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Who are the top-two way football players in NE Ohio 2026? Matt Goul's picks, your votes (poll)

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Who are the top-two way football players in NE Ohio 2026? Matt Goul's picks, your votes (poll)

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By [Matt Goul, cleveland.com](#)

CLEVELAND, Ohio — For the last two weeks, the top high school football players at each individual position have been highlighted from the Greater Cleveland and Akron area.

Now, here are more than 30 of the top players who are among the best on both sides of the ball in Northeast Ohio.

Read about them below and find links to our previous watch lists. Vote for who you think is the best in our poll below. It will remain open until 10 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 20:



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Brady Bush, Solon, sr. — DE/TE

Bush committed in March to Miami (Ohio). He doubles as a [tight end](#) and [defensive end](#), where he made the All-Ohio second team last year in Division I.

Ethan Burge, Kenston, jr. — RB/WR/CB

Injuries hampered Burge after a breakout freshman year for the Bombers. He rushed for 401 yards and two touchdowns on 84 carries last season. The Bombers plan to play him more at wide receiver and utilize him as a cornerback.

Lucci Cantini, Kirtland, sr. — C/LB

A returning All-Ohioan, Cantini is a three-year starter at center ([see interior linemen to watch](#)) for the defending OHSAA Division VI state champions. He also is the catcher on the baseball team and is powerful at 6-foot, 205 pounds. Cantini is moving from the defensive line to linebacker this year on defense.



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Marcus Council, Akron East, sr. — CB/RB

Coming off an All-Ohio season at Streetsboro, where he had six interceptions in 2025, Council is easily one of the [top cornerbacks](#) in the state. He also is one of the most dangerous [running backs in Northeast Ohio](#), rushing 851 yards and 13 TDs as a junior. Council now will star at East for his senior season.

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Khalil Diming, Archbishop Hoban, jr. — RB/S

Whether it be running back or safety, Diming could be in store for a breakout season. He is listed as an “athlete” by recruiting services and has a handful of Mid-American Conference offers. Diming is a returning starter at safety for Hoban and is expected to take over the lead running back role.

Brayton Feister, Massillon, sr. — LB/WR

Feister transferred from Archbishop Hoban in the spring after starring on both sides of the football for the Knights. He rushed for 2,000 yards as a sophomore, then concentrated on linebacker last season and earned All-Ohio first-team honors in Division II. That is where he is projected to play at the next level, as a four-star prospect committed Friday to Oregon over Ohio State, Georgia and California. Feister totaled 133 tackles with 39 TFL, 13 sacks and two interceptions as a junior. He also rushed for 1,098 yards and 17 TDs.



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Jairel Fenton, Avon, sr. — DB/RB

Fenton was a thorn in quarterbacks' sides with six interceptions. He had two against Wadsworth's All-Ohio quarterback in the playoffs. Avon is moving Fenton to safety this season and adding him to the backfield on offense as a change of pace to Michael Colburn.

Karsen Fisher, Nordonia, sr. — LB/TE

He led the Knights with 103 tackles, including 51 solo hits, 17 TFL and three sacks. Fisher made the All-Northeast Inland District second team in Division II. He has tremendous upside at 6-3 and 230 pounds and used that frame to block two kicks last year. Miami (Ohio) has offered him a scholarship. Fisher also plays tight end and had 587 yards with six TDs on 32

receptions.



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Evan Foust, Highland, sr. — LB/TE

Foust might not come off the field much. He made the All-Ohio second team in Division II and had 73 tackles with 3.5 sacks on defense, plus 255 yards with four TDs on 14 receptions at tight end.



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Jude Haller, Wadsworth, jr. — RB/S

Haller had a big sophomore year for the Grizzlies, who won the Suburban League National Conference title. He played safety and outside linebacker, totaling 73 tackles, nine TFL, two interceptions and three pass breakups. Haller also scored twice, including a kickoff return. Kent State gave him his first offer last November. He made the Northeast Inland District second team in Division II. Now, Haller is adding running back duties to his plate. It's a position he grew up playing with quarterback Brysen Hall in the Wadsworth backfield through middle school.

Elijah Harden, Glenville, jr. — TE/DE

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Harden has an offer from Syracuse. Expect his role, as a 6-3 and 215-pounder, to increase this year for Glenville including usage as a defensive end.

Jayden Haynes, Mayfield, sr. — WR/CB

Haynes is one of the new players at Mayfield who will work both sides of the ball, as coach Ross Bandiera tries to cut down on

wear and tear for his roster. Haynes made the All-Northeast Lakes District second team in Division II last year at wide receiver. At 6-2 and 190 pounds, he hauled in 35 es last year for 540 yards and nine TDs. That big frame and speed makes him a tough defender, too. Haynes had one interception in 2025.

Carter Hopkins, Perry, sr. — RB/LB

Injury kept Hopkins out for three games after leading the Pirates in rushing as a sophomore. He made his biggest impact last year at linebacker with 36 tackles, one defensive TD, a sack and interception in the regular season.

Tristin Hughes, Rocky River, sr. — WR/RB/S

A two-way standout at receiver and in the defensive backfield, Hughes committed to Kentucky over Virginia Tech, Purdue, Michigan, Miami and Auburn. He had 1,332 yards and 17 TDs on 75 receptions on offense, plus 391 yards and 10 TDs rushing. Defensively, Hughes had 65 tackles and three interceptions. Not only is Hughes one of Northeast Ohio's premier receivers, but the Pirates plan on using him more out of the backfield this season.



