

**MLB**

Tampa Bay will not play at Tropicana Field this season.

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# Sports

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## PLAYOFF FOOTBALL: HIGHLAND VS. WHITEHOUSE ANTHONY WAYNE



NICK GAMMETT / GAZETTE

Highland's Ben Coyne (58) and Evan Foust (12) celebrate a touchdown against Aurora.

# So we meet again

## Dual-threat QB Kinnee will be Hornets' challenge tonight

**Albert Grindle**  
The Gazette

On Nov. 3, 2017, Evan Kasulones caught a 20-yard touchdown from Matthew Earnest with 6:15 left as the Highland football team held on to defeat Whitehouse Anthony Wayne 21-14.

On Nov. 5, 2021, Lukas Stiles rushed for four touchdowns as the Hornets pulled away 38-14.

On Nov. 10, 2023, Highland knocked out star quarterback Grant



**Gibbons**



**McKeen**

Kinnee with an ankle injury and dominated the rest of the way to emerge 31-10.

Tonight will be matchup No. 4 in the

Division II playoffs, as second-seeded Highland (12-0) and the third-seeded Generals (12-0) will go to war in a Region 6 semifinal at Bellevue's First National Bank Field. One can argue this is the best Generals team of those four, but the Hornets can make that case, too.

The winner advances to play top-seeded Avon (12-0) or fourth-seeded Wadsworth (11-1) for the championship. That one would have all sorts of storylines for Highland regardless of

opponent, but no one is looking past tonight.

"They're similar to us in a lot of ways, and it's something that you look at because you're really familiar playing these guys," Hornets coach Mike Gibbons said. "I know they're well-coached, and I got an opportunity coach a couple years ago with (the Generals' Andy Brungard) at the North-South game. He's a really good guy, and he does a great job with their program."

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# Gazette Pick-It Line



Rick Noland Albert Grindle John Urchek Chad Grant

Overall	67-9	66-10	66-10	65-11
Last week	3-0	3-0	2-1	2-1
Highland vs. Anthony Wayne				
Wadsworth vs. Avon				

## HORNETS

From C1

Anthony Wayne comes in with big-game experience, hammering D-I Toledo Whitmer 27-3 and pulling away from D-I Perrysburg 31-14 to capture the Northern Lakes League Buckeye Division championship. The Generals also were tested in a big way last week, clinging to a 21-14 lead after three quarters against heavy underdog Sandusky before escaping 35-14.

Kinnee is the key to the game, as the 6-foot-4, 185-pound Colgate recruit has rushed 143 times for 1,226 yards and 25 touchdowns while also completing 88-of-143 passes for 1,252 yards, 17 TDs and four interceptions.

The Generals prefer to use two tight ends and run Kinnee in a variety of ways, be them buck sweep, power, guard/H-back counter, isolation draw or letting him scramble in the passing game.

While there is no home run-receiver to deal with — 6-5 Winn Sharp is now at Bowling Green — running back Braden Gardner (5-11, 165) has 108 carries for 951 yards and 11 scores behind physical tight end Brode Sweet and a line that boasts all-conference picks Max Grabarczyk and Owen Palmer.

Highland, which is allowing a microscopic 47.8 rushing yards, counters with All-Ohio linemen Ryan Zywiec (64 tackles, 19½ for loss, 8½ sacks) and Carson Noonan (58, 17, 8½), rangy linebackers Evan Foust (77, 7, 3) and Jameson Gordon (58, 7½, 1) and veteran safety Garrett Phillips (45, 2 INTs).

"The quarterback is what makes them go on offense," Gibbons said. "He's a really solid player and got the ability to run the ball effectively and also drop back and be an accurate passer. That is tough (to defend)."

As for the other side of the ball, Anthony Wayne's 4-3 defense forced Highland to adjust last season by aggressively shooting its ends inside to give the linebackers room to work over the top. The Hornets' answers

were using 220-pound Caleb McKeen as a second tight end to provide extra beef up front and allowing diminutive quarterback Peyton Janickas (19 carries, 140 yards) to shine in the running game.

Like Kinnee being healthy again, the same goes for Highland running back Casey Myser, who played on a badly sprained ankle in last season's meeting. The junior is one of the top rushers in Ohio with 207 carries, 1,940 yards and 34 touchdowns to go with 14 catches for 452 yards and seven scores through the air.

Dylan Borla has thrown for 1,884 yards and 25 TDs, while converted running backs Lucas Gerding (25 carries, 294 yards, 3 TDs; 19 catches, 378 yards, 3 TDs) and Foust (27, 242, 3; 23, 495, 5) give the Hornets unique personnel that provides powerful running in the open field and deep passing game.

Last but certainly not least, the line of Noonan (6-3, 270), Josh Messina (5-11, 240), Zywiec (6-3, 260), Brady Bendau (6-0, 285) and Ben Coyne (6-4, 255) has been the cornerstone all season. The Hornets don't expect a lot of blitzing, but linebackers Casius Krueger (128 tackles, 10 for loss), Kyle Wymer (85, 4) and Roman Morrison (65, 8) fly to the ball and are athletic enough to cover receivers in space.

"Defensively, they're very fundamentally sound, fly to the ball and don't put themselves in bad positions," Gibbons said. "It will be a big challenge for us."

Highland has a ton of respect for the Generals, who play similar brands of football on both sides of the ball. Anthony Wayne is physical, smart and doesn't make a lot of mistakes, along with having the revenge factor on its side.

The only thing left is to kick off the ball and have some fun.

"They're going to be ready to go, and I know we'll be, too," Gibbons said. "Both teams leave it all on the field and play hard. It will be a good game."

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RUSS GIFFORD / GAZETTE

Highland's Casey Myser gets past Toledo St. Francis de Sales' Za'Marion Allen (3) and Beau Thomas for a first down.