

Akron Beacon Journal

High school football | Akron-area first-round playoffs breakdowns, predictions

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Week 11 has arrived and it brings the first week of the OHSAA playoffs across seven divisions and 28 regions.

Here's our look at those games, including a breakdown of each matchup and who we predict will win.

Friday's Summit County high school football predictions, breakdowns

Division II, Region 5

1 Walsh Jesuit (10-0) vs. 16 Willoughby South (3-7)

What to watch: Walsh has arguably the best quarterback in Greater Akron in Keller Moten (87-of-140, 1,397 yards, 16 TDs, 92 carries, 948 yards rushing, 16 TDs) and two solid receivers in Milan Parris (23 catches, 542 yards, 8 TDs) and Aiden Henry (37, 543, 3). ... Moten had 93 yards rushing and scored three touchdowns on the ground, all in the first quarter, in Walsh's 42-0 win over Padua last Friday as the Warriors finished their first undefeated regular season since 1998. Moten also went 6-of-8 passing for another 95 yards. ... Dominic Romanini blocked a 27-yard field goal last week, Lucas Weaver ran for two TDs and Vinnie Courtad added a rushing TD. Willoughby South's Jayden Hardey (979 yards, 11 TDs) is closing in on a 1,000-yard season. Marquez Lashley (24 catches, 623 yards, 6 TDs) leads all receivers... The Warriors are making their 22nd playoff appearance and fifth in a row. The Rebels are in their 17th postseason and fourth in five seasons.

Who will win: Walsh 49-0

2 Hoban (8-2) vs. 15 Firestone (5-5)

What to watch: Hoban returns to the playoffs for the 10th season in a row and 20th season overall with a 57-14 record. The Knights have won five state championships, been a state runner-up three times and a regional runner-up once during the past nine trips to the playoffs. ... Firestone is in the playoffs for the fifth season and is seeking its first win. ... Brayton Feister ran 33 times for 184 yards and a touchdown in Hoban's 24-21 win over St. Edward last Saturday. Tylan Boykin ran for a 20-yard TD, and Elbert Hill IV ran for a 22-yard TD and intercepted a pass against the Eagles. Jeremy Hammel made a 30-yard field goal and three extra points. Tanner Mintz and Owen Turner also had an interception and Eli Lee forced a fumble that Jaiden Daniels recovered. ... Firestone beat Ellet 33-6 last Saturday to earn a share of the City Series championship with East. Dionte Younger Jr., Daylyn Taylor, Daniel Peterson, Taron Bowden, Gucci Stephens, Blake Harris, Isaiah Ramer and Evan Riley lead the Falcons. ... Younger ran for 131 yards and three TDs on six carries in Firestone's win over Ellet. Taylor ran for 108 yards and one TD on six carries and Peterson ran for 103 yards and one TD on 14 carries.

Who will win: Hoban 42-14

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3 Nordonia (8-2) vs. 14 Solon (3-7)

What to watch: The Knights head into the postseason having washed the taste of two one-point losses away. Nordonia opens against the Comets, who they welcomed to the Suburban League with a 45-7 rout in Week 4. ... QB Ben Chesser has had a great senior season, throwing for 1,426 yards with 14 TDs and five interceptions, along with 657 yards rushing and six TDs. Chesser went 12-of-19 passing for 187 yards and threw four TD passes in Nordonia's 49-13 win over Brecksville. Khylan Osbey, Brendan Chadock, Samuel Colins and Rocco DeLorenzo each caught one TD pass. Liam Kountz ran for two TDs. ... Solon got into the playoffs thanks to its Week 10 31-10 upset of Hudson.

