



## PLAYOFF FOOTBALL: HIGHLAND VS. AVON

# Passion for the game

## Dobkowski brings length to wide receiver, safety



NICK CAMMETT / GAZETTE

Highland safety Nick Dobkowski co-leads Medina County with seven interceptions.

**Rick Noland**  
The Gazette

A three-sport letterwinner, Nick Dobkowski is involved in high school sports close to 12 months a year. Nothing against basketball and baseball, which are great in their own right, but football is his favorite.



**Dobkowski**

"I don't think there's another sport like it," the 6-foot-4, 205-pound senior wide receiver/free safety said. "I play multiple sports, so I've gotten to experience all the team bonding. There's really no aspect in the other sports quite like

### NEXT UP

**WHO:** Highland (12-0) vs. Avon (11-1)  
**WHAT:** Division II, Region 6 final  
**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Friday  
**WHERE:** Brunswick Auto Mart Stadium  
**TV/RADIO:** OHSAA.tv; Spectrumnews1.com



the brotherhood and family involved in football."

That brotherhood is at its peak right now, as the undefeated and top-seeded Hornets (12-0) will play third-seeded and defending Division II state champion Avon (11-1) in a Region 6 championship game Friday at 7 p.m. at Brunswick Auto Mart Stadium.

It's not that Dobkowski doesn't love playing basketball for the Hornets in the winter, when he will earn his third varsity letter, or baseball in the spring, when he will get his second. It's just that his two years on the varsity football team have been especially rewarding because the sport requires so many players do their job in order to be successful.

"Right now it's everything," Dobkowski said of the game against Avon, which beat Highland 28-20 in the regional final in 2024 and 28-14 at the same point of the 2023 season, when he played mainly on the junior varsity. "It's win or go home. It's senior year, so in the moment it's everything."

See **DOBKOWSKI**, B3

## DOBKOWSKI

From B1

Like so many players on the roster, Dobkowski has had a lot to do with the success of the 2025 Hornets, though the stats of many are distorted because they've sat out large portions of games due to the fact Highland has outscored its opponents 515-54, including an incredible 396-7 in the first half.

As a receiver, Dobkowski is second on the team with 16 catches for 404 yards (25.3-yard average) and four touchdowns, with Lucas Gerding leading with 26 for 465 (17.9) and six scores.

"He's a three-sport athlete, and that plays a huge part in his success on the football field," Hornets coach Mike Gibbons said. "Because of his overall athletic ability, he can high-point balls and he's super competitive. A lot of that comes from his background as a three-sport athlete."

Dobkowski, who runs a 4.62-second 40-yard dash and squats 360 pounds while deadlifting 415, is adept at outleaping defenders to catch passes from quarterback Grady Gibb, though Gibb has been so accurate this season he's rarely had to do so.

"Grady just places the ball so well there's no opportunity for the cornerback to get it," Dobkowski said. "He has some video-game numbers."

"If a cornerback was there, I definitely think I'd have a better shot to get the ball than him. One of my advantages is definitely my height. I'm good at tracking the ball, which we call 'taking a picture,' and adjusting to it."

Gibb, who has completed an incredible 85.6% of his passes (89-of-104) and has 22 touchdown throws to just two interceptions, is simply glad to have Dobkowski as a target.

"I love throwing to him," the first-year senior varsity QB said. "He's great. He's very athletic and he has great ball skills. Along with that, he's a very intelligent receiver. When I throw that ball up, he's

going to catch it."

The same is true when Dobkowski is playing free safety, where he has seven interceptions. Five came in Highland's three non-league games to start the season, with the other two coming in the postseason. In most of the others, he rarely played a full half.

"That shows who he is as a player," Gibb said. "He shows up in big games and makes big plays."

"He is a long kid and a very smart player," Gibbons added. "His ability to play the ball in the air, when it goes up he just takes it from people."

For Dobkowski, who carries a 3.9 grade-point average, it's simply a matter of doing his job at free safety, where he is often the last line of defense for the Hornets.

"It's kind of like being the quarterback of the defense," he said. "I have to communicate the call to everybody and make sure we're all in the same coverage. If we're not, it's on me."

"I'm in the right place at the right time (on the interceptions), I guess. We preach being a ballhawk, so I guess you could say it's that, too."

Dobkowski and his teammates will have to be at their best Friday against the Eagles, and they know it.

"They've got talent everywhere, at all positions from running back to receiver to quarterback to the defense," the 18-year-old said. "And they've got very big linemen, too. And their coaching staff is excellent."

"Winning this game would mean a ton, because they've beaten us the last two years."

Whenever Highland's football season ends — even if it's with the first state championship in program history — Dobkowski will move on to playing basketball and then baseball for the Hornets.

"I just fight through it because I can't sit around," he said. "I have to be doing something. It's definitely challenging, but you get used to it. I'm not going to complain, because I love playing sports."

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