

Akron Beacon Journal

High school football | Akron-area Week 1 breakdowns, predictions

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The wait is over.

The Ohio high school football season kicks off this week and, for Greater Akron, it opens when Garfield travels to Southeast for a nonleague game Aug. 21.

The rest of the teams start their seasons Aug. 22 with a full slate of games. The best of them, on paper at least, is a powerhouse matchup between visiting Walsh Jesuit and Toledo Central Catholic. Other top games include Canal Winchester Harvest Prep at Archbishop Hoban, Barberton at Wadsworth, Highland at Erie McDowell (Pa.), Austintown-Fitch at Hudson, Buchtel at North Canton Hoover and Indian Valley at Green.

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

Thursday's football game in the Greater Akron area

Garfield (4-6 in 2024) at Southeast (3-7)

What to watch: [Garfield](#) won this matchup 21-13 to open last season and could potentially have the two best athletes on the field in [seniors Ziiyahn Blair and Jamir Jenkins](#). Both have Division I college football scholarship offers to play defense. Can two guys win a game by themselves? Of course not, but look for Garfield to play a physical style with a revamped roster that lost a majority of its starters from last season to graduation. Corey Williams is Garfield's only two-way returning starter. ... Southeast features Joe Sharish, Alaunte Massrock and Nathanael Rivera.

Who will win: Garfield 21-14

Need a break? [Play the USA TODAY Daily Crossword Puzzle.](#)

Friday's football games in the Greater Akron area

Walsh Jesuit (13-1 in 2024) at Toledo Central Catholic (14-2)

What to watch: The David Ternosky era for the Warriors begins with Walsh traveling to the western corner of the state to face the reigning Division III state runner-up. The Warriors lost to Hoban in the Division II, Region 5 final last season. The Fighting Irish fell 19-14 to Columbus Bishop Watterson in the state final. ... Walsh has a stable at running back in [Marty Tobin](#) (974 yards, nine TDs), [Carlos Smith](#) (558 yards, eight TDs), [Vinnie Courtad](#) and [Cade Romanini](#), who returns from injury. ... Iowa State commit and All-Ohioan Milan Parris (597 yards receiving, nine TDs) is back, as are all-state lineman and Ohio University commit Colton Crosley and guard Brayden Piersall. [Caden Carter](#) is a star at linebacker, as are Toledo commit Grant Blascak, Ohio pledge James Brewer, Ben Biel and Tommy Pulletti in the secondary. Add Dario Jeras on the line and the Warriors shouldn't miss a beat. ... Ternosky (1,253 yards passing, 22

TDs, 500-plus yards rushing, six TDs) takes over after an undefeated junior varsity season and has a viable receiver to pair with Parris in Cambell Lann, who has offers from Kent State and Toledo. ... It's little surprise to see Texas A&M commit Victor Singleton as the face of the Irish. He's ranked as the state's top prospect regardless of position and is ready to back that up. Three-star tight end Preston Fryzel will test Walsh's defense and give returning starting quarterback Ali Beydoun a big target. ... TCC returns six starters on a defense that lost just one game to an Ohio opponent.

Who will win: Central Catholic 24-17

Canal Winchester Harvest Prep (9-3) at Hoban (12-3)

What to watch: The Knights come back after a semifinal exit to eventual Division II state champion Avon, and they're absolutely loaded. How much time do you have? Four-star defensive back and USC commit [Elbert Hill](#) (four interceptions, seven TDs), four-star left tackle and Ohio State commit [Sam Greer](#), four-star wide receiver and Louisville commit Payton Cook and three-star defensive end and Colorado State commit [Ace Brown](#) (49 tackles, 16 for loss, 12 sacks, two forced fumbles) begin this nightmare for the opposition. Add Brydon and [Brayton Feister](#) at linebacker, with Brayton also in the backfield, and this team gets scarier. As good as the state semifinal team was last season, this squad comes into the season better. Brayton Feister is a four-star recruit with 23 offers who ran for 2,194 yards and 26 TDS on 296 carries. Brydon Feister will move into the starting lineup at linebacker and has offers from Penn State, Kentucky, Indiana and Kent State. ... Pennsylvania transfers [Jance Henry](#) (1,011 yards, five TDs) at running back and Minnesota move-in [Nick Kinsey](#) (2,268 yards passing, 24 TDs) at quarterback could make Hoban nearly unstoppable. ... Division I recruit [CollinBoff](#) (2,300-plus yard passing 24 touchdowns) leads the Warriors into 2025. He's got a rock of a center in front of him in Abem Teshome, who is 6-foot and 300 pounds and recorded 12 pancake blocks last season, and a stud at wide

