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Highland didn't give up after fumbling Week 1, and its leading receiver didn't give in after a costly mistake

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'It was a blur:' How Highland came back from 18 down in the fourth quarter to beat Wadsworth
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His fumble early in the third quarter squandered a Highland drive that showed promise Friday night against Wadsworth. Instead, the Grizzlies pounced on the loose ball and added to their lead with a Suburban League championship hanging in the balance.

The sequence could have shaken the Hornets and Weber, but it didn't.

The coaches called for two quick plays to Weber on their next drive. Sophomore quarterback Colton Wadle then hit him again for a third pass on their fourth play of the possession. They gradually chipped away at the unbeaten Grizzlies and scored three touchdowns in the fourth quarter of a 29-28 comeback victory.

“I think my coaches trust me,” Weber said, “and after I fumbled the ball they called some plays for me. They came my way. Everyone just picked me up, and I’m so grateful for them.”

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Weber had an 83-yard punt return for a touchdown and gained 118 yards on five recensions a week earlier in a blowout of Solon to set up Friday's

Highland, which moved up to the National Conference this season, won the American Conference crown the previous two years.

The Hornets have not gotten too high or too low with it, coach Mike Gibbons said, noting that's reflected in Weber.

"He's been so good for us all year long, offensively and defensively," Gibbons said. "To see him keep fighting, he had some tough breaks there early on and never hung his head over anything. He was a leader and kept making plays."

That leadership has been essential for Highland, which had to turn to Wadle in place of injured senior quarterback Johnny Prucha after the second game of the season.

Just like Friday night against Wadsworth (8-1), which entered as the No. 3-ranked team in the [cleveland.com Northeast Ohio Top 25](#), Highland (8-1) found itself in a tough spot. The 10th-ranked Hornets dropped their season opener at home, 34-0, to Walsh Jesuit and were losing to Strongsville when Prucha suffered a shoulder injury.

Wadle didn't throw the football much when he first stepped onto the field. Senior Anthony DePompei first came in as a run-first quarterback in place of Prucha as the Hornets rallied to beat Strongsville, 31-27. Wadle worked his way into the speed of the varsity game.

"He stepped into a big role that he didn't really expect," Weber said. "He was ready for it. I just trust him with my whole heart. He's a very good player, and I think all my success goes to him."

Weber has six touchdowns and 568 yards on 30 receptions, all team highs

as Wadle's favorite target. So when Highland had one play left at the 6-yard line facing fourth-and-goal with two seconds left on the clock against Wadsworth, there was only one option.

"I'm looking for him every time," Wadle said. "That's the man to get it done."

Wadle looked to his left on the previous play before rolling out to his right and hitting Weber on a short pass near the front pylon. They connected early in the game on a longer touchdown pass that required Wadle to roll out after faking the handoff.

The sophomore ran the football a team-high 16 times Friday night for 51 yards (more had it not been for a slippery football that caused some fumbles in the backfield).

"He's legit," Gibbons said. "He's 6-(foot)-5, 210 pounds and he's got a cannon, so you know he's only going to keep getting better. The progress that he's made and where he's headed, he's a special young man. He's got a bright future."

Everyone at Highland is in agreement on that.

The Hornets have remained dominant with their move to the Suburban League's bigger division, but Weber took it as added motivation after the loss to Walsh.

"Everyone was doubting us in the offseason, the season, saying that ever since we lost 34-0 like we're not going to be able to compete with these big teams," Weber said. "I think we just proved everyone wrong."

They also jumped Walsh, Wadsworth and everyone else in the Division II, Region 5 playoff standings. Highland is now No. 1 in that region, according to Joe Eitel's projections, which say the Hornets clinched a top-four seed and first-round bye because of their latest win.

“Ever since Week 1, we’ve been on the incline and that loss really made us think about how we have to dig deep,” senior linebacker Evan Foust said.

Weber dug deep after his third-quarter fumble.

He finished with 106 yards on eight receptions, seven after his miscue.

It was the kind of resilience that trickled over to the rest of his teammates when they needed to be at their best. To Weber, it’s been that way since their Week 1 lesson.

“We knew that’s not who we are,” Weber said. “There were so many errors that everyone made throughout the week, that game and it just didn’t show who we were. I think these last seven games or whatever it’s been, that’s who we are and that’s who we’re going to continue to be.”



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