

Akron Beacon Journal

FOOTBALL

10 things to know about Greater Akron high school football in 2026



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Akron Beacon Journal

July 30, 2026, 6:01 a.m. ET

Key Points

- Feeling out of the loop as the 2026 high school football season approaches in Greater Akron? Let us help you get up to speed.
 - One of the themes we're addressing is the area's lack of state championships in recent years. Do you envision a team breaking through in 2026?
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Don't be afraid to confess. With [a whirlwind of high school football news](#) unfolding throughout a long offseason, you need a refresher to properly prepare for [the upcoming 2026 season](#) like [a player](#) needs ice-cold water during a scorching practice in the dog days of summer.

Well, you're in luck. In [the Greater Akron area](#), we have you covered.

Here are 10 things fans need to know about [the 2026 high school football season](#):

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1. Greater Akron football is in the midst of a state championship drought

Greater Akron's high school football tradition is too rich for its enthusiasts to be sensitive about ring culture, so let's just be blunt about it. The area has not produced a state champion in any of the last five seasons.

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Archbishop Hoban's Division II state title in 2020 is the last delivered by an Akron-area team. It's the longest drought in these parts since the Ohio High School Athletic Association playoffs implemented a seven-division format in 2013.

Last season, Walsh Jesuit (11-2 in 2025) and Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy (12-1) made the deepest playoff runs among Akron-area teams. In state semifinals, Walsh lost 38-7 to eventual Division II champion Avon, and CVCA fell 21-20 to Division III runner-up Toledo Central Catholic.

Walsh won its lone state title in 1999. CVCA has never appeared in a state championship game.

Will anyone break the streak this year?

2. Can Walsh Jesuit football build on rare playoff win vs. Hoban?

To reach the Division II final four last season, Walsh overcame a huge obstacle, defeating rival Hoban [35-7 in the Division II, Region 5 championship game](#) at Bedford Bearcat Stadium. Hoban (10-2) had defeated Walsh 19-14 during the 2025 regular season, and the Knights hadn't lost to the Warriors in the playoffs since 1998.

Whether [Walsh](#) can build on its historic postseason victory and establish itself under coach Nick Alexander

as Summit County's most powerful program remains to be seen. Walsh and Hoban are scheduled to meet in Week 6 on Sept. 25 at Walsh. Both teams remain in Division II, Region 5.

Walsh has everyone's attention. Now it seeks the type of consistent dominance [Hoban](#) has achieved during the Tim Tyrrell coaching era, which features five state championships (2015-18 and 2020) and three state runner-up finishes (2021-23) in 13 seasons.

3. Brothers Brayton and Brydon Feister leave Hoban for Massillon football

When senior [Brayton Feister](#) and junior [Brydon Feister](#) transferred in May from Hoban to Massillon (9-4), Summit County lost two of its best and most highly recruited football players.

The Feister brothers are star linebackers being courted by a who's who of college football. As a bruising running back, Brayton Feister rushed for 1,098 yards and 17 touchdowns on 116 carries last season. Hoban's other starting running back last season, [Jance Henry](#), transferred in May from Hoban to Moon Area High School in Pennsylvania. Henry rushed for 968 yards and nine touchdowns on 140 carries in 2025.

Where does all of this movement leave Hoban?

Junior quarterback [Israel Cribbs](#), the son of Browns and Kent State legend [Josh Cribbs](#), has ascended to a prominent role. Senior wide receiver John Johnson, senior cornerback Jaiden Daniels, senior offensive tackle Julian Jenkins, junior defensive tackle Kiren Green, junior defensive back/running back Kahlil Diming, junior defensive back/wide receiver Carlos Gordon Jr. and junior defensive end Jace Campbell are among the top players on whom Hoban will count.

Oh, and running back [Keontae "Ke" Hollis Jr.](#) announced Sunday, July 26, he is transferring to Hoban. Last

season as a freshman at Berkner High School in Texas, Hollis ran for 728 yards on 64 carries and scored 12 touchdowns (10 rushing and two receiving).

More high school football transfer news: [Marcus Council transitions to Akron East from Streetsboro](#)

4. Does Greater Akron have a legitimate Ohio Mr. Football candidate?

Brayton Feister was a finalist for Ohio Mr. Football last season. Yet, he'll be playing in Stark County, so does Greater Akron have a legitimate Mr. Football candidate entering the 2026 season?

The main player to watch is Wadsworth junior quarterback Brysen Hall, who has received scholarship offers from Pitt, Syracuse, Kent State, Toledo, Miami University, UConn, USF and Buffalo.

More high school football: [Picking an all-time Akron City Series team is daunting. We tried anyway | Opinion](#)

5. Akron-area's 2026 football season could be the year of the quarterback

Whenever there is a promising group of players in close proximity who occupy the most important position in football, it stands out.

