Marty.

"Offensively there were a couple of mistakes here and there, but overall I'm pretty pleased."

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PRESEASON HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL: HIGHLAND VS. AVON LAKE

Defense dazzles in season debut

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Gordon, Foust, Phillips make impact plays in stifling effort

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TWING & QUARRIANS

HORNETS

From B1

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