

H.S. Football: Highland tops Brunswick in a record-setting victory



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BRUNSWICK — The Highland football team is taking this whole family approach to extremes.

Coach Mike Gibbons not only broke the program record for career victories with the Hornets' 35-14 non-league win over Brunswick on Friday night, he broke the mark previously held by brother-in-law Tom Lombardo.

Now the head coach at St. Edward, Lombardo went 61-29 at Highland from 2008-15, while Gibbons is now 62-27 in the eight seasons since.

"Tom would say the same thing: It's a great school with great people," Gibbons said. "It's a pleasure to coach these kids every single day."

Gibbons' record-setting victory was like most of the wins before it. The Hornets (2-1) controlled the Blue Devils (0-3) up front on both sides of the ball, moved the chains with a strong running game and hit a few big passes when Brunswick brought more defensive players into the box.

Highland wound up with a 404-155 edge in total offense, a 16-7 edge in first downs and ran 52 plays to the Blue Devils' 38.

"That's crazy," two-way lineman Carson Noonan said of Gibbons breaking the record. "I didn't know that, but he's a great coach. He pushes us past our limits."

Noonan was outstanding in registering 4½ tackles for loss, including 3½ sacks. Ryan Zywiec had 1½ tackles for loss and Tommy Shondel, Jack Howard and Logan Waddell had one apiece as Highland held Brunswick to 105 yards on 28 rushes, with 60 of those yards coming on a run by quarterback Ethan Roksandich that set up a 1-yard score by James Burger.

"We will always be the more physical team," the 6-foot-3, 255-pound Noonan said. "It's hard playing both ways, but I always go my hardest on every play."

Offensively, Highland got 179 yards rushing and a 2-yard score from running back Casey Myser, who gained at least 10 yards on nine of his 19 carries, four receptions for 99 yards from Matt Ciryak and a professional performance from quarterback Peyton Janickas, who was 5-for-9 for 102 yards passing and a 54-yard TD to Ciryak while adding nine carries for 30 yards, including TD runs of 2, 2 and 6 yards.

"It was a long time coming, especially after last year," said Ciryak, an All-Gazette choice in 2022 who began the night with one catch. "It was great to get the ball again."

After Highland's Myser and Brunswick's Burger exchanged short first-quarter TD runs, Ciryak put the Hornets up for good when he leaned right, cut back to the middle and hauled in the long touchdown pass from Janickas with 10:46 to play in the first half.

"Coach Gibbons always says it starts with film work," Ciryak said. "It was just me hitting him outside and then getting inside."

The Hornets stretched their lead to 28-7 on a pair of 2-yard runs by Janickas, but Cooper Neel gave the Blue Devils hope by returning a kickoff 92 yards to the house with 7:09 left in the third period.

"They were trying to avoid me all game, so I asked my coach if I could line up where they were kicking it," Neel said. "My friend Cohen Easa is always blocking for me. He hit the hole and I just followed him. Then I cut it back and kicked it into gear."

Down 28-14, the Blue Devils, who got a sack from Elijah Clement and a tackle for loss from Collin Kavulic on the night, forced a quick three-and-out and took over at their own 34-yard line. A pair of first downs, one on a 30-yard completion from Roksandich (4-for-8, 43 yards; 10 carries, 80 yards) to Alex Hubbell, eventually left Brunswick facing fourth-and-2 from the Highland 18.



Neel, very generously listed at 5-9, 170, took the ball on a jet sweep to the left and managed to push forward, but a measurement showed he was inches short of a first down. Highland went 83 yards in seven plays, with Janickas going the final 6, to go up 21 and seal the deal.

"I gave it my all," said Neel, who had a 40-yard kick return earlier in the game. "At the end of the day, you can't count on the refs for the game. We have to take that on ourselves and work harder and take control of the game."

For the vast majority of the night, it was the Hornets who did that as Gibbons passed his brother-in-law for career wins at the school.

"He's a great coach," Ciryak said. "He deserves it."

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Highland 35, Brunswick 14

HIGHLAND 7 14 7 7 — 35

BRUNSWICK 0 7 7 0 — 14

First

H — Casey Myser 2 run (Carson Kwiatkowski kick), 8:43.

B — James Burger 1 run (Vincent DiTeodoro kick), 2:04.

Second

H — Matt Ciryak 54 pass from Peyton Janickas (Kwiatkowski kick), 10:46.

H — Janickas 2 run (Kwiatkowski kick), 0:33.

Third

H — Janickas 2 run (Kwiatkowski kick), 7:23.

B — Cooper Neel 92 kickoff return (William Burgher kick), 7:09.

Fourth

H — Janickas 6 run (Kwiatkowski kick), 7:44.

H B

First downs 16 7

Rushing 43/302 28/105

Rushing average 7.0 3.8

Passing 5/9 5/10

Passing yards 102 50

Total offense 52/404 38/155

Punting 3/36.3 3/30.0

Penalties 6/36 4/30

Fumbles 0/0 2/0

Individual statistics

RUSHING: Highland — Myser 19-179, Johnny Siliko 4-45, Evan Grant 8-45, Janickas 9-30, Ciryak 1-5, Team 2-(-2). Brunswick — Ethan Roksandich 10-80, Neel 5-25, Eli Nichols 5-11, Burger 3-2, John Crawford IV 2-1, Collin Kavulic 1-(-4), Sean Barnett 2-(-10),

PASSING: Highland — Janickas 5-9-102-0. Brunswick — Roksandich 4-8-43-0, Barnett 1-2-7-0.

RECEIVING: Highland — Ciryak 4-99, Tommy Turk 1-3. Brunswick — Alex Hubbell 1-30, Hayden Swarm 3-12, Neel 1-8.