

High school football: Lucas Gerdling's 36-yard run sets up winning score for Highland

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[The Gazette](#)

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HUDSON — Football coaches always tell their players to play to the whistle. Some might even recommend playing to the echo of the whistle.

Thankfully for Highland, junior Lucas Gerdling did as instructed and turned in a monster play to help the Hornets knock off Hudson 31-24 in their non-league opener Friday.

Running a jet sweep that had minimal success all night, Gerdling looked to be dropped for a very short gain for the fourth time but somehow managed to stay on his feet and scamper 36 yards down the sideline to set up a game-winning touchdown by Casey Myser.

“I was just trying to put my foot in the ground and get as many yards as possible,” he said. “The dude hit me, and I just put my hand on the ground and spun off him. I didn’t hear a whistle blow, and everyone thought the play was dead and I just kept going. It set us up for a big touchdown.”

Gerdling ran the jet sweep three previous times for a total of 4 yards and appeared to be swallowed by a mob of Hudson defenders, only to emerge from the mass of humanity and turn in the Hornets’ longest play of the night before he was finally taken down at the Explorers 22-yard line.

Myser, who was bottled up a bit in the first half and wasn’t cleared to play until Friday morning, ate up the final 22 on three straight carries to give the Hornets the lead with 1:04 left to play.

“I didn’t play in our last scrimmage (against Mentor Lake Catholic), and I didn’t practice all week because I tweaked my elbow a little bit,” Myser said. “I had to get some stuff removed from it, and I was kind of just getting back in the swing of things. My coaches gave me some good advice and said I was dancing too much; just put my head down and get some physical yards. I did and I started getting some longer runs.”

The junior had 50 yards on 14 first-half carries but behind his mauling offensive line wore down the Explorers and finished with 159 yards and two touchdowns on 30 rugged carries.

Myser had his longest and arguably his best run of the night when he rumbled for 15 yards on third-and-16 early in the fourth quarter to set up quarterback Dylan Borla’s 2-yard sneak on fourth-and-1 from Highland’s 29 to keep the game-tying drive alive.

Outside of a few big plays and some luck by Hudson, the Highland defense was its usual stellar self.

Hudson quarterback Nathan Judy (12-of-20, 162 yards, TD; 14 carries, 22 yards) was under duress the entire night. The Hornets only managed a pair of sacks but were consistently and constantly in Judy’s face.

“We just get after it every day in practice, every week,” tackle Ryan Zywiec said. “We just love getting after the quarterback. Our coaches send pressure and that enables me to be one-on-one. It’s amazing.”

On a critical third-and-11 before the game-winning drive, the Hornets, with Zywiec and Carson Noonan placing Judy under immediate duress, forced the Hudson signal caller to scramble. Judy nearly picked up a big first down but was stopped 2 yards short by Caleb McKeen.

After lining up to go for it on fourth-and-2 from its own 38, Hudson called a timeout after nearly running out the play clock in an attempt to get Highland to jump offsides. It then opted to punt.

Highland responded, going 71 yards in just six plays, including Gerdling's big run, to take the lead.

It was an atypical possession for Highland, which had scoring drives of 16, 13 and 15 plays and ran 67 plays to Hudson's 48.

With Myser the focus of the Hudson defense early, Borla (13-of-16, 142 yards, TD, INT; 13 carries, 71 yards, TD), making his return from a torn ACL last season, had a nice run-pass mix and found a new favorite target in the form of sophomore Evan Foust.

"I put in a lot of preparation off the field to get back to where I need to be," Borla said. "All the guys trust me being their quarterback and that just gives me confidence in me coming back."

Borla and Foust hooked up nine times for 111 yards, including a 25-yard touchdown early in the third quarter to give the Hornets a 17-10 lead.

A pair of quick Hudson scores — from Reno Fern (10 carries, 98 yards) and Brennan Funyak — followed and pushed the Explorers in front 24-17.

Fern's 30-yard run was set up by a 20-yard interception return from John Ploskunak and came just 28 seconds after Hudson had evened the game at 17 on Funyak's 6-yard run.

The Hornets owned the game from that point and were at their best when it mattered most.

Highland swarmed Judy on the Explorers' last-gasp possession, sacking the junior once and forcing him into intentional grounding penalties on third and fourth down.

"It was a great performance," Zywiec said. "We just have to work on broken plays and that rollout pass. I mean, we had him sacked and he just broke containment. I think this is the best defense we have ever had."

The Hornets were their own worst enemy in the first half, committing six penalties for 50 yards, including a pair of holding calls, a personal foul and a critical encroachment penalty that gave Hudson a first down on fourth-and-3.

The encroachment penalty kept a Hudson scoring drive alive and Judy made them pay with a 28-yard toss to Mark Salem (3 catches, 75 yards) to give the Explorers a 10-3 lead.

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Highland 31, Hudson 24

HIGHLAND 3 7 7 14 — 31

HUDSON 3 7 14 0 — 24

First

Hi — Jonah Kowza 34 field goal, 2:38.

Hu — Brad Masiella 38 field goal, 0:17.

Second

Hu — Mark Salem 28 pass from Nathan Judy (Masiella kick), 7:07.

Hi — Dylan Borla 1 run (Kowza kick), 0:25.

Third

Hi — Evan Foust 25 pass from Borla (Kowza kick), 8:03.

Hu — Brennan Funyak 6 run (Masiella kick), 1:27.

Hu — Reno Fern 30 run (Masiella kick), 0:59.

Fourth

Hi — Casey Myser 10 run (Kowza kick), 6:24.

Hi — Myser 4 run (Kowza kick), 1:04.

Hi Hu

First downs 22 14

Rushing 51/282 27/132

Rushing average 5.5 4.9

Passing 13/16 12/21

Passing yards 142 162

Total offense 67/424 48/294

Punting 2/53.0 3/39.3

Penalties 8/74 6/60

Fumbles 0/0 1/0

RUSHING: Highland — Myser 30-159, Borla 13-71, Lucas Gerding 4-40, Garrett Phillips 3-10, Kallen Whitling 1-2. Hudson — Fern 10-98, Judy 14-22, Funyak 2-8, Louie Castellarin 1-4.

PASSING: Highland — Borla 13-16-1-142. Hudson — Judy 12-20-0-162, Team 0-1-0-0.

RECEIVING: Highland — Foust 9-111, Phillips 1-13, Nick Dobkowski 1-10, Kyle Williams 2-8. Hudson — Mark Salem 3-75, Castellarin 3-36, Anthony Paoluci 3-23, Jayden Carlton 1-14, Funyak 1-9, Fern 1-5.