

The Blitz Week 13

THE BEST OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



**HIGHLAND 48,
NORTH RIDGEVILLE 0**



RUSS GIFFORD / GAZETTE

Left to right, Highland's Kallen Whitting, Jameson Gordon and Dan Miller celebrate a sack by Miller.

Protect this house

Goal-line stand, Gibb's six total TDs put Hornets in regional final

Albert Grindle
The Gazette

GRANGER TWP. — When the standard is perfection, there's no other option but to chase it.

The top-seeded Highland football team's first-string defense had allowed one touchdown all season heading into a Division II, Region 6 semifinal against No. 4 North Ridgeville on Friday night. The Rang-



Gibb



Miller

ers were threatening to double that number, having two downs to score

from 2 yards.

Cody Bendau, Jameson Gordon, Lukas Grillis, Josh Messina, Dan Miller and the rest of the boys had other plans, stuffing the Rangers on back-to-back plays to set in motion yet another blowout, this one 48-0 in the season finale at North Gateway Tire Field.

Highland (12-0), which saw quarterback Grady Gibb account for all

six first-half touchdowns, advanced to face No. 3 Avon (11-1), a 42-21 winner over second-seeded Wadsworth, at a site to be determined. The Eagles survived the Hornets 28-20 in the regional final last season en route to capturing their first state championship.

"Us seniors, we knew this was our last game on this field, so we knew coming into this game we had to be

very intense," defensive end/tight end Miller said. "Our week of preparation was big for us. Our scout team did a great job getting us ready for the week."

Up 14-0 after a textbook six-play, 65-yard scoring drive and a five-play, 56-yarder after the defense opened its night with a three-and-out, Highland found itself in an unfamiliar situation.

See **HORNETS**, C2

Highland 48, North Ridgeville 0

Division II, Region 6 Semifinal
NORTH RIDGEVILLE 0 0 0 0 0
HIGHLAND 14 27 7 0 48

First
H — Grady Gibb 12 run (Jonah Kovacs kick), 9:06.
H — Lucas Gerding 22 pass from Gibb (Kovacs kick), 6:47.

Second
H — Nick Dobkowski 53 pass from Gibb (Kovacs kick), 11:16.
H — Jake Weber 41 pass from Gibb (Kovacs kick), 9:02.

H — Gibb 8 run (kick blocked), 4:07.
H — Gerding 11 pass from Gibb (Kovacs kick), 0:40.

Third
H — Casey Myser 8 run (Landon Kuzman kick), 8:30.

	NR	H
First downs	13	20
Rushing	22/50	33/209
Rushing average	2.3	8.2
Passing	16/29	8/9
Passing yards	173	271
Total offense	51/224	42/540
Punting	3/32.7	0/0.0
Punt return	5/17	2/16
Fumbles	2/1	1/0

RUSHING: North Ridgeville — Matthew Flesher 7-50, Cole Miller 1-1, Cole Miller 1-1, Eric Langauer 1-8, Luke Bartel 1-1, Tyler All 1-0, Highland — Myser 13-106, Dylan Lutz 4-81, Gibb 8-41, Gerding 2-24, Austin Padua 1-1, Anthony DePompoli 1-1, Frankie Linnaggi 1-1, Ben Radon 1-1.

PASSING: North Ridgeville — Miller 14-23-140-1, Braden Harmon 2-5-37-0, Flesher 0-1-0-0, Highland — Gibb 8-8-217-0.
RECEIVING: North Ridgeville — C. Allison 6-101, Langauer 7-43, Mason Allison 2-20, Duke Baker 1-10, Highland — Myser 2-50, Dobkowski 1-53, Weber 2-45, Gerding 2-33, Evan Faust 1-31.

HORNETS

From C1

North Ridgeville quarterback Cole Miller (14-for-23, 142 yards, INT; 11 carries, 8 yards) was making all the necessary drive-extending plays as the Rangers converted three third downs before eventually reaching third-and-1 from the Hornets 2-yard line.