Could this be the year of the quarterback in the Greater Akron area? We're telling you there's a chance.

Hall and Cribbs have been mentioned already, but there a bunch of other local QBs to know. Among them are Walsh senior David Ternosky, Nordonio senior Steven Fakult, Twinsburg senior Dylan Fantone, Hudson senior Hayden Lipinski, Norton senior Trey Kersten, Copley junior Dane Wininger, Buchtel junior Arthur Thomas and Green senior Chase Herbert.

Hall headlines the list, though.

6. College football recruiting landscape in Greater Akron

Of course, Hall isn't the only player in the area who has a shot to play high-level college football.

Hoban's Johnson committed to Bowling Green, and Daniels committed to Ball State. The Knights' Jenkins, Green, Diming, Gordon and Campbell all have multiple offers.

Nordonia senior linebacker/tight end Karsen Fisher committed to Toledo. Hudson senior offensive tackle Otto Grill committed to Ohio. Others to watch on the recruiting scene include CVCA junior linebacker/running back Tommy Kopec, St. Vincent-St. Mary junior cornerback Nehemiah Moton, Wadsworth senior defensive end Anderson Tetzels, Wadsworth junior linebacker Jude Haller and Wadsworth junior wide receiver Jay'len King.

Then there's Walsh with three incoming freshmen receiving interest — quarterback Kinzy Shea, offensive tackle Calvin Brunson and wide receiver Cameron Brunson. Not to mention Walsh's Owen Pelkowski, an offensive tackle who has committed to Akron, and Cambell Lann, a wide receiver who has committed to Western Michigan. Fellow Warriors senior Drew Wollschleger is a defensive back with Division I options.

7. Keep an eye on the Wadsworth High School football team

There are clearly high expectations on the gridiron for parochial schools Walsh, Hoban and CVCA. The public school in the Greater Akron area most capable of a magical 2026 season is probably Wadsworth (11-1).

Hall, Tetzl, Haller and King are key Grizzlies players back from last season. Wadsworth's season ended with a 42-21 loss to eventual state champion Avon (14-1) in a Division II, Region 6 semifinal.

Justin Todd was named [the 2025 Cleveland Browns High School Coach of the Year](#).

8. Several Akron-area high school football conferences undergo changes

Speaking of Wadsworth, the Grizzlies will have new challengers as they defend their three consecutive Suburban League National Conference titles.

Highland (12-1) has moved to the SLNC after winning the Suburban League American Conference crown in each of the past two seasons. Medina (4-8) has also moved into the SLNC after competing in the Greater Cleveland Conference.

Meanwhile, Brecksville (7-5) and Twinsburg (6-5) have moved from the SLNC to the SLAC, and Kenston (7-5) and Mayfield (5-5) have joined the SLAC with exits from the Western Reserve Conference.

Cuyahoga Falls (1-9), Kent Roosevelt (5-5) and Tallmadge (3-7) have left the SLAC for the Metro Athletic Conference. And Coventry (2-8) jumped from the Metro Athletic Conference to the Principals Athletic Conference.

Got it?

9. Division II, Region 5 filled with OHSAA football playoff heavyweights

Wadsworth and Highland have moved from Division II, Region 6 to Division II, Region 5, where defending

regional champion Walsh still resides along with Hoban and Nordonia (8-4).

In other words, the ingredients for an OHSAA playoff royal rumble exist in Division II, Region 5.

One notable combatant who has left Division II, Region 5 is Hudson, which will feature senior Reno Ferri, one of Greater Akron's top running backs. Hudson (10-3) will be in Division I, Region 1, after opting to rise to Division I along with seven other OHSAA schools.

High school sports: [Akron City Series football fans sound off on all-time greats](#) | [Opinion](#)

10. Will a new Greater Akron football coach hit the ground running?

Coaching changes are always worth monitoring because a good leader at the helm of a program can play a huge role in helping a team forge its identity.

The following Greater Akron-area schools have new football coaches in 2026:

- **Nordonia:** Former longtime Knights assistant [Scott Barwidi](#) took over for [Jeff Fox](#), who had been in charge for 14 seasons. Barwidi's son, Brock, will be a senior on the team this fall.
- **Barberton:** [Pyrce Taylor](#) succeeded [Tony Gotto](#), who had led the Magics (1-9) for 12 seasons. Taylor was the offensive coordinator at Youngstown Chaney High School last season.
- Stow:** Former Stow coordinator [Dan Larlham](#) received a promotion after the departure of [Martin Poder](#), who had guided the Bulldogs (2-8) for four seasons. Larlham was Poder's OC in 2024 and DC in 2025.
- St. Vincent-St. Mary:** [Marcus Wattley](#) returned to STVM (0-9) to replace [Doran Grant](#), who had been at the controls of his alma mater for two seasons. Wattley was the Fighting Irish's head coach in 2016 and 2017.

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