Who will win: Nordonia 35-14

6 Green (6-4) vs 11 Riverside (4-6)

What to watch: This is a rematch of a Week 2 clash in which Green defeated Riverside 17-10. Coincidentally, both teams are seeking redemption after limping into the playoffs. Green lost 21-16 to Perry and 49-21 at Lake to end the regular season. Meanwhile,

Riverside has a three-game losing streak. ... This is Green's 11th OHSAA postseason appearance and fifth in a row. It's Riverside's 12th trip to the playoffs and fifth consecutive. ... Green junior quarterback Tyson Hunka went 137-of-229 passing in the regular season for 1,839 yards and 14 TDs with eight interceptions. He added two rushing TDs. Junior running back and linebacker Evan Reed rushed 90 times for 385 yards and five TDs. He also caught three TD passes, returned a kickoff for a TD and had a pick six. Senior wide receiver Antonio Martin caught 34 passes for 566 yards and eight TDs. ... Junior Anthony McMichael III led Green with 70.5 tackles and tied fellow defensive back Martin for the team lead in interceptions (four). Joining Reed as Bulldogs who scored a defensive TD are senior DB Anthony Fortunato (pick six) and junior D-lineman Dario Lombardi (fumble recovery). ... Junior running back Kyndall McCaleb is Riverside's most productive player. He had 224 carries for 1,535 yards and 17 TDs.

Who will win: Green 21-17

9 Hudson (5-5) at 8 Boardman (6-4)

What to watch: Following its Week 8 win over Nordonia, Hudson lost its final two regular-season games. The Explorers' Week 10 loss to Solon likely cost them a chance for a home playoff game... The Explorers look for QB Nathan Judy to bounce back from a tough Solon game (16-of-28, 196 yards, 3 interceptions). ... Like Hudson, Boardman has had an up-and-down season. The Spartans beat Canfield 47-17 in Week 10. ... Boardman enjoyed its first winning season in six years, led by QB Zach Haus.

Who will win: Hudson 21-17

Division II, Region 6

2 Highland (10-0) vs. 15 Fremont Ross (5-5)

What to watch: Highland rolled to its second undefeated regular season in three years after a 34-0 win over previously unbeaten Aurora. The senior class finished 38-2 in regular-season games. Casey Myser (1,561 yards rushing, 33 TDs, 28 rushing TDs) leads the Hornets. ... Myser ran for 215 yards and two touchdowns on 24 carries against Aurora. Dylan Borla was 3-for-3 passing for 98 yards and a touchdown. Evan Foust caught two passes for 76 yards and a TD. Garrett Phillips contributed two interceptions and a rushing TD. ... The Little Giants have a slinger in Karson Kaden (104-of-183, 1,308 yards, 12 TDS). ... Highland is making its 14th playoff appearance. Ross is making its 12th postseason appearance. Both teams are in the playoffs for the fifth straight time.

Who will win: Highland 42-14

5 Wadsworth (9-1) vs. 12 North Royalton (5-5)

What to watch: The Bears ruined the Grizzlies' first undefeated regular season since 2018 last week when Mannix Wasco scored a 13-yard TD with 39 seconds left in a 44-37 win to bring about this rematch back at Wadsworth. It also snapped a 15-game regular season winning streak against Ohio teams by the Grizzlies. ... North Royalton has won three of the last four meetings with its only loss coming last season, 49-0 in Week 10. ... Division I All-Ohioan Gavin Madigan (ankle) returned last week for Wadsworth, but only on the defensive side of things. Cooper Gray (170 carries for 1,326 yards and 17 TDs) has handled the load in Madigan's absence ... Brysen Hall got his first start in Week 3 at quarterback and is 112-of-185 passing for 1,853 yards and 18 touchdowns. Calix Lemp (32 catches, 690 yards, 11 TDs) is his main target... The Bears, who have won four games in a row, outgained the Grizzlies last week 493-464 and threw for 297 yards. ... North Royalton likes to get a plethora of stars involved behind QB Joe Kinney (96-of-207 passing, 1,674 yards, 18 TDs, 11 interceptions). Kinney likes to target Joey Calarco (28, 617, nine), who is coming off an eight-catch, 210-yard performance that included a TD. Nin Piazza (29 catches, 469 yards, five TDs), and Wasco (20, 338, two) also get attention in the passing game. ... Wasco (86 carries, 579 yards, three TDs) and Cameron Saul (100, 411, one) carry the rushing load, but the Bears like to go to Grady Baugh (64, 252, 11) near the goal line. ... Wadsworth is making its 16th playoff appearance. North Royalton is making its seventh postseason appearance. The Grizzlies have made Week 11 three straight times. The Bears are in the playoffs for the fourth time in five seasons.