Highland's first string hadn't allowed a touchdown since Avon Lake scored on a 31-yard drive in Week 2. The Hornets made sure the streak continued.

North Ridgeville (10-2) attempted a basic rush up the middle with running back Matthew Flesher, but Bendau beat his man inside and fellow tackle Messina commanded a double team that created a gap for linebacker Gordon to shoot. The Bendau-Gordon combination drilled Flesher so hard that the home crowd collectively gasped.

Now facing fourth-and-1, the Rangers put the ball in the hands of their best player, the 6-foot-5, 225-pound Miller. The outcome was similar, as Bendau again beat his man, Messina knocked back the center while taking on another double team and ends Grillis and Miller squeezed inside to collectively smother Miller



RUSS GIFFORD / GAZETTE

Highland quarterback Grady Gibb (16), right tackle Thomas Fearn (52) and center Spencer Marquis (58) celebrate a touchdown by Gibb.

for a critical turnover on downs.

Highland needed only five plays to cover 98 yards — Gibb flipped a 53-yard TD to Nick Dobkowski on an extended triple option — to make the score 21-0 and never looked back.

"It was definitely different," Miller said. "Our defense hasn't been on the field that long (17 plays, 78 yards) in a long time. We just keep telling ourselves next-play mentality throughout the entire drive. Coming out of that, we've just got to realize we've got to pick each other up. If someone makes a mistake, they know they didn't do their job, so we've got to pick them back up and keep them rolling."

"(The stop) was big. No one on our defense wants to give up points. We knew we had to play hard, especially coming into the goal line. We kind of guessed what plays they were going to run based on film we watched. Their QB runs a lot — they really don't run with their running back —

so we filled our gaps. Being able to make that stop, I think it proves how strong our defense really is."

The defense ensured the Rangers, coached by former Black River coach Bryan Morgan, could not regain any sliver of hope. Gibb and the offense left no doubt.

Gibb's absurd statistical season continued in full, as he completed 8-of-9 passes for 217 yards and a school-record-tying four touchdowns to go with nine carries for 61 yards and two scores. Gibb is now 89-for-104 (.856) for 1,647 yards and 22 touchdowns through the air while also rushing 79 times for 632 yards and 10 more scores this season.

As Highland went ahead 28-0 over the opening 14:58, Gibb racked up 213 yards total offense (51 rushing, 162 passing) — only 11 fewer than North Ridgeville had over 48 minutes.

"It's just a tribute to the great guys around me making plays," Gibb said. "Like (Evan) Foust's catch over the

middle of the field (for 22 yards), that was a helluva catch. I've got such great guys around me to help me be the best I can be."

"I've got endless things to say about Gibb," Miller added. "He's a dog day in, day out."

Highland got on the board when Gibb scored from 12 yards on a counter play, then pushed to 14-0 when Lucas Gerding caught an RPO out route and beat the last remaining defender to the sideline to score from 22 yards. Dobkowski's 53-yard reception — the Hornets hit the same play in nearly the same spot for 34 yards the previous week against Brecksville — pushed the ante to 21-0 just 12:34 in.

Another quick stop returned the ball to the offense, where Gibb pumped a quick screen to Dobkowski and floated a 41-yard TD to wide-open Jake Weber. Gibb scored from 8 yards on a power read five minutes later, and Gerding capped the first-

half scoring when he lined up in the tight slot, pretended to pass block for a few seconds and snuck into the flat untouched for an 11-yard reception.

First-team All-Ohio running back Casey Myser (13 carries, 106 yards, TD; 2 catches, 55 yards) joined the scoring party in the third quarter to extend his streak of games with a touchdown to 29, crossing from 8 yards to increase his Medina County scoring record to 540 points.

Long story short, there was no way the Hornets were going to lose at the place they call "The Tire," where Highland has now won 56-of-66 games all time.

"It's such a surreal feeling playing on this field as a youth kid and all the practices and all the blood, sweat and tears we put into this game," Gibb said. "For this to be our last game on this field, it's just insane."

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