

Preseason Top 25: Who are Northeast Ohio's best high school football teams to start 2025?

- Updated: Aug. 18, 2025, 1:24 p.m.
- | Published: Aug. 18, 2025, 12:00 p.m.

[Glenville has unfinished business](#)

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By

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CLEVELAND, Ohio — The road to Canton starts here.

Week 1 of the high school football season kicks off Thursday night in Avon, where the defending OHSA Division II state champions play host to St. Ignatius. More big games follow Friday around Northeast Ohio and the state.

It is the first of 16 weeks before seven state champions will be crowned at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium, and the area is sure to have a presence. Who are the top teams favored to get there?

The cleveland.com power rankings began Monday with a look at 25 of the area's 50 best teams beyond the Top 25. Now find out how the best teams in Northeast Ohio, including the seven counties that surround Cleveland, stack up in the cleveland.com preseason Top 25:

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- [Cleveland.com preseason football power rankings: Counting down the top 50 area teams in 2025](#) Aug. 18, 2025, 6:05a.m.

25. Cleveland Heights

2024 finish: 7-5, Division I regional qualifier

Coach: Bryce Jones (first season)

2025 forecast: There is no shortage of talent at the skill positions in Jones' first season at his alma mater, but can Cleveland Heights buy those playmakers time to produce? Most of the offensive and defensive lines graduated after former coach Mac Stephens left for Garfield Heights. Brandon Caesar is now at West Virginia and Jay'Quan Stubbs is now at Minnesota, while former Mr. Football finalist Marquise Davis is now at Missouri. However, Davis shared the backfield with freshman Elijah Harris last year. Now a sophomore, Harris and John Morris lead that backfield with junior quarterback LaMarques Greenwood II, who transferred from Glenville. He will have Henry Perrymond Jr. — also one of Cleveland's best cornerbacks — as a top target with senior Sirr Gibson. They open Friday at Trotwood-Madison before a visit from Chardon in Week 2.

24. North Ridgeville

2024 finish: 9-3, Division II regional quarterfinalist

Coach: Bryan Morgan (fifth season)

2025 forecast: North Ridgeville took a leap last year with an experienced senior class filled with three-year starters. However, the Class of 2026 came up with them and is back to lead the Rangers after a home loss to Wadsworth in the second round of the playoffs. Senior running back Zack Barnhart is a fourth-year starter at running back, while quarterback Cole Miller has a top target in Ryan Anderson. Tackle Hemzah Fahmawi is an emotional leader on the defensive front, which the Rangers will need after graduating All-Ohio linebackers Carson Madis and Austin DeShazo. They open with North Olmsted on Friday and get defending state champion Avon at home in Week 4 to start the Southwestern Conference schedule.

23. Riverside

2024 finish: 4-7, Division II regional qualifier

Coach: Jeremy Ishmael (second season)

2025 forecast: Running back Kyndall McCaleb is one of Northeast Ohio's most electric players in the backfield. He rushed for 1,535 yards and 17 TDs during Ishmael's first year at the helm in Painesville. The Beavers (4-7) exited in the first round of the Division II playoffs against Green. They have one more season in the Western Reserve Conference before joining the Greater Cleveland Conference. Shaker Heights will provide a preview of that in Week 1, before a rematch with Green in Week 2.

22. Maple Heights

2024 finish: 8-4, Division III regional quarterfinalist

Coach: Shaq Washington (eighth season)

2025 forecast: A junior-laden team led the Mustangs to a first-round win at Kenston and title contention in the Lake Erie League. While the LEL has broken up, Maple will still play those old league rivals this season as independents. Defensive back and receiver Kindall Brown, an Ohio University commit, return with quarterback Luke Anzlovar (2,451 yards, 33 TDs) and playmaker Mike Banks. They will be without Anzlovar to start the season, so expect the Mustangs to improve as this season progresses — both as they adjust early without Anzlovar and later once they expect him back. Maple opens Friday at Lorain in a rematch of last year's LEL title game. Lorain won in a shootout.

21. Chardon

2024 finish: 8-3, Division III regional quarterfinalist

Coach: Brian Landies (first season)

2025 forecast: Landies takes over as the head coach at Chardon after serving as Mitch Hewitt's defensive coordinator for 13 seasons. Hewitt led the Hilltoppers for 14 years before stepping down after last season. Chardon has been built on defense, but it will be helped by returning quarterback Drayton Allgood and a Division I college prospect on the line in Andrew Baggott. Defensively, Jayden Buth returns after a team-high 13 tackles for loss with 75 total tackles, 42 solo, and two sacks.

20. Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy

2024 finish: 10-3, Division III regional semifinalist

Coach: Nick Cook (fifth season)

2025 forecast: With eight starters back on each side of the ball, CVCA is in prime position to build off a 2024 season that saw it earn the No. 3 seed in Region 9 and push to the third round of the playoffs. The Royals are now full North Coast Conference members, too, after fulfilling their Principals Athletic Conference commitments last season. They now bring back one of Northeast Ohio's top two-way standouts at running back and linebacker in Joey Kopec, a Rutgers commit who finished with 85 tackles and six interceptions at linebacker. He gained 1,843 all-purpose yards with 16 touchdowns as a junior. Ben Traux is a returning All-Ohio lineman on the offensive interior, one of three returning starters up front to plow the way for Kopec and quarterback Charley Levak (1,627 all-purpose yards with 957 yards passing and 12 total TDs).

19. Benedictine

2024 finish: 10-3, Division III regional semifinalist

Coach: Joe Prevesk (third season)

2025 forecast: Four of five starters return on the line after a big season for graduated running back Christopher Maloney, who set Benedictine's single-game rushing record of 386 yards and five touchdowns in a Week 11 playoff victory. While he is gone, senior quarterback Matthew Furst returns at quarterback with junior Giovanni Iacampo, who stepped in for an injured Furst last season. Toledo commit Tyrell O'Neal leads the defensive front with Sean O'Connell and Jonathan Spikes. The secondary has potential, led by Smith, senior John Jones and sophomore Kameron Hill. Their Week 1 opener at John Carroll vs. Gilmour Academy could be a Region 9 playoff preview. Benedictine moved over from Region 10, where it lost to Padua a season ago. Their rematch is Week 2 in Parma.

18. Perry

2024 finish: 12-2, Division IV regional finalist

Coach: Bob Gecewich (fifth season)

2025 forecast: The Pirates graduated more standouts from their 2024 team than the 2023 state-title winner, which was loaded then with juniors such as All-Ohio quarterback Walter Moses, leading receiver Luke Sivon and tackler Owen McKoon. However, this has been one of Northeast Ohio's most consistent programs. Gecewich has only enhanced it in four years. He is 49-8 since returning to Northeast Ohio from Dublin Jerome and will have foundational players in defensive end Trent Taylor, running back and linebacker Carter Hopkins with defensive backs Brody Petruccelli and Jimmy Ashburn. Many will go both ways, including Taylor at tight end, plus Hopkins and Petruccelli at running back. With Hopkins a question mark to start the season because of injury, Petruccelli is capable of filling in after moving over from receiver. They open Friday with neighboring rival Madison, which begins a grueling start to the season with Kenston in Week 2, a trip to Kirtland in Week 3 and Chardon in Week 4.

17. Nordonia

2024 finish: 10-3, Division II regional semifinalist

Coach: Jeff Fox (14th season)

2025 forecast: Karsen Fisher returns as one of the area's top linebackers in the Class of 2027 while senior tackle Gavin Kanar is a Kent State commit. Nordonia's offense will have a new look with junior Steven Fakult at quarterback, replacing graduated two-year starter Ben Chessner graduated. Leading rusher Rocco DeLorenzo and Khyllan Osbey also have graduated, but Nordonia has won eight or more games for four straight seasons. The Knights open Friday vs. St. Vincent-St. Mary and are ranked ahead of their first four opponents before a Week 5 showdown vs. No. 16 Solon.

16. Solon

2024 finish: 3-8, Division II regional qualifier

Coach: Brian Wisniewski (fifth season)

2025 forecast: Despite Solon's 3-8 finish, few teams played better down the stretch. The Comets pushed Suburban League National Conference champion Wadsworth before a one-point loss, then upset Hudson in Week 10. Wisniewski had one of Northeast Ohio's youngest teams with A.J. Jefferson at running back and several more prospects from the Class of 2027 with defensive end/tight end Brady Bush and cornerback Khyier Robinson. They will miss the leadership of senior safety Braeden Springer, who earned All-Northeast Lakes District Defensive Player of the Year in Division II with nine interceptions. Quarterback Jack Sanders also is gone as a transfer to St. Edward. Solon moves back up to Division I for postseason play and has a Week 2 trip to Strongsville, which can gauge the Comets' growth after a Week 1 opener at Kenston.

