

High school football: Outsize personality, outsized performance for Highland guard Brady Bendau

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Brady Bendau is the type of dude who in 20 years will probably be pounding Mountain Dew, grilling meat and watching football with his buddies in his garage. These days he's usually front and center in the student section at basketball games, having a grand ol' time.

Don't let the never-going-to-be-confused-with-being-shy personality fool anyone, though. The Highland senior flips a switch when he puts on a football helmet and is ready to rumble on Friday nights.

The 6-foot, 285-pounder loves to throw his weight around at right guard for arguably the best offensive line in Highland history, and the second-seeded Hornets (13-0) will get another shot at glory Friday when they take on top-seeded Avon (13-0) in the Division II, Region 6 championship game at Elyria's Ely Stadium.

"Oh, I love playing offensive line," he said. "If I'm having a stressful week or whatever — a rough test or something's not going right — I have the opportunity every practice to just pop somebody and let some aggression out, which is sweet.

"And I get to be with my friends, all my big buddies on the O-line. We just talk about food (specifically steak and baked potatoes) and have a good time."

The lineman life is the only life Bendau has ever known, with the added bonus of blocking for record-setting stepbrother Casey Myser the past six years. Bendau loves the camaraderie, figuring out a defense's weaknesses and, of course, the ability to overpower a defender.

A three-year starting wrestler at 215 and 285 pounds with 72 career wins, Bendau brings a mauler mentality to the line of scrimmage. He naturally has quick hands and feet and probably would be a D-II college recruit if he was an inch or two taller.

No. 66's favorite play, by far, is pulling on a counter to the left. He's coming full speed for the defensive end and hungry for pancakes, oftentimes by engaging, swinging his hips violently and tossing his guy to the ground.

"I hope that he doesn't spill (dive inside) and he doesn't see me coming," Bendau said with noticeable satisfaction. "I love that. Yeah, I've got to pop him."

With Bendau, left tackle Carson Noonan, left guard Josh Messina, center Ryan Zywiec and right tackle Ben Coyne paving the way — H-back Evan Foust and situational tight end Caleb McKeen deserve credit, too — Highland is on the verge of cementing its place as one of the greatest offenses in Medina County history.

Along with Myser and quarterback Dylan Borla breaking multiple school records, the Hornets are the only county team all time to rush for 3,000 yards and throw for 2,000, need only four points to break 2017 Wadsworth's standard of 589 and sit third in scoring average (45.1).

The challenge Friday will be immense, as the Eagles boast a future D-I college player at all three levels. Safety Jakob Weatherspoon's 17 offers include Ohio State and Notre Dame, linebacker Ryan Stolarski is in talks with numerous mid-major schools and, of utmost important to Bendau, tackle Jeremiah Kelly is committed to Cincinnati.

"As smart of a group we are on offense, they're a smart group on defense," Bendau said. "They love to move, and they're a pretty positive group. We've played some of these teams in the playoffs that have been pretty negative (toward each other) — like Anthony Wayne was super negative — but Avon is positive. When they make a big play, they're going to let you know they've made a big play."

Bendau has dreams of placing at the state wrestling tournament before hanging up the shoes for good and focusing on football, where he's likely bound for the D-III level. Nothing, however, will replace the memories of practicing in the cold rain under the lights at North Gateway Tire Field, because few high school players get that experience in late November.

Only 1995 and 2007 Brunswick and 2013 Highland have won regional championships out of the county. Bendau will do everything within his power to extend that list to four teams on Friday.

"He's a very tough kid," Highland coach Mike Gibbons said. "Obviously he's a football player/wrestler, so he's extremely tough up front and has great size for a guard. That's exactly what you are looking for. He has really good feet, too, and that's something people don't really see is how well he moves and bends on the field.

"He's just a great kid. He plays really hard."

Maybe Bendau will celebrate with an ice cold Mountain Dew, too.

"There is a rumor that I'm a big Mountain Dew guy," Bendau said with a sheepish grin. "Yes, that is a thing."

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