

Tackling the best team units in Northeast Ohio

Continues from D8

TIGHT ENDS

1. Villa Angela-St. Joseph: D'Angelo White by himself can lift any team to the No. 1 spot at tight end. He holds offers from Ohio State, Alabama, Michigan and Auburn, to name a few. At 6-5 and 235 pounds, White has excellent hands and body control after missing a chunk of last season because of injury. Coach Jeff Rotsky also is high on another junior in Dylan Smith.

2. Perry: Trent Taylor is a Bowling Green commit and third year starter for the Pirates. Similar to White at VASJ, his presence lifts any team high in this ranking, where tight ends often play in the slot.

3. Solon: Junior Brady Bush is in a similar mold of Taylor at Perry with MAC offers and doubling as a defensive end.

4. Glenville: Sophomore Emiere Lemons can play inside or out at 6-4 and 200 pounds. Elijah Harden is another sophomore to watch for Glenville and had a productive camp season, impressing at the Build the Bridge and NEO Rising Legends showcases.

5. St. Edward: Joe Moore impressed this month, debuting with the Eagles after a transfer from West Geauga. His 6-4 frame makes him tough to bring down, and he could be a featured option in coach Tom Lombardo's offense to complement big-play Zach Hackleman on the outside. They will need a new No. 2 target after Joseph Saffold transferred to Glenville.

6. Wadsworth: While Jacob Earnest is known for his play at linebacker, he can break off a big gain on offense as the top tight end at Wadsworth. He hauled in 19 passes for 306 yards and three TDs last year.

7. Benedictine: Toledo defensive line recruit Tyrell O'Neal and Sean O'Connell will rotate in at tight end for the Bengals, who use them as traditional blocking backs. They can catch the ball, too.

8. Chardon: The Hilltoppers' unbalanced offensive line formations factor into this, but they also have productive players here. Senior Matthew McIlroy will take the lead spot there, often next to Division I tackle prospect Andrew Baggott, a fourth-year starter who played tight end as a sophomore.

9. St. Ignatius: The Wildcats traditionally have depth in this spot, and senior Shane O'Leary and junior Charlie Blasko entered camp among the options to contribute. Outside linebacker Quinn Kennedy has experience here, too.

10. University School: Big Matteo Morelli picked up his first offer from Butler in June, giving the Preppers the edge for this final spot with Lakewood, Nardonida and North Ridgeville among the schools considered.

OFFENSIVE LINES

1. St. Edward: Mason Wilhelm and junior Jack Marquard lead the left side for St. Edward, where they swapped positions a year ago. Xavier Krzak also is back on the interior for the Eagles, who kept plowing ahead for Tyrese Buchanan last year after Brandon White's injury. This group entered 2024 with question marks after graduating three Big Ten recruits, but now those question marks seem silly. Especially for any defender trying to maneuver around them.

2. Mentor: North Carolina State recruit Landry Brede and Kent State bound Collin Pritchard serve as bookend tackles with Navy recruit JoLo Duca at center. All five spots have experienced players.

3. Archbishop Hoban: Start with Ohio State recruit Sam Greer at left tackle and add returning starter Braylin Parker, who is moving in to play guard or center. Coach Tim Tyrell is high on some other sizable young players, but added he still wants to see them prove their potential.

4. Avon: Maximus Hauck and Eian Englehart return at tackle for the defending Division II state champions, while Mason Hauck also is in the mix. Cincinnati defensive end recruit Lance Dawson also can contribute to this group, if needed.

5. Chardon: On the preseason tour, no line practiced as hard as the one at Chardon. First-year coach Brian Landies, who runs the defense, has not only experienced players but ones with mean streaks. Division I prospect and fourth-year starter Andrew Baggott leads that group with sophomore Stephen Andrews and guard Aiden Hardisty. Both are similar in stature to Baggott, who is 6-4 and 265 pounds.



Strongsville's Storm Miller and Braelin Dally line up during a scrimmage last week. Miller is committed to Texas A&M. *Matt Goul, cleveland.com*

6. Lake Catholic: Cincinnati recruit Nathan Zappitelli and Cruz Nimmo are back at tackle. David Iannini, lost early last year because of injury, also is back. They have experience at all five spots.

7. Walsh Jesuit: Ohio commit Colt Crosley can play tackle or guard. Center Rocco Ruggiero can play with a mean streak, similar to that group at Chardon, and the Warriors got as big of a push up front as anyone during scrimmages on the camp tour.

8. Avon Lake: Another Ohio State recruit, Max Riley, is a fourth-year starter to lead the way. The tight ends also factor in for Avon Lake.

