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SKY HIGH SPORTZ

THE STAGE IS SET!

The OHSAA Playoff Brackets are set! Check inside to see our NEO Playoff Previews!

ON THE COVER

WILLTRELL HARTSON

Pictured: Dan Evans - Photo by: Dane Gardner

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SKY HIGH SPORTZ

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Pictured: Wyatt Gedeon, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Division 1 Preview

Many have touted the Week 9 matchup between St. Edward and Archbishop Hoban as the 2022 Division 1 State Championship Preview. The defending State Champion St. Edward Eagles (9-1) handed The Archbishop Moeller Raiders (9-1) their first and only loss of the season in a 6-0 defensive battle.

Although heavily favored in Region 1, the Eagles' journey to Canton will be lined with teams ready to take their best shot. Barring any major upsets, the Eagles could find themselves facing a hungry Cleveland Heights team that finished the season 9-1, or their crosstown rivals, the St. Ignatius Wildcats who'd be looking to avenge their 48-6 Week 7 loss to the Eagles.

They could then be possibly looking at a 2021 Regional Final rematch with Medina (9-1). Many thought the Bees would lose some ground after the graduation of Drew Allar, however, the team picked right up where he left off. Led by Danny Stoddard, Medina reeled off 9 victories and averaged more than 47 points per game this season.

DIVISION 1 – STATE RANKINGS

NO	TEAM	W	L	PPG	PA	AP RANKING	CLEVELAND.COM
1	ST. EDWARD	9	1	29	13.4	1	1
2	LAKOTA WEST	10	0	36.3	9.2	2	3
3	MOELLER	9	1	32.3	15.4	3	2
4	SPRINGFIELD	8	1	38.5	12.7	4	4
5	ELDER	8	2	25	17.6	5	5
6	GAHANNA LINCOLN	9	1	32.2	11.6	5	8
7	MEDINA	9	1	47.6	23	7	6
8	CENTERVILLE	8	2	23	12.6	8	7
9	DUBLIN JEROME	8	2	24.7	20.2	9	NR
10	PERRYSBURG	9	1	44.7	18.2	10	NR

Region 1

The John Marshall Lawyers will be new entrants into the Region 1 playoff picture this year. Their 6-4 season earned them their 1st playoff birth in school history. Lawyers Head Coach Terrance Clegget earned Senate League Coach of the Year Honors as he helped the team clinch the #12 spot. They have a tough draw, as they will face off against state powerhouse, St. Ignatius Wildcats (6-3) at Byers Field.

The Wildcats will look to spoil the celebration for John Marshall, as they are on a mission to send Coach Chuck Kyle into retirement in style, by sporting another state championship ring.

The Wadsworth Grizzlies (6-4) are another team that has shown promise throughout this season. They matchup in Round 1 with the Elyria Pioneers (5-5). This game of potential Dark Horse contenders should be one of the best games in Northeast Ohio for Round 1. Both are looking to get over some hurdles, as Wadsworth has dropped two of their last three games and Elyria has played some great teams close but have lacked a signature win this season.

The 8th seeded Berea-Midpark Titans (5-5) and the Jackson Polar Bears (5-5) will battle it out in Berea. The rest of the round one games feature some lopsided conference rematches from the season.

The #4 Seeded Cleveland Heights Tigers defeated the Lorain Titans (3-7) 55-24 in week 5. The Medina Bees won 55-35 over Strongsville (3-7) in week 5. Mentor (6-3) handled Brunswick (3-7) 35-14 week 6, and McKinley (5-5) rolled 40-7 over Glenoak (4-6) in week 9.

Pictured: Coen Grimm, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Pictured: Jaylan Salmon, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Pictured: Willtrell Hartson, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Division 2 Preview

The defending State Champion, Winton Woods Warriors (10-0) have continued to show and prove why they should remain at the top of Division 2 conversations. They capped off an undefeated regular season with a 44-8 victory over Lebanon (4-6), bringing their active win streak to 19 games dating back to the 2021 season.

The Archbishop Hoban Knights close out their 9-1 2022 Campaign ranked #2 in the state AP Poll and Cleveland.com's Statewide Poll. Hoban looks poised to get another shot at the Warriors after falling to them in last year's State Championship game, 21-10.

