

Top 10 area specialists to watch this season

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As we prepare for the start of the 2025 Ohio high school football season, we're breaking down the top players by position. Throughout the preseason, we're ranking the top 10 Greater Akron quarterbacks, running backs, receivers/tight ends, offensive linemen, defensive linemen, linebackers, defensive backs, specialists and two-way players.

Today, we look at the top 10 specialists, starting with Archbishop Hoban's Jeremy Hammel, who will handle all the kicking duties for the Knights this fall.

1. Jeremy Hammel
Hoban, kicker/punter, 5-foot-8, 135 pounds, Class of 2027

What to know: Hammel might be the smallest star on a team full of them for the Knights. During his sophomore year, he went 60 of 61 on PATs and 8 of 9 on field goals with a career long of 41 yards and was a second-team Division II All-Northeast Inland District selection. His leg should only get stronger this season after he scored 100 points in two years (73 PATs and nine FGs).

2. Riley Edgehouse
Nordonia, kicker/punter, 5-11, 165, Class of 2026

What to know: Edgehouse continues the legacy of solid kickers to come out of Nordonia. He has shown himself capable hitting kicks from beyond 40 yards, which is why he was a second-team Division II All-Northeast Inland District selection his junior year. He made 56 of 58 PATs, 12 of 14 field goals and recovered five onside kicks last season.

3. Elbert Hill IV
Hoban, returner, 5-11, 180, Class of 2026



Hoban wide receiver Payton Cook runs the ball after a catch against visiting Buchtel in a 2024 game in Akron.

NICHOLAS MCLAUGHLIN/SPECIAL FOR THE AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

What to know: Obviously, Hill is best known for his work on defense as a first-team All-Ohio selection in Division II last year, but his athleticism makes him dangerous every time he drops back to return. If Hoban chooses to use the USC recruit as a returner, the best option for opponents might be to kick it out of bounds. Hill totaled five interceptions, over 65 tackles and two TDs on defense, five TDs on offense and returned two kickoffs for TDs.

4. Buddy Willig
Norton, returner, 6-1, 175, Class of 2026

What to know: Willig earned second-team All-Ohio honors in Division IV last year as a defensive back and will be all over the field this year for the Panthers in all three phases of the game. When he drops back to return punts and kickoffs, he is a threat to take it back every time. He returned a punt for a TD

last year, completed seven TD passes and ran for nine TDs.

5. Freddie Marcell
Walsh Jesuit, kicker, 5-9, 130, Class of 2026

What to know: One of several kickers who are also soccer stars on this list, Marcell was a steady hand as a place-kicker for Walsh in 2024, when he made a school-record 68 of 70 PATs. He has 26 goals and 24 assists in his career with Walsh's soccer team.

6. Andrew McKnight
Copley, punter/returner, 6-1, 185, Class of 2026

What to know: How often do you see a player perform well on both ends of the kicking game? Such was the case for McKnight, who proved himself an asset on both sides for Copley as a punter and holder last year. McKnight was second-team All-Ohio in Division III last year as a wide receiver with 57 receptions for 926 yards and 14 TDs. The versatile McKnight also scored a rushing TD.

6. Mason Boerner
Twinsburg, kicker, 5-3, 140, Class of 2026

What to know: Boerner might be on the small side, but he came up big for Twinsburg in 2024, nailing 98% of his PATs. He also went 4 of 4 on field goals with a long of 40 yards.

7. Evan Foust
Highland, punter, 6-0, 195, Class of 2027

What to know: Foust will make a big impact for the Hornets as a linebacker (88 tackles, four sacks) and receiver (28 catches for 577 yards and five TDs). However, he was a second-team Division II All-Northeast Inland District punter in 2024 for Highland and will

shore up a big part of the Hornets special teams after averaging 35.4 yards per punt.

8. Payton Cook
Hoban, returner, 6-1, 210, Class of 2026

What to know: When they said Hoban has depth this year at every position, they were not kidding. Cook, a second-team Division II All-Northeast Inland District defensive back in 2024, provides another explosive weapon for the Knights should he drop back on punts and kickoffs. He has committed to play at Louisville.

9. Ian Katz
Hudson, kicker/punter, 6-0, 185, Class of 2026

What to know: Katz will likely play soccer at the next level, having scored 28 goals to go with 11 assists in his career with the Explorers. However, his big leg will be an asset for the football team as well.

10. Joey Kopec
Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy, returner, 6-1, 210, Class of 2026

What to know: Kopec has excelled at everything at CVCA, and returning punts is one of them. Kopec earned first-team All-Ohio honors in Division III as a linebacker last year with 85 tackles and six interceptions. The Rutgers recruit was named the All-Northeast Ohio Inland District Division III Defensive Player of the Year, and totaled 1,072 rushing yards, 230 receiving yards, 541 return yards and scored 17 TDs.

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