9. Kirtland: Third-year starting junior center Lucci Cantini leads a group that brings back Jack Turk and Vince Prusock from the Hornets' Division VI state final run.

10. Olmsted Falls: With four returning starters, the Bulldogs have an argument to be made that they are stronger than Avon or Avon Lake up front. They must still prove it with an early test Friday against Mentor, but guard Nathan Scheffler and Co. are capable. They round out this top 10, which also considered Nardonida, Benedictine, Strongsville, Streetsboro and Norton.

DEFENSIVE LINES

1. Glenville: Ohio State commit Jamir Perez already served as an interior anchor. Then Glenville added St. Edward transfer Diondre Taylor, a Kent State recruit. Junior defensive end Kaylon Bailey and senior Gemir Johnson come off the edge for this team, which should be the favorite in Division IV to bring a state championship back to Cleveland.

2. Strongsville: Ohio University recruit Austin Adkins can play every spot up front, while Braelin Dally is another senior coming off the edge. Strongsville played Texas A&M recruit Storm Miller off the edge, too, last year but is moving him to middle linebacker.

3. St. Edward: Taylor's transfer served as a hit for St. Edward, which still has one of Northeast Ohio's top ends in Collin Crocker. He had 7.5 sacks and 12.5 tackles for loss as a junior. Brendan Shultz also is a returning contributor to this defensive front, which gave Mentor trouble in their scrimmage.

4. Avon: The defending Division II state champions had the deepest defensive front a year ago. Cincinnati recruit Lance Dawson is back to lead this new-look unit, which debuts Thursday night against St. Ignatius.

5. Benedictine: Toledo commit Tyrell O'Neal leads the Bengals at one end spot. Sean O'Connell has moved up and inside to that line, too, after a 10-win season.

6. Villa Angela-St. Joseph: Senior tackle Sean McCall is among the area's most powerful players on a defensive interior. VASJ has some size and strength around him, including top tight end prospect D'Angelo White and junior end Chance Stevens.

7. Archbishop Hoban: Patrick Kinsell is back at an end, while sophomore Kiren Green earned time on the inside as a ninth-grader. Ace Brown also comes off the edge as an Eastern Michigan recruit.

8. Perry: Even without Bowling Green commit Trent Taylor for their final scrimmage, the Pirates held up well against Benedictine with a swarming defense to counter a strong offensive line. Their first four tries include Madison, Kenston, Kirtland and Chardon.

9. Kirtland: You don't get to the state finals 13 times in 14 years without a sound defensive line, and Kirtland has that with senior nose tackle Ty Bledsoe leading the way.

10. Lake Catholic: Those linemen at Lake Catholic can go both ways, led by Zappitelli, Nimmo and Iannini. The Cougars get the edge over Solon, Lorain, Berea-Midpark, Streetsboro and Elyria Catholic, who also received consideration.

LINEBACKERS

1. Glenville: Reigning *cleveland.com* and All-Ohio Defensive Player of the Year Cincere Johnson carries Glenville's standing here, but teammate Da'Von McDougle is another one to watch.

2. Archbishop Hoban: Brayton Feister's move to linebacker was needed for Hoban after the graduation of Ohio State recruit Eli Lee and Tanner Mintz. Younger brother Brydon "Squeak" Feister figures to play a role in this group, too.

3. Avon: Miami (Ohio) commit Ryan Stolarski leads the defending Division II state champions from this perch on defense. Safety Cam Wendell also can play up in the box.

4. Wadsworth: Longtime starter Jacob Earnest had 129 tackles and 10 TFL as a junior. Boden Ballinger and converted quarterback Ryan Stoops add to this group.

5. Strongsville: Like Johnson at Glenville, Storm Miller leads the Mustangs' presence here as an early favorite for several defensive player of the year awards.

6. St. Ignatius: Linebacker has always been part of St. Ignatius' identity, and coach Ryan Franzinger has one of his better groups with senior Nick Rivera, junior James Conrad and outside backer Quinn Kennedy.

7. Lorain: Jay I Diaz and Jamiyus Gaines earned All-Ohio honors last year in Division I for Lorain, which moves from the Lake Erie League to the Greater Cleveland Conference.

8. Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy: Rutgers commit Joey Kopec and sophomore brother Tommy Kopec lead the Royals, who are coming off a 10-win season.

9. Kirtland: Zander Perko served as a bright spot in the Division VI state championship game, starting as a sophomore. He returns with Cam Treadwell, while Andy Ridgeway has impressed in the preseason.