Who will win: Wadsworth 35-31

OHSAA football playoffs: Complete OHSAA first-round schedule, Nov. 1

Division III, Region 9

3 CVCA (8-2) vs. 14 University School (5-5)

What to watch: Besides Greater Akron's two undefeated teams, CVCA is the the hottest local program, as it heads into the postseason with eight straight wins. ... The Royals have relied on their running game and defense, both of which are anchored by the Kopec brothers. Joey and Tommy Kopec each made an interception in the Week 10 win over Manchester, the Principals Athletic Conference champion. ... CVCA's running attack has

been a three-headed monster this season with RB Joey Kopec, QB Charley Levak and RB Ryan Wiehe each having big games. Levak led the Royals vs. Manchester with 69 yards rushing and a TD on 10 carries. Joey Kopec threw a halfback pass to junior Brayden Harris for a 65-yard touchdown, intercepted a pass and ran for 50 yards on 13 carries in the win over Manchester. Tommy Kopec recovered a fumble that junior Ky'Ron Fikes forced, made a tackle on a Manchester 4th-and-1 and intercepted a pass. ... The Preppers have a young team this year after finishing 6-4 in the 2023. RB Mikey Malone has been the Preppers best all-around weapon.

Who will win: CVCA 35-7

4 Aurora (9-1) vs. 13 Bedford (5-4)

What to watch: Aurora's bid for an undefeated season ended with a resounding thud in Week 10 vs. Highland. The will host a Bearcat team known for great athletes and physical play. ... One key for the Greemen will be the availability of RB Lucas Manderbach, who missed the Highland game due to injury. ... QB Ryan Dwyer will look to bounce back, after he was held to just 41 yards passing vs. Highland. ... Bedford is led by senior Javion Hudson, who can play any skill position in the Bearcats' offense.

Who will win: Aurora 45-21

11 Tallmadge (7-3) at 6 Chardon (7-2)

What to watch: The Blue Devils will be tested by a Hilltoppers defense that hasn't allowed more than 14 points in seven of their nine games. It's a defense that only allows 149.1 yards per game and one that has two shutouts. ... Tallmadge is led by QB Ryan Loveless (88-of-180, 1,378 yards, 13 TDs), who has main targets in Caleb Reifsnyder (22 catches, 595 yards, 6 TDs) and Robbie Reid (21, 304, 3). ... Ricky Maclean (95 carries, 453, 5 TDs) averages almost 5 yards per carry. ... James Robinson (100 tackles, 15 for loss, sack, 2 interceptions) leads the way on a defense that allows just 2.9 yards per carry. ... Mike Sprouse, JD Kanatzar and Maclean scored rushing TDs for Tallmadge in last week's 31-0 win over Copley, and James Robinson returned an interception for a TD. ... Chardon doesn't pass the ball as Drayton Allgood's 310 yards this season show. What the Hilltoppers do well is run. Allgood (137 carries, 824 yards, 7) and Caleb Hewitt (96, 712, 9) lead the way. Hewitt is Allgood's leading receiver with 292 yards. ... Where Chardon shines is on defense. The Hilltoppers average 7.5 tackles for loss per game. ... This is the 22nd playoff appearance for Chardon, which has made it seven seasons in a row. It's the 14th appearance for Tallmadge, which has played in Week 11 four of the past five seasons.