15. Villa Angela-St. Joseph

2024 finish: 8-3, Division III regional quarterfinalist

Coach: Jeff Rotsky (fifth season)

2025 forecast: Rotsky's senior class last season was the first one he saw all the way through at VASJ, as they arrived together in 2021. It produced three Power Four commits, led by Lamar "Bo" Jackson (Ohio State), Brian Kortovich (Penn State) and lineman Robert Smith (Boston College). However, more potential is coming up. D'Angelo White is one of the area's biggest prospects in the Class of 2027, already with offers from the Buckeyes and several more big schools as a tight end and defensive end. T.J. Moore emerged as the lead back after Jackson's Week 4 injury, too, helping the Vikings to an 8-3 finish. They will be at Columbus Walnut Ridge and Youngstown Cardinal Mooney before a Week 3 home opener vs. Mansfield Senior.

14. Hudson

2024 finish: 6-6, Division II regional quarterfinalist

Coach: Jeff Gough (10th season)

2025 forecast: Senior quarterback Nathan Judy and junior Reno Ferri showed sparks in the backfield for Hudson, which won five of its games in a six-week stretch. Brennen Funyak and two-way starter Louie Castellarin are back for Gough, whose program challenges every season in Division II and the Suburban League's National Conference. The Explorers will be tested Friday by Austintown Fitch before a Suburban League crossover trip in Week 2 to Highland.

13. St. Ignatius

2024 finish: 1-10, Division I regional qualifier

Coach: Ryan Franzinger (third season)

2025 forecast: St. Ignatius' growth this season should be helped by returning leaders on both sides of the ball in Daniel Chalhoub at quarterback and Jayshon Thomas at safety with Nick Rivera at linebacker. The line took a hit last winter with Oklahoma commit Will Conroy transferring to IMG Academy in Florida. That leaves Michael van der Oord as Franzinger's returning starter to protect Chalhoub, who has one of his top two rushers back in Owen Colwell and electric receivers in Luke Simms and junior Trey Haddad. The schedule remains unforgiving with defending Division II state champion Avon to open the season, followed by Division I state-title contenders in Pickerington North and Mentor. Walsh Jesuit also is a state-title contender at the Division II level, meaning those first four weeks could define the Wildcats' season.

12. Avon Lake

2024 finish: 6-5, Division II regional qualifier

Coach: Matt Kostelnik (ninth season)

2025 forecast: Four-year starting tackle and Ohio State commit Max Riley headlines Avon Lake, which has some firepower around him with a Division I college prospect in Air Force commit Aidan Stewart at receiver and two strong backs in Michael Summerfield and Ezra Jones. Toledo St. Francis de Sales upset the Shoremen, 34-31, in the first round of last year's playoffs. They had picked up steam down the stretch after a tough nonconference schedule. That doesn't change this year, but Lake Catholic and Highland replace Benedictine and Chardon in Weeks 2 and 3.

11. Olmsted Falls

2024 finish: 8-4, Division II regional quarterfinalist

Coach: Tom DeLuca (13th season)

2025 forecast: One of the top games this season saw Olmsted Falls outlast Avon Lake, 43-37 in double overtime. Running back Owen Singleton, who rushed for 1,382 yards and scored 16 TDs, is back with top lineman Nathan Scheffler and junior linebacker Mason Cerovac. A strong running game and defense are traditional staples for the Bulldogs, who will test their might Friday against Mentor. They open with three Greater Cleveland Conference opponents, including Brunswick and Strongsville, before Southwestern Conference play. Falls looks to unseat Avon atop the SWC in Week 5.

10. Highland

2024 finish: 13-1, Division II regional finalist

Coach: Mike Gibbons (11th season)

2025 forecast: Defense also be will be a big question mark for Highland, which graduated Miami (Ohio) recruit Carson Noonan and Ryan Zywiec from its front. Both made the All-Northeast Inland District first team, and Noonan shared the Defensive Player of the Year. The offense should center around senior running back Casey Myser, one of Northeast Ohio's top returning playmakers. Junior Evan Foust will be another one to watch on both sides of the ball for Highland, which reached the Division II regional finals and nearly pulled off a comeback vs. Avon. Gibbons' Hornets will be on the road for two of the first three weeks, starting with Erie (Pa.) McDowell on Friday. They host Hudson before headed to Avon Lake, a former scrimmage partner in Week 3, and then begin their Suburban League American Conference title defense vs. Aurora.

