

High school football: Peyton Janickas ready to lead Highland

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Most don't realize Peyton Janickas was nearly the starting quarterback for Highland's record-smashing football team last season, ultimately falling short to senior Andrew Lurtz days before the regular-season opener.

Janickas is the unquestioned starter now, and the speedy right-hander dazzled with his Johnny Manziel/Kyle Murray-like skill set Friday as the Hornets pulled away from Mentor Lake Catholic 28-14 in a simulated half that allowed full contact against quarterbacks.

The 5-foot-9, 165-pounder rushed 10 times for 89 yards and two touchdowns while completing 4-of-7 passes for 26 yards. Janickas directed an offense that could have ended up with 50 points and 500 yards against the Cougars, who are coached by Highland mentor Mike Gibbons' brother, Marty, and appear to be much-improved after going 3-7 a year ago.

"When you give him the ability to run ... We don't want anyone getting hurt, but that's part of his game," Mike Gibbons said. "When he can get going, it sets everything else up. We wanted to open him up and get hit a little bit and see a game-like situation before Game 1.

"He does have good arm talent and he's able to throw from different body positions. Decision-making was key. He had some really nice passes, including a really nice one in the back of the end zone we dropped. We expect that from him and need that to be successful this year."

Janickas starred running downhill out of the Hornets' signature power read, rumbling for 12, 5 and 30 yards on his first three carries before scrambling right for a 14-yard TD. He also hit returning starters Matt Ciryak, Tommy Shondel and Johnny Siliko through the air, easily shaking off jitters from an inconsistent effort against Avon Lake last week.

Highland controlled the line of scrimmage and showcased its new running back combination of Evan Grant (7 carries, 44 yards) and Casey Myser (4, 27). Ciryak also got in on the fun by breaking multiple tackles on a 44-yard jet sweep down the sideline, while Garrett Phillips scored from a yard out.

"I thought offensively we played really well," Gibbons said. "We didn't punt the whole time."

The defense found its bearings after a rough start, as Lake Catholic could do nothing of note on the ground en route to 14 yards on 10 attempts and failed to convert fourth-and-2 from the Highland 21-yard line.

The Cougars, however, took advantage of Highland's inexperience with passes over the middle. Their second play went 78 yards to the house after a missed tackle down the seam, another pass

over the middle connected for 46 yards and a screen covered 18 yards to paydirt as Lake Catholic completed 9-of-16 passes for 214 yards.

Shondel had a tackle for loss, while Ryan Zywiec added a sack.

"Defensively, there were things we did well and things we can improve on," Gibbons said. "They have a Division I receiver out there (Cross Nimmo), which is obviously going to help us. There were a couple of communication breakdowns in the secondary, and we've got to clean that up."

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