Who will win: Chardon 21-10

15 East (6-4) at 2 Gilmour Academy (9-1)

What to watch: East returns to the playoffs for the seventh season, all since 2016, and has two wins. Gilmour is in the playoffs for the 16th time and has six wins. ... East beat Garfield 28-26 last Saturday to earn a share of the City Series championship with Firestone. ... The Dragons are led by Ziaire Stevens, Marlin Engram Jr., Braylon Bush, Donte Swain Jr., MarQuan Davis, Terrell Wharton Jr., Denico Knight Jr. and Darshawn Spragling. ... Stevens ran for 137 yards and two touchdowns on and caught a 81-yard touchdown pass from Engram in East's win over Garfield. Engram completed 7 of 7 passes for 223 yards and two TDs, one apiece to Stevens and Bush. Knight and Bush both scored on 2-point conversions. ... Gilmour won its first nine games this season and lost to 7-2 Villa Angela-St. Joseph 48-14 last Friday. The Lancers best wins are over 8-2 Hawken (33-13), 5-4 Rhodes (38-6), 5-5 Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin (48-21) and 5-5 University School (54-0). ... The Lancers feature TE-RB Brody Lennon, an Ohio State recruit. Other key players are QB Cooper Panteck, WRs Sean Dillard and Lars Broberg and RB Nate Lennon and defenders Bernard McDonald, Bruno Cook and Aiden McNamara. Panteck has completed 139 of 205 passes for 2,378 yards, 32 touchdowns and two interceptions.

Who will win: Gilmour 28-21

Division III, Region 10

8 Copley (5-5) vs. 9 Revere (6-4)

What to watch: The rivals meet again after host Copley beat Revere 47-35 in Week 9. ... Copley is making its 16th playoff appearance and has 10 wins. This is Revere's 11th playoff appearance and it has six wins. ... Gabe Mansel led Copley past Revere in Week 9 when he rushed for 160 yards and three TDs and completed 18 of 22 passes for 229 yards with two TDs to Andrew McKnight (seven catches, 81 yards) and another TD to Jacob Kuczkowski (two catches, 65 yards). ... Revere's Luke Farris completed 14 of 23 passes for 264 yards with three TD passes and a rushing TD against Copley. James Perry had 11 carries for 82 yards and a TD and Aaron French had four catches for 113 yards with a TD. Johlil Blanchard and Nicholas Hall also caught a TD pass. ... Last Friday, Revere topped Kent Roosevelt 17-7 and Tallmadge beat Copley 31-0. ... French caught two touchdown passes from Farris and David Kennedy made a 25-yard field goal and two extra points in Revere's win over Kent. Farris connected with French for TDs on a fourth-and-4 and a fourth-

and-5. Donovan Farrow ended the win against Kent with a sack.

Who will win: Copley 35-28

Division IV, Region 13

6 Northwest (8-2) vs. 11 Orange (7-3)

What to watch: Northwest looks to make a deeper playoff run this year after the 2023 postseason ended at the first hurdle. Head coach John DeMarco's team won its last five PAC-7 games to finish second in the conference. ... Northwest has one of the area's most formidable passing attacks. Chase Badger has completed 70% of his passes for 2,454 yards and 26 TDs with just four interceptions. He has a myriad of talented receivers to throw to. Logan Allman leads Northwest with 68 catches for 762 yards and 10 TDs. Carsen Nickey has 37 receptions for 684 yards and seven TDs. Joe Musleve and Landon Cross are also in the mix. Badger is a dual-threat quarterback, leading the team in rushing with 654 yards and eight TDs. ... Orange is in the playoffs for the first time since 2018. Prior to this year, the Lions went 3-32 in their previous four seasons. Russell Tye set Orange records with 1,684 yards rushing and 21 TDs this season. He ran for 200 yards and three TDs in last week's come-from-behind 25-22 win over West Geauga.

Who will win: Northwest 42-17

10 Norton (7-3) at 7 Struthers (8-2)

What to watch: The Panthers come in on a four-game winning streak and have won seven of their last eight. The Wildcats have won four of their last five but lost 14-7 last week to Poland Seminary. ... Norton has a healthy Buddy Willig, who has a .710 completion percentage and 1,301 total yards to go along with 13 TDs. Willig also has 67 tackles and three interceptions on defense. ... Jason Beverly (747 yards, 8 TDs, 16 catches, 202 yards) and Markus Brown (501 yards rushing, 5 TDs) lead the rushing attack. ... Beverly opened last week's 37-7 win over Coventry with a kickoff return for a TD. Luke Senderak, Brown, Willig, Beverly and Danny Adair ran for a TD. ... Struthers averages just over 39.3 yards passing per game but has two solid running backs in Devin Braham (1,615 yards, 18 TDs) and freshman Tyler Cole (556 yards, 5 TDs in nine games). Brown (110 tackles, 10 four loss, five sacks, two forced fumbles, interception) and Beverly (65 tackles, eight for loss, two sacks) stand out on defense for the Panthers. ... Their only losses came to undefeated South Range and eight-win Poland. ... This is the 12th playoff appearance for Struthers, which has made it to Week 11 five of the last six seasons. It's the sixth

postseason for Norton, which is on a five-season streak of making the playoffs.