receiver in Jamarcus Jones (51 catches, 947 yards, nine TDs). ... Jones returns as a district defensive player of the year after he made 37 tackles with seven interceptions.

Who will win: Hoban 28-14

Barberton (2-8) at Wadsworth (11-2)

What to watch: This is the season the Grizzlies have been waiting for. With returning All-Ohioans running back [Cooper Gray](#) (211 carries, 1,673 yards, 21 TDs); safety and Army commit [Gavin Madigan](#) (92 tackles in 10 games); wide receiver, Air Force pledge and hybrid linebacker [Calix Lemp](#) (41 receptions, 722 yards, 11 TDs); and linebacker [Jacob Earnest](#) (112 tackles, 4½ for loss) and Wadsworth is set for a great season. ... Sophomore quarterback [Brysen Hall](#) (142-of-245 passing 2,118 yards, 22 TDs) will be the starter again. It's easy to see why the Grizzlies are the favorites to win a third consecutive Suburban League title. ... Barberton boasts a lethal quintet of Anthony Gotto, Jamar McCray and Trent Dewitt (65 tackles, two for loss, two interceptions). Two-way linemen Ricco Varner and Brice Crowe are the impact players in the trenches. ... The addition of two-way linemen Jason Modi, who is back from Hoban, should be a shot in the arm. ... Look for 5-10, 180-pound senior Bryadon Louk to make an impact at quarterback after playing for Rittman in 2024. ... Barberton has won 31 of the 50 meetings between the two, but Wadsworth has won all 11 games this century.

Who will win: Wadsworth 35-7

Highland (13-1) at Erie McDowell, Pa. (7-5)

What to watch: The No. 1 question for the Hornets will be how to replace All-Ohioans Carson Noonan and Ryan Zyweic. The answer is they won't. That said, Highland is still a deep playoff contender. It begins with [Casey Myser](#), a first-team All-Ohioan who set school records with 2,130 yards rushing and 39

touchdowns on the ground. Add 433 yards receiving and seven more scores and you see just how special he is. ... [Evan Foust](#) (28 receptions, 577 yards, five TDs), Lucas Gerding (25 receptions, 447 yards, three TDs) and Nick Dobkowski (22 receptions, 375 yards, seven TDs) return from a record-setting pass attack for the Hornets as well. ... Highland shines on defense with a linebacking unit that includes Foust (88 tackles, four sacks), Jameson Gordon (73 tackles) and Kallen Whitling (59 tackles). ... Grady Gibb makes his debut for Highland, which shouldn't miss a beat under the first-year starter at quarterback. ... McDowell lost a lot on offense with quarterback Blayze Myers (2,744 yards, 34 TDs), running back Stephon Porter (1,303 yards rushing, 11 TDs) and wide receiver James Zigler (585 yards receiving, five TDs) gone to graduation. ... Rocco Perseo, Rowan Szuba and Cole Hammond bring sustainability to an experienced line. Two-way starters Jalil Thrower, Deonte Flemings, Owen Haffey and Kameron Bastow are expected to fill in the gaps. Running back Brody Bronsell and tight end Ayden Mays will be there as well. ... This is the first of three games in which 14-time District 10 Class 6A champion McDowell plays a team from Ohio, with Mentor and Chardon to follow.

