

Akron Beacon Journal

FOOTBALL

2026 high school football | Akron-area Week 1 breakdowns, predictions

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The [Ohio high school football season kicks off this week](#) and, for Greater Akron, it opens Thursday, Aug. 20, when Garfield travels to Norton and Archbishop Hoban plays at West Orange (Fla.) in nonleague games.

The rest of the local teams start their seasons Aug. 21 with a full slate of games.

The most anticipated game is the matchup between Division II powers Walsh Jesuit and Highland in Granger Township. Other top games include East vs. Bedford, Hudson at Fitch, Streetsboro at Copley, Woodridge at Revere and Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy at Brecksville.

Who will win? Keep reading and see which teams the Beacon Journal staff thinks have the upper hand.

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Thursday's football games in the Greater Akron area

Garfield (4-6 in 2025) at Norton (10-2)

- **What to watch:** [The Panthers will look to open the season](#) with a bang after

canceling their Week 1 game last season against Northwest because of cases of hand, foot, and mouth disease on their team. The game was initially ruled a no-contest by the OHSAA, but the OHSAA changed its decision ahead of Week 10 and gave Norton a forfeit loss. ... Trey Kirsten will lead Norton's offense after earning All-Ohio honors in the Division IV last season. He completed 101 of 155 passes for 1,784 yards in 2025. ... Jason Beverly will be a major player on both sides of the ball for Norton. He ran for 932 yards and 17 TDs last year and will be play linebacker. ... Garfield will look to rebound from a sub .500 season. Coach Kemp Boyd has high hopes for a breakout season from running back Sheldon Corley. ... The Rams have a returning quarterback in Darius Sales. ... Garfield looks to continue a streak of five straight wins in

- Week 1 games.

Who will win: Norton 35-14

Hoban (10-2 in 2025) at West Orange (10-3)

- **What to watch:** Hoban ventures to Winter Garden, Fla., to open its 2026 season. DB-RB Jaiden Daniels, DB-WR John Johnson, DE Devanaire Riley, OL Rylee Pickering and OL Caleb Williams are seniors to watch for Hoban. Daniels is a Ball State recruit, Johnson is a Bowling Green recruit and Williams is a Buffalo recruit. Junior Israel "Major" Cribbs is projected to start at quarterback after dealing with an injury last season and with the graduation of Nick Kinsey and Payton Cook, who both played QB. Look for Daniels and Kahlil Diming to be Hoban's top running backs. Hoban coach Tim Tyrrell said "the two strong parts of the team are offensive line and defensive line." Hoban returns six starters on offense — linemen Pickering, Williams, Zander Thomas and Sean Mantell, tight end Ryland Oliphant and Johnson at wide receiver. The Knights bring back six starters on defense — linemen Riley and Kiren Green and backs Daniels, Diming, Carlos Gordon and Gavin Baluch. Jeremy Hammel also returns as the kicker. West Orange is in Class 6A, Region 2, District 6 in Florida and is coached by Geno Thompson. The Warriors posted records of 10-3 in each of the past two seasons West

[Orange](#) is led by quarterback AJ Chung, wide receiver Yuto Kawamura-Johnson, running back, Jayden Ammons and edge rusher Matheus Kaminski. [Megan Bruinsma of the Observer in Winter Garden](#) said Chung threw 41 TD passes as a sophomore last season and Ammons scored 12 total TDs. The Warriors won all three of their rivalry games last season over Dr. Phillips (28-19), Ocoee (21-14) and Olympia High (48-0).