However, a familiar foe is lurking who has taken down all of their opponents since Week 1. The Massillon Tigers (8-1) have won 8 straight contests, including a Week 5, 31-28 victory over the state's top ranked team, the St. Edward Eagles.

NEO teams claimed 6 of the top 10 AP Poll slots in Division 2 this year, with only 4 collective losses between them all. Hudson (10-0) and Highland (10-0) come into the playoffs without a loss and a mission to get the respect they deserve. Avon (9-1) and Riverside (9-1) are also looking to make some noise and make their moves for the Division 2 title.

DIVISION 2 – STATE RANKINGS

NO	TEAM	W	L	PPG	PA	AP RANKING	CLEVELAND.COM
1	WINTON WOODS	10	0	42.7	12.6	1	1
2	AKRON HOBAN	9	1	38.1	15.8	2	2
3	MASSILLON	8	1	36.3	18.6	3	3
4	XENIA	10	0	42.2	11.3	4	10
5	CENTRAL CATHOLIC	9	1	40.6	8.7	5	4
6	AVON	9	1	40.5	15.9	6	5
7	MEDINA HIGHLAND	10	0	45	4.3	7	6
8	KINGS MILLS KINGS	9	1	37.2	11.5	8	7
9	HUDSON	10	0	31	10.6	9	9
10	RIVERSIDE	9	1	38.4	15	10	8

Region 5

Region 5 will certainly be a gauntlet and will showcase, arguably, some of the best matchups regardless of division in the NEO regions, especially in the later rounds. While Archbishop Hoban (9-1) looks like the favorite to win its 3rd straight regional title, this region also hosts two other teams that finished in the AP State Top 10 polls, Hudson (10-0), and Riverside (9-1).

Hudson cruised through their regular season schedule, with the closest contest coming in Week 1 with a 14-13 win over Solon (6-4). The two teams will square off in Hudson in the 1st Round where Hudson comes in as the #3 Seed and Solon is #14.

Riverside (9-1) is one missed field goal away from an undefeated season. They fell 7-6 to Mentor in Week 3. They bounced back the next week to snap Division 3 Powerhouse, Chardon's 31 game win streak. They have not looked back since and will definitely be contenders for the Region 5 Title.

The Akron St. Vincent St. Mary Irish (6-4) come into the Playoffs battle tested. Fantastic50.Net has their strength of schedule ranked #6 of all Division 2 teams in the state. They have faced off against some of the top teams in Divisions 1 through 4 (Heights (9-1) Hoban (9-1), Ursuline (8-2), and Glenville (9-0)). They look to bounce back against John Hay (7-3) after suffering a week 10 loss to fellow Region 5 competitor, Walsh Jesuit (8-2).

Pictured: Lamar Sperling, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Pictured: Ryan Kerscher, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Pictured: Brian Robinson, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Pictured: Mikey Maloney, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Pictured: Ja'Mykle Benison, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

The Walsh Jesuit Warriors (8-2) are certainly contenders in this stacked region. They reached the Regional Finals last year but fell to the Hoban Knights 49-24. They also gave Hoban a run for their money in Week 6 before falling 32-20. They have won 4 straight games since then, averaging more than 42 points per game. They will host the 6-4 Maple Heights Mustangs in Round 1. The Mustangs have had a roller coaster season but should not be looked past by any team in this region.

Austintown Fitch comes into Round 1 sporting a 9-1 record, with their only loss coming in Week 6 to the red hot Massillon Tigers. While they should not look past the Mayfield Wildcats (6-4), a potential Round 2 matchup with Akron St. Vincent St. Mary could be an instant classic, and a potential Regional Semi-final matchup with Hoban could be a strong gauge for just how good this Austintown Fitch team is.

The matchups between Barberton (6-4) and Rhodes (4-4), as well as Nordonia (8-2) and Garfield Heights (7-3), should be interesting games and potential tune up games for a Dark Horse run in the region. The winners of those games are more than likely to face off against the #1 and #2 ranked teams in the region, Hoban and Riverside.