9. Kirtland

2024 finish: 15-1, Division VI state finalist

Coach: Tiger LaVerde (20th season)

2025 forecast: Kirtland is coming off its 13th appearance in a state final in the last 14 years. Four starters are expected back on offense, led by senior quarterback Jake LaVerde with running back John Silvestro — the team's third-leading rusher behind LaVerde and senior Danny Alfieri. Defensively, nose tackle Ty Bledsoe leads the Hornets up front with junior linebackers Zander Perko and Sebastian Becker, plus two-way lineman Luciano Cantini. They open Friday at Central Clarion (Pa.) and have an anticipated rematch in Week 3 vs. Perry, which starts a series of Chagrin Valley Conference crossovers.

8. Strongsville

2024 finish: 7-5, Division I regional quarterfinalist

Coach: Jason Trusnik (second season)

2025 forecast: Trusnik's first year on the sidelines brought a renaissance to Strongsville, which earned a first-round home game in Division I for the first time since 2008 and won in the playoffs for the first time since that season. Senior quarterback Nolan Beard and third-year starting tackle Cormac Lally are among the biggest losses coming because of graduation for the Mustangs, but they will have one of Northeast Ohio's most dangerous pass rushes with Texas A&M commit Storm Miller (five sacks, 27 TFL) and Ohio commit Austin Adkins, plus Braelin Dally. Senior receiver Alex Espay is dangerous in the open field, and Strongsville's Class of 2027 is a promising one. Running back Kendrick Boddie showed why when he spelled senior Sam Dimacchia in the backfield, as they met Mentor twice for the Greater Cleveland Conference title

and again in the regional quarterfinals. This season could be defined by an Oct. 3 rematch with the Cardinals.

7. Wadsworth

2024 finish: 11-2, Division II regional semifinalist

Coach: Justin Todd (10th season)

2025 forecast: The Grizzlies' strength for the last two years has been with their Class of 2026, which will now be seniors, led by Gavin Madigan at running back and safety with linebacker Jacob Earnest. Madigan is [about to be a four-year starter](#). He missed the second half of the regular season, which led to a takeover at running back by junior Cooper Gray. Additionally, freshman Brysen Hall [made his impact](#) as the starting quarterback with junior receiver Calix Lemp. Cornerback Jude Haller also started as a freshman for the Grizzlies, who ran into Avon in the Division II regional semifinals. Their only regular-season loss last year came against North Royalton in Week 10 for a share of the Suburban League's National Conference. They will meet this year in Week 4 at North Royalton, as Wadsworth is favored to defend its title share and challenge Avon in Region 6.

6. Mentor

2024 finish: 13-1, Division I regional finalist

Coach: Matt Gray (sixth season)

2025 forecast: How do you replace Scotty Fox? That's the big question for Mentor, which traditionally produces big-time quarterbacks and is now sending the four-year starter to West Virginia. The strengths of this team, which won the Greater Cleveland Conference and earned the top seed in Division I, Region 1, will be up front with tackle Landry Brede (North Carolina State commit) and Miami (Ohio) commit Justen Hodge at receiver. Mentor is slated to return three starters on the offensive line for Gray with center JoJo LoDuca and tackle Colin Prichard. That should lead to a strong run game with Jackson Farley (1,925 yards, 22 TDs) and Dominic Burns (345 yards, three TDs). Cornerback Xayvion Dunn will be back on defense and proved dangerous to quarterbacks who tested him this season. They play two Top 25 teams in the first three weeks, opening Friday at Olmsted Falls before a visit in Week 3 from St. Ignatius.

5. Walsh Jesuit

2024 finish: 13-1, Division II regional finalist

Coach: Nick Alexander (seventh season)

2025 forecast: Senior quarterback Keller Moten electrified the Walsh offense for the past two seasons. He will turn over the keys of the offense to David Ternofsky, also a touted baseball prospect. The line will bring back Colton Crosley for another season with Marty Tobin and Carlos Smith among the returning backs. Milan Parris, at 6-5, is one of the area's biggest big-play receivers. Cornerback and Ohio commit James Brewer III is one of the area's biggest cornerbacks with the highest ceilings at 6-3 for the Warriors, who reached the Division II regional finals for a third time in the last four years. Their secondary includes another Mid-American Conference commit in junior safety Grant Blascak (Toledo). They start the season with two tough road tests, beginning Friday at Toledo Central Catholic, which is coming off last year's run to the Division III state finals. Springfield will be up next in Week 2.

