

NFL

The Browns-Steelers game Thursday was not completed before press time.



Sports

Section

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Hoosier hysteria

Indiana game has taken on new meaning

Mitch Stacy
The Associated Press

COLUMBUS — Looking at Ohio State's schedule at the start of the season, the game against Indiana in late November didn't stand out.

The Hoosiers haven't been a contender in the Big Ten for decades and were terrible last season, so it was logical to think about this game as a throwaway, one that wouldn't require a lot of heavy lifting for the Buckeyes as they schemed for revenge against Michigan the following week.

Instead, the college football world will get a treat instead of a dud on Saturday when undefeated No. 5 Indiana plays No. 2



Day



NEXT UP

WHO: Indiana at Ohio State

WHEN: Noon, Saturday

WHERE: Ohio Stadium

TV/RADIO: WJW TV-8; WKNR 850-AM; WEOL 930-AM; WAKR 1590-AM



Ohio State at the Horseshoe, a place where the Hoosiers haven't won a game since Ronald Reagan was president.

Indiana (10-0, 7-0 Big Ten, No. 5 CFP) is one of the most uplifting stories of the season. Behind Ohio University transfer quarterback Kurtis Rourke, the Hoosiers are enjoying their best season since 1967, when they finished 9-2 and shared the Big Ten title with Purdue and Minnesota. They haven't even sniffed a conference crown since.

The Buckeyes (9-1, 6-1, No. 2 CFP) are doing what they were expected to do. Their only stumble this season was a nail-biter of a 32-31 loss to now-No. 1 Oregon. Ohio State hasn't dropped below No. 4 in the AP Top 25 all season.

"We saw Indiana becoming a big game, now a top five matchup," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said this week. "Our guys are fired up for this one and know this is a must-win for us. We've got to go win this game to play in Indianapolis (in the Big Ten championship). I know the team, the coaches, everybody in this building, the fans know what kind of game this is, and we've got to bring it on Saturday."

Oregon has already clinched one of the spots in the conference title game.

If Indiana beats Ohio State — the only nationally ranked team on its schedule this year — and closes the season with a win over Purdue, the Hoosiers will be in the Big Ten championship for the first time since the inception of the game in 2011.

See OSU, C3

PLAYOFF FOOTBALL: HIGHLAND VS. AVON



AARON JOSEFCZYK / GAZETTE

Highland's Nick Dobkowski leaps out of the grasp of Whitehouse Anthony Wayne's Ben Nieckarz. Below, the Hornets' Lucas Gerding carries the Generals' Casius Krueger for extra yardage.

It's showtime, baby



Premier public schools have plenty of familiarity

Albert Grindle
The Gazette

One week ago, second-seeded Highland eliminated third-seeded Whitehouse Anthony Wayne from the playoffs for the fourth time in eight seasons.

Tonight in the Division II, Region 6 championship at Elyria's Ely Stadium, the Hornets (13-0) will again try to climb the mountain that is top-seeded Avon (13-0), something they've done only once in seven playoff attempts since first butting heads in 2011.

Despite beating Highland six times by an average of 20.7 points, including in a

closer-than-it-appeared 28-14 regional final last season, the Eagles greatly respect coach Mike Gibbons' Hornets. The similarities are striking, as the once agriculture-based communities have grown into de-facto rural Cleveland and Akron suburbs and their football programs have morphed from afterthoughts into D-II powerhouses.

The winner gets to stake its claim as the top Northeast Ohio public school in the division and will play Walsh Jesuit (13-0) or Archbishop Hoban (11-2) in the state semis at a site to be determined Sunday by the OHSAA.

"They are extremely well-coached," Avon coach Mike Elder said of the Hornets. "They're big, strong and physical. I think anybody left in the playoffs at this point has done the work in the weight room. There's a physicality to them both offensively and defensively. The thing that sticks out to me most is how physical they are on both sides of the line. When you're as physical as they are, well-coached and put those players in position to succeed, you get to the regional final."

See HORNETS, C4

TONIGHT

WHO: Highland (13-0) vs. Avon (13-0)

WHAT: Division II, Region 6 final

TIME: 7

WHERE: Mercy Health Field at Ely Stadium, 1915 Middle Ave., Elyria

RADIO: WEOL 930-AM; WEOL.com, Stream 1



HORNETS

From C1

Avon is big, strong, physical and well-coached, too. While Eagles quarterback Nolan Good was recently named Lorain County's Golden Helmet winner and Highland running back Casey Myser is among the state leaders in yards from scrimmage and points, the matchup diehard fans are itching to see starts up front.