Who will win: Hoban 28-21

Friday's football games in the Greater Akron area

Walsh Jesuit (11-2 in 2025) at Highland (11-1)

What to watch: This could be a playoff preview as the Hornets move up to Division II, Region 5 from Region 6 this season. ... Highland lost a lot of firepower with Northeast Inland Division II Offensive Player of the Year Casey Myser at Ohio University now. That said, the Hornets are coming off an 8-2 junior varsity season and are looking good in the preseason. ... Evan Foust returns for Highland as the Suburban League American Conference Co-Defensive Player of the Year and was Division II second-team all-state in 2025. He led the team in tackles (73), tackles for loss (14) and forced fumbles (five). At H-back he caught 14 passes for 255 yards and four touchdowns. ... Center Spencer Marquis powered an offense to an average of 238.8 yards on the ground. ... Jonah Kowza is a secret weapon at kicker. Of his four field goals, the SL Specialist of the Year had two of more than 40 yards and logged 43 touchbacks on 63 kickoffs. ... [The Warriors](#) are coming off a state semifinal berth and have a solid nucleus back. ... Quarterback [David Ternosky](#) (117-for-186 passing, 1,466 yards, 19 TDs) has a standout in receiver Cambell Lann. The Western Michigan commit caught 29 passes for 289 yards and four touchdowns last season, and those numbers will skyrocket this season. ... Ternosky should have plenty of time in the pocket this season with University of Akron commit Owen Pelkowski back at tackle. The Warriors gained 369.2 yards per game last season and will have a balanced attack once again. ...

Three-star recruit Dario Jeras will anchor the Warriors defensive front.

Who will win: Walsh Jesuit 28-17

■ **CVCA (12-1 in 2025) at Brecksville (7-5)**

What to watch: The biggest question for [CVCA is will 2025 stand as the greatest season in school history](#) — or was it just the start for the Royals? ... After a nine-game schedule last fall, CVCA face a solid challenge in Week 1 against the Bees. ... Despite graduation losses, CVCA still has plenty of firepower in its T-formation back field. Tommy Kopec will be a major player on both sides of the ball again for the Royals, as he will see plenty of time at running back and linebacker. ... Zac Anderson also returns at running back, following some huge games during CVCA's postseason run. ... CVCA's new QB is Alex Mammone. ... The Bees are under new coach Dan Schreiber.

Who will win: CVCA 28-14

■ **Woodridge (6-4 in 2025) at Revere (8-3)**

What to watch: This intriguing matchup pits two teams from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park who have different profiles entering the season. ... [Revere reached the Division III playoffs](#) last season but graduated 15 starters ... The Minutemen will lean on their lines early, anchored by all-conference selections Jackson Farrow and Ryan Ferrara. ... Defensive end Joel Caipen also returns after notching seven sacks in 2025 ... In contrast, [Woodridge returns 21 lettermen and the bulk of its starters](#) from an injury-riddled 2025 season. ... After being forced into the emergency quarterback role last year, Carter Maxa will make an impact at tight end and linebacker for the Bulldogs. ... Woodridge will have a ton of experience returning on the line this fall. Anchoring that group will be senior Alex Christiansen. ... Woodridge will look to make its first run to the playoffs in four years.

Who will win: Woodridge 28-24

East (10-3 in 2025) vs. Bedford (4-6)

- What to watch:** [East](#) plays Bedford for the fourth year in a row. The Dragons won in 2023 (13-12) and 2025 (20-6). The Bearcats won in 2024 (27-20). [East returns All-Ohio RB-DB Lawrence Cherry Jr. and All-Ohio DL-LB-WR Terrel Karim Jr along with OL Sean Echols and WR-DB Emmanuel Jefferson.](#) Karim is a Bowling Green recruit. The Dragons roster also includes All-Ohio CB-RB Marcus Council Jr., who played at Streetsboro as a sophomore and junior. Cherry and Council will be East's top running backs. Both went to Hoban as freshmen. In total, [East](#) welcomes eight impactful
- transfers — Council, DB Khamari Brady (Garfield), OL-DL Elliot Ervin Jr. (Massillon), WR Elijah Grice (Firestone), CB-WR Amir Haynes (Cuyahoga Falls), FS-WR Cashmiere McKinnie (Barberton), WR-DB Timothy Tate
 - (Garfield) and QB Naseer Williams-Clay (Woodridge).