4. Avon

2024 finish: 16-0, Division II state champion

Coach: Mike Elder (19th season)

2025 forecast: Avon will have as much talent to replace as anyone in Ohio. Senior quarterback Nolan Good was a Mr. Football finalist, capping his career with a 190-yard rushing performance in the snow during the Eagles' [20-13 win](#) against Cincinnati Anderson. All-time leading receiver Matt Maxey graduated. So did safety Tyler Kaufmann and two-way tackle Jeremiah Kelly, whose death earlier this year in Cincinnati weighs heavily on everyone at Avon. The Eagles' title defense starts Ohio State recruit Jakob Weatherspoon in the secondary and Miami (Ohio) recruit Ryan Stolarski at linebacker. They open the season Thursday at home vs. St. Ignatius and follow with a trip to Florida before clashing again with Glenville in Week 3. Avon is favored to win a 10th straight Southwestern Conference championship. Avon is one of four SWC teams in the preseason Top 25.

3. St. Edward

2024 finish: 9-6, Division I state semifinalist

Coach: Tom Lombardo (11th season)

2025 forecast: Injuries ravaged St. Edward's bid for a fourth straight state championship. They lost standout running back Brandon White three games into his junior season after rushing for more than 1,900 yards as a sophomore. That led to an aggressive passing offense, which then saw Zach Hackleman lost to an injury after he set the single-season receiving record for the Eagles. St. Edward still reached the state semifinals despite missing both of them. The offensive line will remain one of the state's strongest, led by guard Mason Wilhelm going into his senior year and Jack Marquard, who will be a junior with the ability to play guard or tackle. The Eagles

open Friday vs. Pickerington North, but a healthier finish to the season should take St. Edward back to Canton.

2. Archbishop Hoban

2024 finish: 12-3, Division II state semifinalist

Coach: Tim Tyrrell (13th season)

2025 forecast: Hoban has three Power Four recruits in its Class of 2026 with Elbert “Rock” Hill IV headed to USC, Peyton Cook bound for Louisville and tackle Sam Greer committed to Ohio State. Tyrrell hinted last season that leading rusher Brayton Feister (2,096 yards, 26 TDs) will play more linebacker, where he is projected to play at the next level. That transition is boasted by the arrival of four-star junior running back Jace Henry from Central Valley in Western Pennsylvania. Eastern Michigan commit Nick Kinsey has arrived at quarterback, too, from Minnesota. Hoban will open with three out-of-area opponents, starting with a visit from Canal Winchester Harvest Prep before two out-of-state opponents. The second-half of their schedule is where Hoban will truly be tested with four straight home games to conclude the regular season against Walsh Jesuit, Glenville, Central York (Pa.) and St. Edward.

1. Glenville

2024 finish: 11-4, Division IV state semifinalist

Coach: Ted Ginn Sr. (28th season)

2025 forecast: Before Glenville’s season began, seeking a third straight Division IV championship, coach Ted Ginn Sr. noted this is the youngest team in his 27 years as coach. A handful of freshmen started or worked their way into the rotation, including 6-3 Emiere Lemons as a tight end and kicker. Garry Pritchett Jr., thought to be an emerging receiver and cornerback, used his speed at running back. They will be back with leading rusher C.J. Newell (1,136 yards, 18 TDs), change of pace sophomore Romell Phillips and quarterback Arvell Nelson Jr. Defensively, it all starts with Ohio State commit Cincere Johnson (205 tackles, 41 TFL, 8.5 sacks) at linebacker. The All-Ohio Defensive Player of the Year in Division IV is joined by another Buckeyes-bound defender in Jamir Perez at tackle, while Aaron Scales is a third-years starter at safety. The Tarblooders’ bid for another title ended with a [13-11 loss](#) to Sandusky Perkins in the state semifinals. This team should be motivated by that, as it opens the season Friday at Massillon before a trip in Week 2 to defending Division I state champion Olentangy Liberty, then D-II state champ Avon. The Tarblooders then take on St. Edward before their stretch of Senate League games.