The Hornets offensive line of Carson Noonan, Josh Messina, Ryan Zywiec, Brady Bendau and Ben Coyne understands the challenge.



Messina

The Eagles boast first-team all-district picks Jeremiah Kelly (6-foot-3, 295 pounds) and Jason Gillespie (6-2, 250) at tackle and Sam Toniolo (6-4, 230) at end, not to mention future D-I college linebacker Ryan Stolarski and fireplug Owen Garcia behind them and big-time D-I recruit Jakob Weatherspoon flying down from his safety spot.

The start of last season's meeting couldn't have gone worse, as Highland tried to match strength on strength and pound the ball. Avon countered with five- and six-man fronts — the Eagles even went to a 7-1 look in the second quarter — and roared to a 14-0 lead while holding the Hornets to 63 yards in the first half.

An explosive passing attack built off play-action to Myser (2,024 rushing yards) could be the difference tonight, however, as Dylan Borla has thrown for a spread-out 2,116 yards and 27 touchdowns to H-back Evan Foust (26 catches, 537 yards, 5 TDs), Myser (16, 502, 7), slot receiver Lucas Gerding (23, 445, 3) and wide receiver Nick Dobkowski (18, 326, 7).

"I love it. We're blessed to have this opportunity," Messina said. "We need to show out for our community."

"It's going to be weather like this (45 degrees, 50% chance of rain, 20 mph winds), so obviously the running game is key. Their fronts, they switch those around pre snap and post snap, so we



Gazette Pick-It Line



Rick Noland Albert Grindle John Urchek Chad Grant

Overall	69-9	68-10	68-10	67-11
Last week	2-0	2-0	2-0	2-0



have to recognize that and pick those up."

Of course, the Eagles are probably thinking the same thing about their offense after beating Highland last season with backup quarterback Blake Elder at the controls due to an injury to Good. The latter is back, healthy and a lock to be named first-team All-Ohio in the coming weeks. He's as good of a runner as Anthony Wayne's Grant Kinnee and a superior passer.

Good has 52 rushes for 528 yards and nine touchdowns while completing 176-of-270 passes for 2,908 yards, 28 touchdowns and seven interceptions. Avon career receiving leader Matt Maxey owns the slot with 79 catches for 1,212 yards and 10 scores, No. 2 Cole Kepner (29, 604, 7) has good numbers as well and the running back committee of Tyler Kaufmann (87 carries, 607 yards, 10 TDs), Quiante' Smith (57, 450, 9) and Cam Wendell (70, 393, 5) has 1,450 yards and 23 TDs.

Kicker Owen Warrick is another threat, having made 64-of-65 extra points and 5-of-8 field goals — though Wadsworth blocked an extra point and field goal last week — but stopping the Good-to-Maxey connection will be critical to success. With the Hornets paying so much attention to now-Cincinnati running back Jakorion Caffey last season, Maxey was the only Avon player with a reception and torched them with nine for 130 yards.

"(Good) poses a threat as a runner and passer, so we have to make sure we're gap-sound and where we need to be if he does

decide to pull the ball, whether he's pulling it on a zone read, running a quarterback draw or with his ability to drop back and throw the ball," Gibbons said. "He's got a number of weapons — obviously Maxey in the slot is a tough player — and their other receivers are really good. It starts with (No.) 5. We've got to slow him down and disrupt those receivers."

With so many key returning starters and tremendous depth, Avon had state-title aspirations to begin the season. Nothing has changed in that regard.

Highland, meanwhile, was expected to at least challenge defending champion Aurora for the Suburban League American Conference title. The Hornets crushed the Greenmen 34-0, have dominated in the playoffs by a combined 139-41 score and are clearly more confident thanks to a faster defense and a more well-rounded offense than a year ago.

The world will find out how much the Hornets have closed the gap tonight.

"They've been No. 1 on our list all year long," Zywiec said after the Anthony Wayne game. "We're coming in there to win. (Safety) Garrett Phillips said it over there when we were talking that countless senior classes have lost to this team. Ever since (2013), we haven't beat them. So, we're coming in there with revenge on our mind."

"It's win or go home, you know? We don't want to go home."

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