Who will win: East 24-18

Wadsworth (11-1 last year) at Cleveland Heights (5-6)

- The Grizzlies' nonconference games are all new this season as they move into Division II, Region 5. ... The Tigers are in Division I, Region 1. ... Wadsworth's offense lost two 1,000-yard rushers in All-Ohioans Cooper Gray and Gavin Madigan, but has quarterback Brysen Hall back. The [first-team Division II All-Ohio](#) completed 139 of 215 passes for 2,490 yards and 29 TDs with just four interceptions. He's got a burner in Jay'len King and solid receivers in Kyle Schmeltzer, Donny Bettis and Kolbey Ostervich. ... Cleveland Heights lost a ton of talent and took some transfer hits in the offseason (All-Ohio
- running back Elijah Harris to Garfield Heights, John Morris to Glenville, quarterback LaMarques Greenwood II to Glenville). ... The Tigers are strong at linebacker with Sirius Jones (62 tackles, 10 for loss, two fumble recoveries,
 - four interceptions, four sacks) returning.

Who will win: Wadsworth 42-14

Streetsboro (9-3 in 2025) at Copley (7-4)

- What to watch:** Streetsboro topped visiting Copley 34-20 last year. The Rockets lost five All-Ohio players from last season. DL Arthur Scott III (Wisconsin), OL Cooper Richmond (Columbia), LB Ayden Knuebel and RB Janiere Cook (John Carroll) graduated, and DB-RB Marcus Council Jr. transferred to East. Look for the Rockets to be led by QB Colton Cox, OL-DL Alan Podboy, OL-DL Demetrius Fuller, OL-DL Jaxon Fedor and RB-DB Logan Fincham this year. Copley features QB-Dane Wininger, DB-RB Jalen Owens, OL-DL Niko Enberg, OL-DL Justin Chatmon and WR-DB Jacob Kuczkowski. Wininger completed 87 of 157 passes for 1,381 yards and 15 touchdowns and ran for 324 yards and eight TDs on 54 carries last season.
- Who will win:** Copley 28-21

Crestwood (3-7) at Mogadore (11-2 in 2025)

- What to watch:** The first Red Devils-Wildcats game since 2019 was highly compelling, with Mogadore emerging with a 13-6 victory last year. Much of the offense in that game came from Wildcats running back Conner Lehner and Red Devils wide receiver Wyatt Januska, both of whom graduated last spring. Watch for Michael Kalista and Maddox Smith, both first-year starting quarterbacks in 2025, to play much bigger roles in the rematch, though Mogadore does boast a dangerous secondary.
- Who will win:** Mogadore 28-20

Buchtel (4-6 in 2025) at Hoover (9-3)

What to watch: This is the fifth straight season the Vikings welcome Buchtel to North Canton for the season opener. Hoover has won three of the four, including 30-0 last season. ... Buchtel, up to Division III this season after being D4 last year, returns 29 lettermen. That includes junior QB Arthur Thomas (6-5, 175), who threw for 1,043 yards and 12 touchdowns last year. Thomas has college offers from Bowling Green, Akron, Miami (Ohio) and

Kent State. "He can get it downfield and they have some players who can go get it," Hoover coach Brian Baum said. "They have some size at the skill positions and they're fast. It's going to be a nice challenge. It's exactly what we want out of Week 1. They give us a great game every year, and I think it helps to set us up for the season." ... Senior Terrell Hall (6-2, 185) is Buchtel's leading returning receiver. Senior TaVione Iverson (5-10, 175) is another important skill player. Senior King Arthur Love (6-3, 290), a transfer from East, joins senior Mehki Wright (6-3, 225) as leaders on the Griffins' lines. ... Baum declined to say who will start at quarterback for the Vikings between seniors Nolan Bonner and Ryan Kavanagh. What he did say is senior RB Michael Lammlein is good to go after a recent injury scare. Lammlein brings

- back the most experience in Hoover's backfield. ... Baum has been impressed with the play of senior Joe Gniazdowski at left tackle as Hoover replaces its entire offensive line from last year. Gniazdowski has primarily been a
- defensive lineman in the past. Another D-lineman, senior Owen Williams, is taking over at right tackle. Baum also likes the play of junior LBs Justin Oster and Jake Lukens in the middle of the Hoover defense.

