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‘We were doubted’: Highland football embraces change, ignores doubters

Updated: Oct. 24, 2026, 5:13 a.m. | Published: Oct. 24, 2026, 5:00 a.m.



Highland football coach Mike Gibbons talks to his team after a 13-10 win over Hudson Ryan Isley, [cleveland.com](#)



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'We were doubted': Highland football embraces change, ignores doubters
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By [Ryan Isley, cleveland.com](#)

HUDSON, Ohio – Change can be scary. But not for Highland football.

After 11 years in the Suburban League American Conference, the Hornets made the move to the National Conference this season and knew that some didn't expect them to have immediate success. They heard the doubt, but they didn't listen.

What they did was get to work and let its play do the talking, the latest speech being a 13-10 win over Hudson that secured a perfect 7-0 conference record and outright National Conference title.

"We were doubted by everyone at the beginning of the year," said Highland senior safety Chatham Phillips, who had two interceptions in the win over Hudson. "It just shows that we can really do anything that we put our minds to."



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Highland senior running back/linebacker Evan Foust scored the only touchdown of the game for the Hornets against Hudson and also came up with a forced fumble late in the game that kept the Explorers from having a chance to tie or take the lead.

When asked about how important it was for the Hornets to jump over to the side of the Suburban League that features the bigger teams of Stow, North Royalton, Medina, Solon, Hudson, Wadsworth and Nardon and come away as the champions in their first season, Foust reflected on the big picture as well as the immediate impact.

“A lot of people doubted us going to the National (Conference),” Foust said. “There are a lot of better teams on the National side and for I think this is huge for not just the team, but like the kids coming up through the program. It is great momentum for the kids coming up in the high school and coming up through youth and see how good Highland actually is.”

One thing about moving sides of the league is that while Highland has played a cross-conference matchup with Hudson for the last two years and with North Royalton for several years, there was little to no familiarity with the other teams in the National Conference.

“We’re a little bit familiar with them, but the other teams, we were not as familiar with, and kind of getting our feet wet that way,” Highland head coach Mike Gibbons said. “But I’m glad to be in this league. It’s a great league, and you have to bring it every week.”

The players believe the way they were able to fight through the doubt and win the conference championship by just putting their heads down and grinding.

“I think it’s the practices ” Phillins said “We worked so hard in the

I think it's the pressure," Phillips said. "We worked so hard in the offseason. We were training every day over the summer, and it just feels good to finally have our work pay off."

But changing conferences isn't the only thing new for the Hornets.

After years of being in Division II, Region 6, Highland finds itself now in the same division, but in Region 5. So while the Hornets had the likes of Avon, North Ridgeville, Anthony Wayne and Clay to contend with in Region 6, they are now in a region with teams like Walsh Jesuit, Nordonía, Mayfield and Archbishop Hoban.

"We have been in Region 6 for a long time and kind of knew that Toledo/Avon (area) pretty well," Gibbons said. "But this is a new challenge for us, so we're excited about it."

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Just like they did with the conference switch, the Hornets didn't let the change in region bother them either. The Hornets clinched the top seed in the region, according to Joe Eitel, with the win over Hudson.

And now it is up to the players to put in keep putting in the work if the Hornets want to win the region and make the state semifinals for the first time since 2013.

“We just have to have good weeks of practice,” Foust said. “We’re going to face new opponents. We just have to study the film hard and practice really hard.”

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