Who will win: Highland 42-14

Austintown-Fitch (9-4) at Hudson (6-6)

What to watch: [Hudson](#) returns a good chunk of its skill position players, but the Explorers face a tough opening week challenge against the Falcons. Both teams were part of the Division II, Region 5 playoffs last fall and both were eliminated by Walsh Jesuit (Hudson lost 35-21 in the second round; Fitch lost 42-28 in the regional semifinal). ... The Explorers will be looking for a more healthy season, as Hudson struggled down the stretch with injuries. ... Hudson will rely on running back [Reno Ferri](#), who put up 880 rushing yards his sophomore year, despite being hobbled by injury. Brennan Funyak also could receive carries, though he will focus on play as a defensive back. ... Speaking of defense, Hudson

wants All-Ohioan Nate Judy to concentrate on his linebacking duties. That means junior Hayden Lipinski will get the starting look at quarterback, though Judy is expected to receive reps under center, especially in the early season. ... Hudson has a deep threat in receiver in Louis Castellarin, who had 698 yards and five TDs last season. ... The Explorers' nonconference schedule remains loaded, with trips to Highland in Week 2 and St. Vincent-St. Mary in Week 3.

Who will win: Hudson 28-24

Buchtel (4-7) at North Canton Hoover (6-5)

What to watch: [Buchtel](#) opens the season at Hoover for the fourth consecutive year. The Griffins won 22-13 last year after the Vikings won 35-21 in 2022 and 27-21 in 2023. ... [Buchtel features an athletic trio of Daurean Johnson \(6-0, 170\), Dwight Shade \(6-2, 185\) and Karter Dawson \(6-2, 200\)](#). Sophomore Arthur Thomas takes over at quarterback for the graduated Stevie Diamond. ... "He's a skinny kid, but he can run a little bit," Hoover coach Brian Baum said. "He's not afraid to put it up. And they have tall, lanky kids that can go up and get the football." ... Senior DL Jordan Holloway is a returning starter and leader for Buchtel's defense, which is not shy about bringing blitzes. ... The Griffins lost talented senior RB-LB Anthony McMullen Jr. when he transferred to Massillon earlier this month. ... Hoover senior QB John Collins is a 6-3, 190-pound athlete who has made great strides as a passer. The Vikings become a scary team to defend if Collins is able to spread the ball around to his playmakers, such as senior Jack Andes, who is a threat to score every time he touches the football, whether on a reception, a handoff or a return. ... Senior Jack Ziarko (6-4, 280), a Miami University recruit, leads Hoover's lines that are working in a lot of new faces but show some promise.

Who will win: Buchtel 28-21

East (6-5) at Bedford (5-5)

What to watch: Bedford won this matchup 27-20 in Week 2 last season. Look for [East senior standouts Terrell Wharton Jr., Donte Swain Jr., Marlin Engram Jr., Darshawn Spragling Jr. and Youngstown State recruit Marcus Henderson II](#) to be motivated to secure a victory in Week 1 this season. Wharton, Swain, Engram and Spragling each have multiple college offers. ... [The Dragons](#) started last year 0-2 and then recovered to earn a share of the City Series championship and make the playoffs.

Who will win: East 28-21

Firestone (5-6) at Rocky River (8-4)

What to watch: [Firestone](#) has a new Week 1 opponent after defeating Cuyahoga Falls in its past two season openers, 34-0 in 2024 and 15-0 in 2023. ... [The Falcons](#) lost a lot of key players to graduation off last year's team that earned a share of the City Series championship and made the playoffs. Can [Gucciano Stephens, Mekhi Tatum, Brandon Tilley, Nae'than Milliner and Anwar Haslam](#) lead [Firestone](#) to a win in Cuyahoga County?

Who will win: Firestone 21-14

North (0-10) at. St. Thomas Aquinas (1-9)

What to watch: Despite having only one senior — RB-DB Tyshawn Dixon — look for Aquinas to open the season with a win with big plays from Dixon, QB-LB Kaden Bowman, WR-DE Travion Elliot and OL-DL Ganon Mitchell. ... [North](#) features [QB Jair Bell, LB-TE La'Danian Hughes, C-NG Ben Sullivan and WR-DB Nate Ruffin](#).