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John Johnson, Archbishop Hoban, sr. — WR/S

A multisport standout and the leading scorer on Hoban's basketball team that reached the state final four in Division III, Johnson's future is likely to be as a receiver at the next level. He committed in April to Bowling Green, picking the Falcons over Kentucky, James Madison and Kent State. The 6-3 receiver should have a bigger role this year on both sides of the ball as a receiver and safety, following the graduation of four-year standouts Payton Cook and Elbert "Rock" Hill IV.

Terrel Karim Jr., Akron East, sr. — WR/DE

Karim plays both receiver and comes off the edge as a defender, which is where he made the Northeast Inland District first team in Division III. Karim is classified as an "athlete" by recruiting services.

Rowan Kennedy, Rocky River, jr. — WR/S

Kennedy made Northeast Lakes District second team in Division III last year during the Pirates' deep playoff run. He was one of two 1,000-yard receivers with Tristin Hughes. Kennedy scored 13 TDs with 1,103 yards on 43 receptions. He also had three interceptions at safety.

Tommy Kopec, Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy, jr. — RB/LB

With older brother Joey now at Rutgers, Tommy will be the big man on campus at CVCA. He contributed last year as a running back and linebacker during the Royals' run to the state semifinals. Kopec had 61 tackles with five TFL and three sacks to make

All-Ohio honorable mention in Division III

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Landon Lehmer, St. Edward, sr. — S/WR



Lehmer led St. Edward in tackles en route to another Division I state semifinal appearance. He made the All-Ohio second team with four interceptions and a team-high 79 solo tackles. Lehmer committed in late April to Miami (Ohio) over Marshall, Kent State, Army and Air Force. Lehmer wore the gold jersey, which is reserved for one two-way player, in the preseason. The Eagles plan to use him as a wide receiver.

Jonathan Lemon, Massillon Perry, sr. — CB/RB

He is projected as a cornerback prospect at the next level. Lemon made the Northeast Inland District second team in Division II as a running back.

Charlie Mallett, Hawken, sr. — WR/S

Mallett made All-Ohio in Division III as the top receiver for Donovan Moorhead, who is now at Jacksonville State. Mallett is a three-sport standout for the Hawks. He also plays basketball and track. On the football field, he had 1,193 yards and 16 TDs on 104 receptions. Defensively, Mallett added three interceptions at safety.

Deontay Malone, Massillon, sr. — WR/CB

Malone committed in June to Ohio State, picking the Buckeyes over Michigan, Michigan State and others. He made the All-Ohio second team on defense last year for the Tigers. He had 498 yards and seven TDs on 34 receptions, two returns for touchdowns (one on a punt and another on a kickoff), plus three interceptions on defense. He also had 28 solo tackles with 11 assists.

Da'Von McDougale, Glenville, sr. — RB/LB

McDougale hits the line of scrimmage like a sledgehammer. He shared carries last year with C.J. Newell, who is now at Bowling Green. McDougale plays both running back and linebacker for the Tarblooders and committed in June to James Madison as a defender.



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Luke McGovern, Aurora, sr. — WR/CB

McGovern has speed to burn, as he runs the 100 and 200 meters in the spring. He made the All-Ohio third team in Division III last year after putting up 815 yards from scrimmage with 11 TDs and 30 receptions. Defensively, he came up with three interceptions, two pass breakups and returned a punt for a touchdown. McGovern has nearly a dozen Division I college scholarship offers, including Kent State and Toledo.

Traxton Richards, Perry, jr. — WR/QB/S



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Richards made the All-Ohio third team in Division IV. He is a big play waiting to happen on both sides of the ball, plus special teams, where he ran back kicks against state champions Glenville and Kirtland.

Elijah Robinson, Euclid, sr. — OL/DT

A Youngstown State commit, Robinson also can play offensive tackle, guard and defensive tackle. He registered seven pancake blocks. Defensively, Robinson had four TFL and a sack in limited time.



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Kentsten Staten, Maple Heights, sr. — QB/S

One of the area's [quarterbacks to watch](#), Staten has not only started there but also at receiver and in the defensive backfield. He rushed for more than 600 yards with about 200 yards passing last year at Bedford. Staten also scored twice with about 200 yards receiving. Defensively, he had four interceptions and six PBU with 20 tackles. Staten committed in June to Toledo.

Ke'Shawn Telfair, Euclid, sr. — CB/WR

Telfair could push Cincinnati Anderson's Ace Alston for the title of best cornerback in Ohio's 2027 recruiting class. At 6-0 and 160 pounds, he had four interceptions as a junior. That gives him 14 for his career. He added 650 yards and nine TDs on 30 receptions at receiver.

Luciano Traczyk, Mayfield, jr. — DE/OT

A two-way starter for the Wildcats, Traczyk made All-Ohio as a defensive lineman. He had 87 tackles with 21 TFL and nine sacks. Traczyk is 6-4 and 240 pounds, one of many returning starters at Mayfield.

Riley Verderber, Lakewood, sr. — DE/TE

A three-sport star for the Rangers, Verderber also plays basketball and baseball. It's tough to take him off the field, especially on the football field as a tight end and defensive end. The 6-5, 235-pounder had 218 yards and four TDs on 21 receptions and graded at 92% as a blocker on offense. Defensively, he had two sacks.

Derek Weitzel, Avon, jr. — G/DT

At 6-3, 280 pounds, Weitzel had a productive offseason that included multiple Mid-American Conference offers. He was in the line rotation on both sides of the ball during Avon's Division II state championship run, playing mostly guard on offense.