

The Blitz Week 12

THE BEST OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



**HIGHLAND 49,
TOLEDO ST. FRANCIS DE SALES 20**



Roadgraders

Hornets roll on, rack up 542 yards

Albert Grindle
The Gazette

GRANGER TWP — Since opening in 2015, North Gateway Tire Field has been a graveyard for opposing football teams in the playoffs.

Second-seeded Highland claimed another victim Friday in the Division II, Region 6 quarterfinals. No. 10 Toledo St. Francis de Sales went down kicking and screaming, but the Hornets had an answer virtually every time the Knights tried to come back, pulling away for a 49-20 victory while improving to 10-0 all time at "The Tire" in the postseason.



Coyne

A 2023 rematch is in store next week at a site to be determined Sunday, as Highland (12-0) will play third-seeded Whitehouse Anthony Wayne (12-0). The Generals, who lost to the Hornets 31-10 a year ago, elimi-

nated pesky No. 11 seed Sandusky 35-14.

"Oh, dude, it's amazing," senior right tackle Ben Coyne said. "I love the atmosphere here every single time under the lights. Tonight is just special. Last game at 'The Tire,' all the emotions get to you. You practice here every single day — even during summer camp, too — so it feels good coming out here with the dub."

Scoring three touchdowns on its first 10 plays from scrimmage and holding St. Francis de Sales (8-4) to negative yards through three defensive possessions, Highland roared to a 21-0 start that game-planning dreams are made of before managing the rest of the night.

Casey Myser opened the scoring on a 5-yard run, Dylan Borla floated a 32-yard TD pass to H-back Evan Foust and backup quarterback Grady Gibb caught a lateral pass in the slot before firing to wide-open Luke Berkmeier for a 63-yard score with 5:27 left in the opening quarter.

See **HORNETS, E2**



RUSS GIFFORD / GAZETTE

Highland's Casey Myser cuts between St. Francis de Sales' Jordan Brown (13) and Daniel Hyler-Traylor.



RUSS GIFFORD / GAZETTE

Highland's Evan Foust tackles Toledo St. Francis De Sales quarterback Corey Swartz.

HORNETS

From E1

The Knights lost 1,500-yard rusher Eli Beal (9 carries, 13 yards) to an ankle injury but battled back to 28-17 by scoring 10 unanswered points sandwiched around a surprise, line-drive onside kick that bounced off a Highland up man. They hit the same double pass twice, as wide receiver Drew Tucker found Markwan Dublin and Raheem Brown (8 catches, 147 yards) for 72- and 70-yard gains, and also were successful on two hook-and-lateral plays.

The Hornets' stout O-line of Carson Noonan, Josh Messina, Ryan Zywiec, Brady Bendau and Ben Coyne eventually wore down St. Francis, which lost four players to injury. Myser made the score 35-17 on a 2-yard run and 42-20 on a 12-yarder before Lucas Gerding took a jet sweep 78 yards to the house to cap the scoring.

Highland 49, St. Francis de Sales 20

Division II, Region 6 Quarterfinal	
ST. FRANCIS	HIGHLAND
0	7
10	7
3	14
—	20
21	7
7	14
—	49

First
 H — Casey Myser 5 run (Jonah Kowza kick), 10:56.
 H — Evan Foust 32 pass from Dylan Borla (Kowza kick), 8:44.
 H — Luke Berkmeier 63 pass from Grady Gibb (Kowza kick), 5:27.

Second
 S — Raheem Brown 10 run (Drew Pucket kick), 8:04.
 H — Lucas Gerding 6 run (Kowza kick), 0:15.
Third
 S — Pucket 35 field goal, 9:22.
 S — Brown 70 pass from Drew Tucker (Pucket kick), 4:05.
 H — Myser 2 run (Kowza kick), 1:59.

Fourth
 S — Pucket 28 field goal, 11:57.
 H — Myser 12 run (Kowza kick), 9:11.

H	S	H
H — Gerding 78 run (Kowza kick), 5:09.	14	22
First downs	32/65	45/382
Rushing	2.0	8.5
Rushing average	17/27	6/8
Passing	33/9	16/0
Passing yards	59/404	53/542
Total offense	4/35.8	3/34.7
Punting	8/63	5/45
Penalties	1/0	3/1
Fumbles	RUSHING: St. Francis de Sales — Braylon Pokrywka 6-28, Eli Beal 9-13, Brown 4-13, Corey Swartz 12-13, Team 1-(-2), Highland — Myser 28-25, Gerding 5-10, Foust 2-18, Borla 5-12, Dylan Lazar 3-6, Team 2-(-14).	
PASSING: St. Francis de Sales — Swartz 15-25-197-0, Tucker 2-2-142-0, Highland — Borla 5-7-97-0, Gibb 1-1-63-0.		
RECEIVING: St. Francis de Sales — Brown 8-147, Markwan Dublin 3-94, Tucker 3-90, Austin Urban 2-5, Pokrywka 1-3, Highland — Berkmeier 2-75, Myser 1-41, Foust 2-35, Gerding 1-9.		
MISSED FIELD GOAL: St. Francis de Sales — Pucket 48 (SH).		

"We studied hard," Noonan said. "We made sure, especially on the D-line and O-line, we had to be the most physical team up front."

Myser had another virtuoso performance, rushing 28 times for 255 yards and three TDs while also catching a 41-yard wheel route. His final TD tied the Medina County season record of 41 set by Medina's Jimmy

Daw in 2016, and he broke the 2008 school season rushing record of 1,851 held by Chris Snook by upping his total to 1,940.

Gerding added 105 rushing yards and two scores and Borla and Gibb combined to throw for 160, giving Highland a whopping 542 yards on 53 plays. The Hornets are now fifth in county lore with 548 points.

Highland identified two mismatches. The first was early play-action passing against man coverage — the Knights were forced into zone after Gibb's trick play to Berkmeier — while the second was right tackle Coyne manhandling a Knights backup end who was starting in place of the injured Ben Kahl.

"We've been doing this all season," Coyne said. "Right off the rip, we step hard and go right at them. Eventually they give up. We just keep going until they do."

If there were any cracks in the Hornets' armor, the defense gave up big plays through the air. While Highland held St. Francis to just 65 rushing yards, quarterback Corey Swartz completed 15-of-25 passes for 197 yards and the Knights finished with 339 passing yards when the two Tucker trick plays were factored in.

On the flip side, the Hornets got key stops when they needed them. Three promising St. Francis drives

stalled and led to Drew Pucket field goal attempts — he connected from 35 and 28 yards but was short from 48 — and the outcome was essentially decided when linebacker Jameson Gordon pressured Swartz into an incomplete pass on fourth-and-goal from the 6 with 6:40 remaining.

A scrappy foe that dug itself a deep hole tried all it could to climb out, but the Hornets simply didn't let that happen.

"All the glory to (defensive coordinator) Coach (Chris) Meyer," Zywiec said. "He's watching film all week, studying up. No one can run the ball on us because our D-line is top tier. We're an amazing group, one of the best ever to come through Highland."

"Once they started coming back, we fixed a lot of things. No more trick plays — we shut that down — and it's all thanks to the coaching. We can't do that without them."

Contact Albert Grindle at (330) 721-4043 or agrindle@medina-gazette.com.