Who will win: Hoover 21-12

Ellet (4-6 last year) at Tallmadge (3-7)

Tallmadge enter the Metro Athletic Conference and is in Division III, Region 9. ... **Ellet** stays in Division II, Region 5. ... Tallmadge will be led on defense by linebacker James Robinson, who played five quarters before getting hurt last season. Robinson made 111 tackles, 16 for loss, as a sophomore. Defensive tackle Daron Clark (44 tackles, 12 for loss, four sacks) adds a strong rush up front. ... Jake Blatt, Gage Herston, Jackson Clapper and Ty Albertson are returning starters along the offensive line that should provide a solid foundation for Tallmadge's offense.. The Blue Devils also welcome **RB-LB-DB Angelo Gotto** to the lineup after he played at Barberton the past two years for his father, former Magics coach Tony Gotto. The Gottos live in Tallmadge, and Tony is an assistant on Mike Hay's staff. Angelo Gotto had 116 carries for 596

yards and six TDs and 13 catches for 149 yards and two TDs last season. He also had 35 tackles and two interceptions and forced three fumbles. ... Jayden Cooper will be everywhere for Ellet on offense. Cooper will see time at running back, wide receiver and will run the Orangemen's wildcat package. ... Three-year starter Brandon Guest will be a force at linebacker, with three-year starting defensive lineman Jonez Ammons opening up holes up front. ... Ammons will have help from Jordan Robinson, who will also see time at fullback.

Who will win: Tallmadge 19-13

Hudson (10-3 last year) at Austintown Fitch (9-2)

What to watch: Another year, another tough opening game for the Explorers. Hudson will travel to face a Falcons team that has plenty of weapons, including running back Deon'Dray Richard and a receiving corps featuring Altahire Iluono and Wayne Holloway. ... Fitch reached the Division II playoffs last season before running into Walsh Jesuit in the second round. ... [Hudson has one of the best returning backfields](#) duos in Summit County in QB Hayden Lipinski and RB Reno Ferri. ... Ferri can fly, having broken the school's 100 meter record during track season, and hopes to remain healthy this fall. ... Lipinski is a dual-threat QB who helped guide Hudson back to the Division II playoffs in 2025. ... Hudson beat Fitch 28-14 in Week 1 last fall.

Who will win: Hudson 28-21

Firestone (1-9 last year) at Barberton (1-9)

What to watch: [Pyrce Taylor](#) makes his debut as Barberton's coach. QB Jackson Hanlin, WR-DB Noah Wright, WR-DB Vernon Reynolds Jr., OL-DL Ricco Varner, RB Ethan Youkers, RB Rantonio Thomas, and RB D'Antwone Brown are players to watch for [Barberton](#). [Firestone](#) is led by QB Donniven Younger and OL-DL Nae'than Milliner, Jaylen Croff, Me'khi Young, Anwar Haslam, James Boyer and Cory Griffith.

Who will win: Barberton 28-21

North (1-9 last year) at Warren Champion (3-7)

What to watch: North opens the season with freshman Karr'Dae Little playing quarterback after the tragic shooting death of J'Air Bell on Aug. 9 in

- Akron. Bell was North's starting QB the past two years as a sophomore and junior. OG-DT Deon Williams, RB-LB Jeffrey Williams, DE Albert Sorey and RB-LB Jeremiah Fort are returning players to watch for North.

Who will win: Champion 28-21

Stow (2-8 last year) at Aurora (6-4)

What to watch: New coach Dan Larlham said he knows he faces a huge challenge in his first game leading the Bulldogs. ... After a slow start last season, Aurora won its final four games, just missing the Division III playoffs. ... This year, the Greenmen return the bulk of their roster, led by Luke

- McGovern, who put up 855 all-purpose yards and 11 TDs last season. ... Aurora coach Bob Mihalik is one of Ohio's best, entering his 26th season leading the Greenmen. ... Stow will lean on Jack Miller on offense, as the H-back will play in multiple positions in the Bulldogs' spread offense. ... Caden Boyd and Israel Perkins will give Stow a formidable one-two punch at running back.

