



NICK CAMMETT / GAZETTE

Highland's Ryan Zywiec sacks Fremont Ross' Karson Kayden.

Always seeking perfection

Punts, penalties have Hornets yearning for more

Albert Grindle
The Gazette

GRANGER TWP. — Internal expectations for the Highland football team are so high that right guard Brady Bendau was annoyed Evan Foust had to trot back to punt twice Friday in a Division II, Region 6 first-round playoff game against Fremont Ross.

Yes, punt, which former Ohio State coach and current Sharon Township resident Jim Tressel called "the most important play in football."

As it was, the Hornets also com-



Bendau



Myser

mitted two incredibly uncharacteristic turnovers and were plagued by penalties in the first half, but they dominated the trenches so handily that the errors didn't really mean a thing in a ho-hum 52-7 victory that moved their all-time playoff record

to 9-0 at North Gateway Tire Field.

Second-seeded Highland (11-0) advanced to host No. 10 Toledo St. Francis de Sales (8-3), a 34-31 winner over No. 7 Avon Lake, next week after watching Casey Myser do Casey Myser things with five touchdowns against the overmatched, No. 15 Little Giants (5-6) to become the school's career scoring leader.

"I think we played all right in the first half," Bendau said. "The ball wasn't really flowing. I know we put up 35 (points), but that's not what we do. That's not our standard.

See **HORNETS**, E3

Highland 52, Ross 7

Division II, Region 6 First Round

ROSS 7 0 0 0 — 7

HIGHLAND 14 21 14 3 — 52

First

H — Casey Myser 26 pass from Dylan Borla (Jonah Kowza kick), 10:27.

H — Myser 1 run (Kowza kick), 4:16.

R — Jadrian Brown 57 pass from Karson Kayden (Bryce Estep kick), 3:00.

Second

H — Myser 17 run (Kowza kick), 7:21.

H — Kyle Williams 23 interception return (Kowza kick), 7:01.

H — Myser 63 pass from Borla (Kowza kick), :33.

Third

H — Nick Dobkowski 58 pass from Borla (Kowza kick), 10:15.

H — Myser 23 run (Kowza kick), 3:50.

Fourth

H — Kowza 40 field goal, 6:28.

R H

First downs 6 13

Rushing 25/41 31/223

Rushing average 1.6 7.2

Passing 7/19 6/14

Passing yards 87 206

Total offense 44/128 43/429

Punting 8/33.1 2/40.0

Penalties 8/69 6/65

Fumbles 4/1 2/1

RUSHING: Ross — Zalen Harris 5-14,

Norris Brown 1-13, No. 43 2-13, Kayden

11-6, Jallon Brown 2-5, Elijah Ysaqure

3-4, Team 1-(-14). Highland — Myser

15-123, Evan Foust 2-41, Dylan Lazar

3-33, Grady Gibb 2-30, Borla 3-14,

Cotton Winston 1-5, Lucas Gerding 1-3,

Anthony DeFompa 1-0, Team 3-(-26).

PASSING: Ross — Kayden 7-19-

87-2, Cameron Henderson 0-1-0-1.

Highland — Borla 6-14-206-1.

RECEIVING: Ross — Brown 3-75,

Jaxson Mackey 2-6, Ysaqure 2-6,

Highland — Dobkowski 2-96, Myser

2-89, Gerding 2-21.

HORNETS

From E1

It's a good win, but we're not satisfied. We had two punts, we had a pick in there, things that are a little unnatural for us."

The Hornets roared to a 14-0 lead, gave up a 57-yard TD pass and were forced to punt up 14-7 after another costly holding penalty put them behind the sticks. The defense settled in, however, and a 14-0 run that took just 20 seconds and was capped

**Williams**

by a Kyle Williams 23-yard interception return for a touchdown swung momentum for good. Highland entered half-time up 35-7 and obtained a running clock just 1:45 into the third quarter when Dylan Borla found Nick Dobkowski laughably wide open for a 58-yard score after a great zone read fake to Myser. The Hornets completed the scoring on a Jonah Kowza 40-yard field goal, giving the sophomore 10 points to go with seven touchbacks.

Despite being called for three holding penalties and a false start, the line of Carson Noonan, Josh Messina, Ryan Zywiec, Bendau and Ben Coyne paved the way for Myser to rush 15 times for 123 yards and three TDs and catch scores from 26 and 63



NICK GAMMETT / GAZETTE

Highland's Lucas Gerding stiff-arms Fremont Ross' Kevin Jones.

yards. Borla completed 6-of-14 passes for a whopping 206 yards, giving him 1,787 on just 80 completions this season (22.4 average).

Myser broke the school career scoring record of former teammate Lukas Stiles (324, 2020-22) on a 17-yard TD run in the second quarter. The junior now has 57 TDs and 342 points, putting him logically in reach of Black River star Andrew Vaughn's Medina County standards of 82 and 530 set from 2010-13.

"(Myser is) my stepbrother, and I think he's awesome. I love Casey," Bendau said. "He makes our job a lot easier. We do our part for the first 5 yards and he does the rest. It's cool, and my brother Cody is on the D-line, too, so we have three on the field."

The defense rebounded brilliantly from the deep TD pass, as it accounted for

57 of Ross' 128 yards total offense. Zywiec recovered a fumble and pummeled Karson Kayden for a sack, sophomore cornerback Chris Metzger added an interception and backup linebacker Dylan Lazar also picked off a pass.

The game-changer, however, was Williams. Kayden was forced up in the pocket by pressure from Zywiec, then fired a rocket that glanced off Noonan's helmet and into the air. That allowed Williams to break on the ball, basket catch it at the 23 and scurry to the end zone for a 28-7 lead with 7:01 left in the half.

"The guy (Ross receiver Bryce Shiets) was running across, and I was on him," Williams said of the mesh play. "(Noonan) tipped it up, and I saw it in the air. I just went for it. I got it and saw nothing but the end zone."

Highland continued to

force quick punts, as the Little Giants booted from their own 12, 13, 18, 12 and 18 in the first half. The last set up Myser's second TD catch in which no defender was in the same zip code after he ran up the sideline on a wheel route.

The challenge will no doubt get tougher next week against St. Francis de Sales, which played five Michigan teams but put up a respectable fight against D-III state title favorite Toledo Central Catholic in a 28-7 loss two weeks ago.

he Hornets know they must clean up some mistakes. If they keep scoring 52 points, however, they also know they'll be just fine.

"In the first half, I'd say we struggled a little bit," Williams said. "But in the second half, we made some corrections and played really well."

Contact Albert Grindie at (330) 721-4043 or agrindie@medina-gazette.com.