Who will win: Aquinas 14-7

Tallmadge (7-4) at Ellet (1-9)

What to watch: Ellet is led by [talented seniors Brandon Knowles and Terrance Parker Jr.](#), but [Tallmadge](#) won this matchup 49-0 last season in Week 2 and returns 22 lettermen. ... Look for the Blue Devils defense to be tough with [James Robinson](#), Nate Hunt-Heller, Robbie Reid, Caleb Kendrick, Logan Miles, Tracey Franklin and Quenton Johns. Miles and Sonny Cuva are Tallmadge's leaders at running back, and quarterback Braxton Dente adds some spice to this game after playing in five games at Ellet last season.

Who will win: Tallmadge 49-14

Revere (7-5) at Woodridge (3-7)

What to watch: [Revere](#) won this matchup 7-6 in Week 1 last season. Expect to see more scoring and the same team winning as Revere features [two-way linemen Joe Rozak and Elijah Sedor](#), RB-LB [James Perry](#) and RB-DB [Johlil Blanchard](#). ... [Woodridge](#) counters with QB-DB [Naseer Williams-Clay](#), QB-LB [Rory Johnston](#) and WR-DBs [Kellen Morr](#) and [Andrew Stull](#).

Who will win: Revere 28-21

Copley (5-6) at Streetsboro (12-1)

What to watch: The line play in this one should be exceptional with three Division I commits — Copley's Lucas Tielsch (Minnesota) and Streetsboro's Cooper Richmond (Columbia) and Arthur Scott III (Wisconsin). Not that it's all about the trenches in this one with stellar weapons like Copley's Andrew McKnight (57 catches, 926 yards, 14 TDs) and Streetsboro's Marcus Council (80 carries, 933 yards, 11 TDs). ... Both teams will trot out new starting quarterbacks, with Colton Cox taking over for Rockets star

Cohen Klimak, and Dane Wininger getting some experience last year when Copley's Gabe Mansel had to miss a few games with an injury. ... Can the Rockets, who ran for 360.2 yards per game last year, establish the run to ease the burden on their new quarterback? Streetsboro's Janiere Cook, Logan Fincham and Council all return after topping 600 rushing yards apiece in 2024. [Copley](#), however, has solid run-stoppers in middle linebackers Rhalachai Childs and Hendrix Sickels and linemen Donovan Crook and Tielsch.

Who will win: Streetsboro 35-24

Twinsburg (3-7) at Boardman (6-5)

What to look for: [Twinsburg coach Charles Saulter](#) is looking for more physicality from his team this fall. The Tigers will get a solid test in Week 1, traveling to face a Boardman squad that reached the Division II, Regional 5 playoffs in 2024. ... Twinsburg has one of the deepest receiving corps in Greater Akron, anchored by Rob Herndon, JD Okuma and RJ Ruffin. The key will be the development of quarterback Dylan Fantone, who takes over from three-year starter and 2025 graduate Joey Pollock.

Who will win: Boardman 28-24

St. Vincent-St. Mary (1-9) at Nardon (10-3)

What to watch: [St. Vincent-St. Mary](#) is looking to find its footing after a challenging start to [the Doran Grant coaching era](#). Its task out of the gate in 2025 is daunting, though. With coach [Jeff Fox](#), [Nardon](#) has gone 8-2 in each of the past four regular seasons. ... This matchup will provide an early peek at young quarterbacks hoping to establish themselves at the varsity level. Nardon junior [Steven Fakult](#) passed for 1,748 yards and 25 touchdowns in 34 junior varsity quarters last season. Sophomore Will Adamson is back with STVM after gaining varsity experience as a freshman.

Who will win: Nordonia 45-13

St. Vincent-St. Mary football: [Parris Campbell, Doran Grant celebrate careers with jersey retirement](#)

Cuyahoga Falls (2-8) at Willoughby South (3-8)

What to look for: [Falls](#) has a new challenge to open the season, traveling to Lake County to face a Rebels team coming off an interesting season. South reached the Division II, Region 5 playoffs in 2024, despite going 3-7 in the regular season. ... Falls' main man is Gavanni Tuttle, who led the Black Tigers in tackles from his safety spot. ... With a new offensive coordinator, Falls might be in run mode early, as the Black Tigers return four of their five starting linemen.

