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High school football: Highland hammers North Royalton behind dominating defense

Chad Grant The Gazette
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NORTH ROYALTON — The Highland football team's defense had something to prove after a tough-opening week loss in which it allowed an un-Hornet like five touchdowns to Hudson in a loss.

Highland bounced back with a vengeance, hammering North Royalton 35-7 with a dominating defensive effort in non-league play.

The Hornets (1-1) forced five turnovers and allowed just 210 offensive yards to a Bears (1-1) team coming off a strong offensive effort in its season opener.

Highland had just two sacks and five tackles for loss, but led by linemen Ryan Zyweic (2 TFLs) and Carson Noonan (1½ TFLs, half sack) swarmed North Royalton quarterback Joe Kinney and made running back Cody Miller's night a very long one.

"It was just the physicality of our defense getting extended and getting in the backfield," Zyweic said. "Intense practices make us better. It's just how much more physicality we have than the teams we play."

Logan Waddell also had a half-sack and Jack Capotosto added a sack for the Hornets.

"We've been watching film on them," Noonan said. "We knew what they were going to run and what they were going to do. We are still going to come off harder than them and be more physical."

The Highland defense set up four of its five touchdown drives with turnovers.

Casey Myser struck first for the offense, taking a counter 75 yards to the house on Highland's second possession on his way to a career-high 202 yards and three TDs on 17 carries.

"The O-line opened a huge hole," the sophomore said. "The O-line was blocking great all night and I just saw the hole and ran as fast as I could hoping I wouldn't get caught."

Highland racked up 303 yards on 40 attempts on the ground and had zero passing yards on one completion until backup quarterback Dylan Borla hit Caleb McKeen for 16 yards on the final drive.

The defense made its first big play when Timothy Wallace picked off Kinney (6-of-15, 59 yards, 4 INTs).

Highland went 42 yards on three plays, capped by an Evan Grant 4-yard touchdown, to make it 14-0 with 5:09 left in the first quarter.

The Hornets defense picked off Kinney again on the next possession when Garrett Phillips made the first of his two interceptions and returned it 28 yards to the Bears 24.

“We watched a lot of film,” Phillips said. “Me and senior captain and safety Chase Crutchley, any chance we get we are watching film and texting each other. It’s all film and preparation.”

Myser capped the ensuing possession with a 21-yard scamper to up the Highland lead to 21-0.

Linebacker Jason Sambor made it three consecutive interception-ending drives for Highland when he picked off Kinney across the middle.

Grant (5 carries, 31 yards) scored his second of the game, bursting in from 12 yards to make it 28-0 Highland with 10:44 still left to play in the first half.

The Hornets weren’t finished turning over the Bears, as Jack Howard stripped the ball from Nicholas Safranek on the ensuing kickoff return.

That Highland drive stalled at the North Royalton 32 as Peyton Janickas’ fourth-and-11 scramble came up short.



The defense stood tall again late in the first half when it stuffed Miller (29 carries, 135 yards) on fourth-and-goal from the 2.

The Bears finally got on the board on their first possession of the third quarter, driving 72 yards in 13 plays. The Hornets committed a third-and-20 holding penalty and pass interference to keep the drive alive.

Contact Chad Grant at sports@medina-gazette.com.

Highland 35, North Royalton 7

HIGHLAND 21 7 0 7 — 35

NORTH ROYALTON 0 0 7 0 — 7

First

H — Casey Myser 75 run (Carson Kwiatkowski kick) 8:18.

H — Evan Grant 4 run (Kwiatkowski kick), 5:09.

H — Myser 21 run (Kwiatkowski kick), 2:05.

Second

H — Grant 12 run (Kwiatkowski kick), 10:44.

Third

N — Joe Kinney 1 run (Sasha Sunjevaric kick), 4:24.

Fourth

H — Myser 13 run (Kwiatkowski kick), 10:38.

HN

First downs1814

Rushing40/30341/151

Rushing average7.63.7

Passing2/66/15

Passing yards1659

Total offense46/31956/210

Punting2/48.02/43.0

Penalties 6/606/51

Fumbles0/01/1

Individual statistics

RUSHING: Highland — Myser 17-202, Peyton Janickas 7-35, Grant 5-31, Dylan Borla 3-25, Johnny Siliko 3-13, Luke Berkmeier 2-1, Lucas Gerding 2-1, Kallen Whitling 1-(-5). North Royalton — Cody Miller 29-135, Tarush Pandey 2-11, Grady Baugh 2-3, Quinn Costanzo 1-2, Mannix Wasco 2-1, Connor Monyak 1-1, Kinney 4-(-2).

PASSING: Highland — Borla 1-1-16-0, Janickas 1-5-0-1. North Royalton — Kinney 6-15-59-4.

RECEIVING: Highland — Caleb McKeen 1-16, Siliko 1-0. North Royalton — Wasco 3-21, Cooper Zunt 1-15, Nicholas Safranek 1-14, Luke Koprowski 1-9.