10. Walsh Jesuit: The Warriors have depth at linebacker, and it showed in their four-team scrimmage with two more of the area's better teams at this position in Nardonida and Olmsted Falls. Bowling Green commit Caden Carter is the headliner with senior captain Cade Romanini, back from a Week I injury last year that cost him his junior season. Walsh rounds out a position that also included Nardonida, Olmsted Falls, Chardon, St. Edward, Lake Catholic, Amherst and Garfield Heights for consideration.

DEFENSIVE BACKS

1. Maple Heights: How many teams have three Division I recruits in their secondary? The Mustangs have that with Kindall Brown (Ohio University), a fourth-year starter who has moved between cornerback and safety throughout his career. Then, a pair of Kent State pledges are third-year starters in Keshaun Sheppard and Na'Carli Gary.

2. Glenville: The Tarblooders also boast comparable college prospects in sophomores Jaylen Edwards and Jaquan Gibson, but seniors Aaron Scales and C.J. Newell are third-year starters who separate Glenville from much of the pack. They enter the 2025 season stronger at safety because of Scales, Newell and Gibson, while Maple Heights' talent plays more at corner. Let the debate begin between who has the better secondary, "The Ville" or Maple?



Ohio State pledge Jamir Perez is the anchor of a strong Glenville defense. *Matt Goul, cleveland.com*

3. Archbishop Hoban: Hear those coughs echoing from Akron? Hoban sports fourth-year starter and USC commit Elbert "Rock" Hill IV, while Payton Cook (a Louisville commit on offense) also can contribute there. Senior safety Antonio Williams also is among the best at his position.

4. Avon: North Carolina commit Jakob Weatherspoon, who flipped from Ohio State this summer, can play cornerback or safety. Remember that many of these standouts move to safety so teams can't simply shy away from them in the passing game. Weatherspoon fits that mold, as does Maple Heights' Kindall Brown. Safety Cameron Wendell, cornerback Alex Rivera and Trevor Maly also are returning contributors from last season's Division II state-title run.

5. Cleveland Heights: Fourth-year starting Henry Perrymond Jr. is among Northeast Ohio's most talented and experienced cornerbacks. Devron Mills also is a returning starter, while this unit added Matthew Valentine from Lutheran East.

6. Walsh Jesuit: Senior cornerback James Brewer III is an Ohio commit, while Grant Blascak is headed to Toledo. Two Mid-American Conference commits is a strong starting point.

7. St. Edward: Michigan State commit Brayden Thomas leads an always talented group for defensive coordinator Pete Pappas, who also has cornerback Makhi Boone and Brodon Moore back from the Eagles' Division I state semifinal run. Their depth extends to junior safety Landon Lehmer, who is one of the better up-and-coming players at the position, and senior cornerback Bray Adams.

8. Wadsworth: The defending Suburban League champions return seniors Tommy Hohn and Calix Lemp, a two-way starter, at cornerback with super sophomore Jude Haller, who can play safety and hybrid linebacker.

9. Solon: Junior Khyier Robinson holds multiple MAC offers, while two-way threat Cooper Walker adds to a group that will help Solon in a Suburban League that has formidable passing attacks, including defending champion Wadsworth.

10. Euclid: Junior cornerback Kei'Shuan Telfair could find himself at safety this year, considering all quarterbacks would be wise to not throw his way. Coach Damon Creel also can use standout receiver Ky'Mari Frieson and junior Sincere Hamilton on defense. Telfair holds multiple Big Ten and Power Four offers, including Penn State, Michigan State and Pittsburgh. His presence elevates the Panthers into a top 10 in which Akron East, Mentor, Perry and Villa Angela-St. Joseph were considered.

SPECIAL TEAMS

1. Archbishop Hoban: Senior Jeremy Hammel is back to handle kicks, while Payton Cook and Elbert "Rock" Hill IV lead the return game — which factors into this category just as much as the kickers and punters.

2. Highland: Field position is critical, and the Hornets return all-district selection Jonah Kowza at kicker. Evan Foust, who punts, and Casey Myser are dangerous options to run it back.

3. Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin: This area has always been a staple of NDCL, which returns Ryan Cvitkovic after he made the All-Ohio second team in Division IV.

4. Brunswick: Vincenzo DiTeodoro has range for Brunswick after making the All-Ohio third team in Division I. He had 29 of 36 kickoffs go for touchbacks.

5. Nardonida: The Knights always produce a talented kicker with a big boot, and Riley Edgheuse made 12 of 14 field goals as a junior. Nardonida edged out Glenville, Kirtland, St. Edward, St. Ignatius, North Ridgeville, Kenston, Walsh Jesuit, Buckeye and Amherst for the final spot.