

'Odd' week

Three teams are navigating having a bye

Rick Noland
The Gazette

Wadsworth football players will congregate in the back room at Spunkmeyer's Pub & Grill this evening to watch a live stream of their next opponent, while many Highland players will travel to nearby Brecksville and those from Buckeye will be checking "X" or other social media platforms for score updates.

Due to the Ohio High School Athletic Association's decision to reduce the number of playoff teams from 16 to 12 per region, the second-seeded Grizzlies and top-seeded Hornets and Bucks earned first-round byes and won't be playing tonight.

"It's kind of a weird feeling," Wadsworth running back/safety Gavin Madigan said. "We're getting our bodies right and practicing hard, but it's a feeling nobody has had before. It doesn't change much. We're still working hard to get better, but in a way it's odd."

Seeded second in Division II, Region 6, the Grizzlies (10-0) will host the winner of the game between No. 10 Valley Forge (5-5) at No. 7 Toledo St. Francis de Sales (6-4) in a regional quarterfinal a week from tonight.

Highland (10-0), the top seed in D-II, Region 6, will host the winner of No. 9 Oregon Clay (6-4) at No. 8 Brecksville (6-4), while Buckeye (10-0), the top seed in D-III, Region 10, will host the winner of No. 9 Copley (7-3) at No. 8 St. Marys Memorial (7-3).

"This is new to everybody and everybody has their own ideas on what they're going to do (with the week off)," Bucks coach Greg Dennison said. "We'll see which one works."

"Our kids handle things well. That's one of the reasons we're 10-0. We're able to handle the good, bad and in between. The mentality has been just like every other week. We just don't have a game."

While Medina County schools Brunswick, Cloverleaf and Medina will be playing first-round games tonight — Black River did not qualify — the coaches from Buckeye, Highland and Medina will be traveling to scout their potential opponents.

Because St. Marys is in Auglaize County in Northwest Ohio and St. Francis de Sales is also a long drive, few if any players from Buckeye and Wadsworth will be in attendance to watch their future opponent. Highland, however, is expected to have a lot of players at nearby Brecksville tonight.

"A lot of us are going to go," Hornets running back Casey Myser said. "A couple of guys are going to go to the Medina-Strongsville game because they have friends on those teams, but most of our guys and coaches are going to be at the Brecksville game."

"We've got to stay locked in. It's just like it was a game week. We're getting after it in the weight room and practice, so it's not really a week off for us."

In terms of how their teams spent this week, Dennison, Highland's Mike Gibbons and Wadsworth's Justin Todd followed similar procedures, though the Bucks, who took Monday off and will be off today, Saturday and Sunday, had a bit more down time.



J. Snyderburn



Myser



Madigan



NICK CAMMETT / GAZETTE

Highland celebrates a fumble recovery against Cuyahoga Falls. Below, Buckeye's Turner Dolata, left, and Mason Dolata celebrate a touchdown at Rocky River.

BYE

From B1

"Practice has been a little different," Buckeye wide receiver/outside line-backer Jacob Snyderburn said. "We've got no one to plan for, so we've just been focusing on ourselves this week."

"We're not going to drive 2½ hours (to St. Marys), but we'll keep an eye on the score."

Highland watched film of its Week 10 win on Saturday, took Sunday and today off, held fairly light practices on Monday and Tuesday and went at it hard on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The difference on Tuesday and Wednesday was that instead of practicing against a scout team like the Hornets did in the regular season, the varsity offense went against the varsity defense, with the exception of a few two-way players who could only be on one side of the ball.

"We've really gotten some good practices in," Gibbons said. "Sometimes it can get monotonous, so this has been kind of a fun week where we go Highland against Highland."

"We have a couple players with nagging injuries, so we kept them out all week. We're just trying to be extremely smart. We want to get in a good workout, but we don't want any guys on the ground (through tackling) right now. It is what it is. The kids have been good about working hard and staying focused, and we're just trying to get them in and get them out."



Wadsworth players lifted weights Monday morning before school and didn't practice that afternoon, then took the field the rest of the week, though most practices were a bit shorter than normal. The Grizzlies continued their season-long schedule of doing yoga on Wednesday and also checked to make sure all their

players had maintained their preseason weight.

On Saturday morning, Wadsworth players will do a workout in the pool, watch film of their Week 12 opponent if it is available and have a team brunch. Like Buckeye and Highland, the coaches will begin game-planning that day and continue that on Sunday, with

the Grizzlies, also like Buckeye and Highland, taking the field for practice Monday through Thursday next week.

"The No. 1 priority (this week) was rest and getting our guys healthy," Todd said. "A lot of our guys were banged up, and we gave some of our two-way players more rest. We went back to fundamentals like blocking, tackling and ball security and went over some game situations we haven't faced this season."

"We want to make sure our kids come out of this week feeling like they were productive and got better. That's why we were doing all the situational things. One of the assignments I gave the staff last weekend was to come in Monday with crazy situations we might encounter that we can create in practice. We want to get better and be ready to go."

Tonight at Spunkmeyer's, where the Grizzlies will have a team dinner prior to watching Valley Forge take on St. Francis de Sales, wings, chicken fingers and the like will be on the menu. Next week, Wadsworth hopes to feast on whatever wins that game.

"When you get into the playoffs, it's really about players," Todd said. "You build this menu throughout the year and add to it. This was a great week to evaluate what we like and don't like. Our focus was on Wadsworth this week. Next week we'll get back to game prep."

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