Who will win: Aurora 28-10

Nordonia (8-4 last year) at St. Vincent-St. Mary (0-9)

What to watch: Nordonia is still in Division II, Region 5. STVM moved down to Division III, Region 10. ... There will be fresh faces all over the place as Marcus Wattley returns as coach for the Irish. Wattley was STVM's head coach in 2016 and 2017 and was an assistant on Dan Boarman's staff from 2007-2015. ... Scott Barwidi is guiding the Knights. Barwidi was an 18-year assistant before taking over the reigns for Jeff Fox, who left to coach his alma mater, Willoughby South. It will be interesting to see how schemes change under the new regimes. ... Steven Fakult has a rocket arm, and he'll get to

- show it off once again for Nordonia, with Collin Atha, Grant Kaminski, Dominick Jackson and Karsen Fisher as his primary receivers. ... Fakult (199-of-354 passing, 3,072 yards, 27 TDs) is coming off a season in which he was [second-team Division II All-Ohio](#). ... Jackson is a phenomenal two-way player who led the team in receptions (49), yards (933) and touchdowns (12). Atha (48 receptions, 646 yards, five TDs) and Kaminski (36 receptions, 608 yards, three TDs) weren't that far behind... Fisher, a Toledo recruit, is the glue on defense at linebacker with 59 tackles, three for loss, 1½ sacks, a forced fumble
- and an interception last season. ... Pay attention to Field transfer Nehemiah Moten for STVM. The wide receiver/ defensive back has offers from Buffalo, Wake Forest, Austin Peay and Kent State as a junior. Moten's counterpart in
 - the secondary will be Tyler Wharton, who is coming off a solid freshman year in which he made 37 tackles, two for loss, and had nine pass breakups. ... The key for the Irish will be to jumpstart a squad that averaged 5.2 points last season and didn't score until Week 4.

Who will win: Nordonia 35-13

Kent Roosevelt (5-5 last year) at Twinsburg (6-5)

- What to watch:** Kent Roosevelt moved to the Metro Athletic Conference and is in Division III, Region 9. Twinsburg is now in the Suburban League American Conference and Division II, Region 5. ... Dylan Fantone (216-of-350
- passing, 2,307 yards, 23 TDs) will move the Tigers this season. His primary receiver will be Kyle Annello, who rushed for 312 yards and a touchdown in 81 carries. He caught 12 passes for 77 yards and a score last
 - season. ... Max Froman anchors the Rough Riders up front on offense. ... Wide receivers Tyler Ellington (26 catches, 516 yards, five TDs) and Sevyon Jones (20 catches, 278 yards) will be big targets for either Kingston Bryant and Cyler Foreman at quarterback.

Who will win: Twinsburg 42-7

Coventry (2-8 last year) at Girard (12-1)

- **What to watch:** [Coventry coach Gary Kanaga](#) said his team was playing one of the toughest schedules in Ohio and its opener was large part of that. ... Girard reached the regional finals in Division V last season before running into Youngstown Cardinal Mooney and is expected to be among the top teams in Division V again this fall. ... Coventry will rely on running back Alex Barker, who gets his shot to run the ball after playing on the line the past two seasons. ... Alex Eudy will anchor the Comets defense at linebacker.
- **Who will win:** Girard 35-7

Cuyahoga Falls (1-9 last year) at Willoughby South (5-6)

- **What to watch:** [The Black Tigers will play their first season opener at Lambert Stadium](#) against a Rebels team that made the Division II playoffs despite finishing under .500. ... Long-time coach Matt Duffy has South playing as a fixture in playoff football. ... Falls will lean on its line, led talented tackle Uly Scribner. ... Mason Maxwell will be a key player for Falls at linebacker.
- **Who will win:** Willoughby South 28-7