Who will win: Norton 13-10

15 Buchtel (4-6) at 2 Lake County Perry (9-1)

What to watch: Buchtel is making its 18th appearance in the playoffs and has a record of 32-15. The Griffins are trying to add to a program history that includes two state championships and three state runner-up finishes. ... Perry won the Division V state championship last season, the first state title in the program's history. The Pirates are in the playoffs for 21st time and have a 24-19 record. ... Stevie Diamond threw for 112 yards and three TDs in Buchtel's 36-0 win over North last Friday. Dwight Shade caught two of the TD passes and Daurean Johnson caught one TD pass. Anthony McMullen ran for 108 yards and two TDs on 11 carries. Johnson and Tamir Jones each had an interception. ... Perry's lone loss is to reigning Division VI state champion Kirtland 22-21. The Pirates have wins over 7-3 Madison (42-10), 9-1 Geneva (44-7), 7-3 Orange (62-0) and 8-2 Hawken (68-0). ... The win over Hawken was last Friday and Perry QB Walter Moses surpassed 80 career TD passes. Luke Sivon and Trent Taylor are key receivers, Dare'on Howard is a dynamic running back and Armani Chiappone is a talented defensive back.

Who will win: Perry 42-14

Division V, Region 17

2 Manchester (9-1) vs. 15 Young. Liberty (5-5)

What to watch: While the Panthers' Week 10 loss to CVCA cost them a chance at an undefeated season, coach Kevin Stacy has engineered a remarkable turnaround after Manchester went 1-9 in 2023. ... The Panthers are 4-0 at the new James R. France Stadium. ... The engine of the Panthers' offense has been RB Phil Partin. The sophomore has run for 1,488 yards and whopping 25 TDs, averaging 7.3 yards per carry. ... QB Yadin Sharp can do damage with his legs as well. He has run for 398 yards and seven TDs, along with going 52-of-96 for 731 yards through the air with five TDs and four interceptions... LB Merrik Baker lead the Panthers defense with 78 tackles, 14 tackles for loss and six sacks. ... Liberty turned its season around after starting 0-4, going 5-1 down the stretch, including a 39-19 win over Southeast in Week 10 ... Liberty is led by QB Dawaun Moody, who amassed 866 all-purpose yards and 12 TDs as a freshman in 2023.

Who will win: Manchester 35-14

Ex-NFL players coaching HS football: Browns legend Phil Dawson has advice for high school coaches who used to play in the league, like STVM's Doran Grant

Division VI, Region 21

12 Mogadore (5-5) at 5 Hanoverton United (9-1)

What to watch: Mogadore returns to the playoffs for the 38th season. The Wildcats have a 73-34 record in the playoffs, have won three state championships and finished as a state runner-up five times. Mogadore won its final three regular-season games to extend its playoff streaks. ... Conner Lehner ran for two TDs and caught a TD pass from Karson Jaber last Friday to lead the Mogadore to a 28-7 win over Rootstown. Jaber also threw a TD pass to Maddox Smith. ... United won the Eastern Ohio Athletic Conference title and is in the playoffs for the seventh time and has two postseason wins. ... The Golden Eagles have regular-season wins over 6-4 Southern (17-14), 7-3 Valley Christian (45-14) and 6-4 East Palestine (51-12). The lone loss is to 8-2 Crestview (30-7). ... United features QB Parker Newburn, RBs Kollyn Wells and M'Kyan Haynes and WRs Kota Shasteen and Thomas Brown on offense. Logan Wood and Sydney Casto are key defensive players.

Who will win: United 35-28

High school football: 2024 USA Today Network Preseason All-Ohio Football Team

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