Who will win: South 21-14

Medina (2-9) at Stow (3-7)

What to look for: [As Stow coach Martin Poder](#) said, Stow has yet to beat Medina since the two big schools started playing each other in the opener five years ago. The Bulldogs hope a senior-heavy squad will break that jinx. ... Four-year starting quarterback Jake Harrington is eager to lead the Bulldogs to their first winning record since Poder took over. He will have two solid targets in wide receiver Daylon Keeling and tight end Andrew Reickelman. ... Medina will look to rebound from 2024, after it reached the Division I regional final in 2023. ... These two teams will be conference rivals next year when Medina moves from the Greater Cleveland Conference to the Suburban League National Conference.

Who will win: Stow 24-21

Brecksville (3-7) at Aurora (11-2)

What to look for: Did Aurora lose a ton of talent to graduation? Yes. Do the Greenmen seem to reload every year under coach Bob Mihalik? Also yes. ... Aurora's offensive might not be quite as explosive as last season, when the Greenmen averaged better than 40 points a game. ... Look for Aurora to lean on running back Xavier Board to carry the load early. Ryan Ziegler has some big shoes to fill at quarterback ... Brecksville will have to rely on its line early after losing much talent to graduation as well.

Who will win: Aurora 28-14

Indian Valley (16-0) at Green (7-5)

What to watch: [Green](#) opens its season against a defending state champion. ... [Bulldogs](#) senior quarterback [Tyson Hunka](#) threw for 2,076 yards and accounted for 21 touchdowns (17 passing and four rushing) last season. He is the undisputed leader of a team featuring eight returning defenders with starting experience. ... [Green seniors](#) Evan Reed, a running back-linebacker, and Anthony McMichael III, a running back-defensive back, are expected to be key playmakers again. ... [Indian Valley](#) has seven returning starters on offense and seven on defense from [last year's Division IV state title team](#).

Who will win: Indian Valley 31-27

Coventry (1-9) at Manchester (11-2)

What to look for: Coach Gary Kanaga has brought renewed energy to the [Coventry](#) program, but the Comets face a huge test in their opener. ... [Manchester](#) looks hungry after returning to the Division V playoffs last fall. The Panthers' biggest weapon is All-Ohio running back [Phil Partin](#), who ran for just under 2,000 yards and 32 TDs last fall. ... Defense might be the Panthers' strong suit this year with All-

Ohioans Gavin Gindlesperger at defensive end and Merrik [Baker](#) at linebacker. ... These two backyard rivals will become conference rivals again in 2026 when Coventry moves to the PAC-7.

Who will win: Manchester 35-10

Mogadore (6-6) at Crestwood (5-5)

What to watch: There's a lot of new on the field when the Red Devils and Wildcats square off at Jack Lambert Stadium, including new quarterbacks Maddox Smith (Mogadore) and Michael Kalista (Crestwood). ... This is also the teams' first meeting since 2019, the Red Devils' final year in the Portage Trail Conference. ... Both teams bring back big-play threats in Wildcats running back Conner Lehner and Red Devils wide receiver Wyatt Januska. And both return solid talent on the line, including Aiden Boylen, a three-year starter at Coventry now playing center for Mogadore, where he'll join two-year starters James Pollock and Shayne Thomas on the line. Crestwood's Jake Eyerman, Mike Hager and Brody MacLearie should lead a similarly strong line.

Who will win: Mogadore 28-20

Waterloo (4-6) at Springfield (1-9)

What to watch: Waterloo opened last season with a 28-0 win over Springfield. ... Waterloo only returns six lettermen, including Keyshawn Anderson, Brady Hakes, Dominic Harouff and Xavier Rebecchi.

[Springfield](#) returns 17 lettermen, including Skylor McLaughlin, Spencer Casto and Elijah Manior, Trevor Durham and Martin Thurston.

Who will win: Waterloo 14-7