Green (6-6 last year) at Indian Valley (12-1)

What to watch: The Division II [Bulldogs](#) make the trip south to Gnadenhutten to face D4 power [Indian Valley](#). Green lost 28-21 at home to Indian Valley in last year's season opener. ... Green has a lot of new faces in key places. Senior Chase Herbert (6-0, 187) takes over at quarterback and senior Kam Worner (6-1, 215) takes over as the feature back after spending the past two years primarily playing linebacker. "He showed us some really good stuff," Green coach Mark Geis said of the scrimmages. "We've got a lot of faith in him." ... Another thing Geis liked from Green's scrimmages was the play of senior defensive linemen Clayton Washington (5-10, 205), Carson Schosker (6-1, 180) and Nolan Sankovich (6-3, 225). "It was a good step in the

right direction," Geis said. ... Green junior WR-CB Reed Liberatore (5-10, 175) had an outstanding preseason in Geis' opinion and could be primed for a big year. ... Indian Valley graduated 2025 Ohio Mr. Football Grady Kinsey, now a running back for Air Force. Senior QB Ryker Williams returns to lead a program that earned the 2024 state championship, advanced to a 2025 state semifinal and currently boasts a 22-game regular-season winning streak. Williams passed for 1,283 yards and 15 touchdowns last year while running for 615 yards and 10 TDs in earning First Team All-Ohio. "Doesn't look like they've missed a beat, quite honestly," Geis said of this year's Braves. "They have a lot of guys on both sides of the ball that have a ton of experience. They have multiple three-year starters. It doesn't look like they've changed a whole lot. It's kind of plug and play." ... Green could use a good start this season after beginning last year 0-2 and 1-5, due in part to costly injuries .

Who will win: Indian Valley 20-17

Rocky River (11-3 last year) at Manchester (8-4)

■ **What to watch:** Manchester hosts Rocky River, the Division III, Region 10 runner-up last season to eventual state runner-up Toledo Central Catholic. The Pirates return wide receivers Tristin Hughes, Rowan Kennedy and Danny Berg. The trio combined for 3,300 receiving yards and 47 TDs last year. Hughes, a Kentucky recruit, earned All-Ohio honors along with Kennedy, quarterback Ryan Taylor and defensive lineman Steven McHenry. Taylor graduated and McHenry is back. Two-time All-Ohio RB-DB Phil Partin is back for Manchester, along with OL-DL Blaze Johnson, OL-DL Joe Bickett, WR-DB Noah Lance and WR-DB Lorenzo Donatelli. Look for Partin to have another big season for the Panthers.

■ **Who will win:** Rocky River 35-28

Springfield (1-9 last year) at Waterloo (0-10)

■ **What to watch:** A year ago, the Vikings' most competitive game came against the Spartans. Keyshawne King nearly led Waterloo to victory with a

five-touchdown performance in a 40-32 loss to [Springfield](#). Now, King hopes to help the Vikings avenge that loss in a game featuring two very young teams. Meanwhile, 6-foot-2, 250-pound offensive lineman Spencer Casto looks to lead an improved ground game as the Spartans' size up front could pose a challenge to the Vikings.

Who will win: Waterloo 35-28

■ **Medina (4-8 last year) at Findlay (6-5)**

Both teams are coming off playoff seasons, although neither team set the world on fire. ... Findlay is down in Division II, Region 6 from Division I, Region 2 a season ago. ... Medina stays in Division I, Region 1. ... The Bees lost 122 receptions, 1,279 yards and 12 TDs in their receiving unit but have experience back in Bishop Burch, Cooper Sokolowki and Ashton Knowles. ... Third-team All-Ohio quarterback Miles Bailey has graduated and is now playing for the University of Findlay, but the Trojans still have a weapon in honorable mention all-state wide receiver Carter Imke (51 receptions, 601 yards six TDs).

Who will win: Findlay 21-14

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