

OHSAA Division II regional finals preview: Avon-Highland, Hoban-Walsh Jesuit run it back once again

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[Avon runs hard, gets after Wadsworth in regional semifinal](#)

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CLEVELAND, Ohio — For the third straight year, Avon will play Highland while Archbishop Hoban faces Walsh Jesuit in the OHSAA Division II regional finals.

The winners should play next week in the state semifinals, but will that matchup be any different?

Avon and Hoban have beaten their regional adversaries in each of the last two years, but there are reasons to believe Highland and Walsh Jesuit can change their fortunes this time. Here's why, as they meet Friday night at neutral sites:

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Avon (11-1) vs. Highland (12-0)

Aside from last year's state championship game, no team came closer to stopping Avon in the playoffs than Highland.

The Hornets were within a touchdown until Nolan Good ran for his second touchdown in a [28-20 win](#) to send the Eagles back to the state final four. Good rushed for 119 yards that night in the Region 6 championship.

No team has fared better against Highland's defense since then. In fact, the Hornets' starters have not allowed a touchdown since Week 2. Their stingy play continued with last week's [48-0](#)

[shutout](#) of North Ridgeville to set up this rematch in the Region 6 final against Avon at Brunswick Auto Mart Stadium.

Avon will look to hand the Suburban League's American Conference champion its first loss after giving the Suburban's National Conference winner its only defeat. The Eagles, who entered as the region's third seed, [had to play on the road](#) despite being defending state champs with no losses in Ohio.

They never trailed in a [42-21 win](#) at Wadsworth, as senior running backs Quiante Smith and Cam Wendell rushed for four touchdowns in their [second game back from injuries](#). Smith ran for 108 yards and three TDs, including two in the second quarter, when Wendell gave them the go-ahead score on a short-yardage run.

While Avon seeks its eighth state final four appearance in the last nine years, Highland has only one regional crown in its history. That came in 2013.

"We know who Highland is," Avon coach Mike Elder said after his team's win at Wadsworth. "We played them in a JV game Week 10. I have tremendous respect for Coach (Mike) Gibbons, just like I do Coach (Justin) Todd (at Wadsworth). Those guys are both Mount Union guys, and so there's something about those Mount Union guys that get deep into the playoffs. I'm proud of that as an alum myself."

Gibbons' Hornets scored six touchdowns in the first half against North Ridgeville, which had won seven straight since its 55-7 loss to Avon. Highland senior quarterback Grady Gibb [accounted for all six TDs](#) and finished with 217 yards and four TDs on 8-of-9 passing. He also rushed for 61 yards and two scores, while senior running back Casey Myser added 106 yards rushing and 55 yards on two receptions. He scored one touchdown, bringing his career total to 90.

Last year in this game, Myser rushed for 95 yards and all three TDs for Highland on 21 carries.

Archbishop Hoban (10-1) vs. Walsh Jesuit (10-1)

Hoban has won 13 of its last 14 games against Walsh Jesuit, including three regional finals since 2021. They split their two games last year, but Hoban got the one that meant the most in the playoffs.

Coach Tim Tyrrell's Knights followed last year's [21-7 victory](#) in the playoffs by edging Walsh, [19-14](#), this year in Week 6. Brayton Feister powered them both times, including a 262-yard performance with three TDs on 38 carries last year in the playoffs. The junior came into this season taking on a bigger role at linebacker, but steadily returning to the offensive backfield. He had 125 yards on 15 carries, including the winning run in the final minute at Dowd Field in their last meeting this season.

This time, they will play at Bedford's Bearcat Stadium, and Walsh might not have its starting quarterback. Junior David Ternosky, who threw for 134 yards last time at Hoban, missed last week's 42-21 victory against Austintown Fitch because of an injury he suffered in the [regional](#) quarterfinals. Ben Biel started in his place, while senior running back Marty Tobin rushed for 222 yards and three TDs on 15 carries. Tobin scored four times, including an 82-yard opening kickoff return. He has [nearly 500 yards](#) in Walsh's first two playoff games.

Hoban, meanwhile, cruised to a [35-3 win](#) against Hudson. Eastern Michigan commit Nick Kinsey completed 14 of 17 passes for 189 yards and rushed for a touchdown. Junior Jance Henry ran for 106 yards and a score while Feister added 66 yards and two TDs on only three carries.

Ohio's other regional finals

Sunbury Big Walnut (11-1) vs. Massillon (9-3): Manny Patterson threw for 226 yards and four TDs on 12-of-13 passing to lead the Tigers past Columbus DeSales, [48-14](#), in Region 7. Savior Owens and Anthony McMullen combined for five TDs and 303 yards rushing, as Massillon advanced to take on top-seeded Big Walnut. The Golden Eagles beat the Tigers last year, 14-7, to reach the state semifinals.

Cincinnati Anderson (12-0) vs. Trotwood-Madison (8-3): Anderson, which finished the regular season [atop the Associated Press state poll](#), is poised for a run at Canton after losing there last year to Avon. Junior quarterback Owen Scalf completed 22 of 28 passes for 281 yards. He also rushed for 74 yards, scoring once each with his arm and again with his legs to help the Raptors edge Cincinnati La Salle, [35-28](#).

This is Anderson's fourth straight regional final.



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Matt Goul has covered high school sports with some college and pros sprinkled in since 2005 with a bachelor's degree from Kent State University. He has covered high school basketball and football in Northeast...

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