Region 6

Pictured: Jakorion Caffey, Photo by: Kevin Wilker

The Divison 2 gauntlet is just as tough in Region 6. Region 6 is home for three AP Top 10 Teams in Ohio. Toledo Central Catholic (9-1) ranked 5th, Avon ranked 6th (9-1), and Highland ranked 7th (10-0). After finishing the regular season 9-1 last year, Highland fell victim to Toledo Central Catholic 23-20 in the Regional Semi-Finals. Avon and Central Catholic battled for the Regional Championship last year with Avon prevailing 43-42.

There is a saying, “All good things must come to an end.” Avon continues to prove that saying wrong. Avon has reigned supreme in Region 6 since 2017, so certainly both Central Catholic and Highland are looking to stop Avon from winning their 6th straight Regional Championship.

Central Catholic has won nine straight games after losing Week 1 to Division 1 defending State Champions, the St. Edward Eagles 23-20. They have dominated every opponent since then. Highland has also been dominant throughout the season. They’ve averaged 45 points per game, while only giving up 10 points in the last six weeks of the season.

Anthony Wayne (9-1), Olmsted Falls (8-2), and Avon Lake (8-2) are certainly contenders, but the three aforementioned teams look like well oiled machines. An upset or two would definitely make things interesting for the fans.

Region 7

The Massillon Tigers (8-1) can make a great case that they are the best team in Northeast Ohio this regular season. They only have one loss on the season and that is to Archbishop Moeller (9-1) (Cincinnati). They are also the only team that beat the team that most rankings have at number, the St. Edward Eagles. The Tigers are on a mission.

After three straight State Runner Ups between 2018-20, the Green Bulldogs sent the Tigers home in the regional finals last year. Although there are very formidable opponents in the region and division, could this be the year that Massillon brings home their first State Championship trophy in the playoff era?

Massillon Perry (4-6) would like to say no to that question, as they look to take down the Tigers in the Backyard Brawl in round 1, a 2020 Regional Championship Rematch. Maybe they will get to avenge last year's Regional Final loss to Green in the Regional Semifinal. Or perhaps, barring any significant upsets, they face off against the 9-1 Uniontown Lake Blue Streaks.

All in all, this should be Massillon's region to lose. Westerville South (9-1), Watkins Memorial (8-2), Big Walnut (8-2), and Independence (7-2) are all 1 or 2-loss teams that are certainly capable of making a deep run and should not be overlooked.

Pictured: Dorian Pringle, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Pictured: Mitch Hewitt, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Division 3 Preview

After defeating Badin 21-14 in last year's Division 3 State Championship, the Chardon Hilltoppers (8-1) are in Dynasty mode but they first have to successfully make it through the Region 9 gauntlet.

Badin (10-0) enters Round 1 atop the state AP Polls after extending their regular season win streak to 28 games. Fantastic50.net gives the Rams a 56% probability to win their region and a 19% chance to win state. Chardon, on the other hand, is given a 53% chance to win their region and a 31% chance to get the 3-peat.

Division 3 newcomers, the Ursuline Fighting Irish (8-2), will certainly present a new obstacle for teams in the Division. The Fighting Irish lost a heartbreaker in the Division 4 Championship last year 29-28 to Clinton Massie. They come into the playoffs ranked number 7 in the state AP Polls and the number 3 seed in Region 9.

Out of the Top 10 Teams in the Division 3 AP Polls, 8 of them come from Region 9 and Region 12 (4 each). So while there may be some clear favorites, this Division may be more wide open than people think.

DIVISION 3 – STATE RANKINGS

NO	TEAM	W	L	PPG	PA	AP RANKING	[illegible]
1	HAMILTON BADIN	10	0	31.8	8.2	1	2
2	CHARDON	8	1	33.3	12.2	2	1
3	CANFIELD	8	1	32.7	10.3	3	7
4	TIPPECANOE	9	1	38.4	13.2	4	3
5	WESTERN BROWN	9	1	50.3	23.1	5	9
6	THORNVILLE SHERIDAN	9	1	30.9	14.8	6	8
7	URSULINE	8	2	37.2	19.1	7	5
8	CHANEY	9	1	30.4	11.4	8	6
9	WAPAKONETA	9	1	24.8	10.6	9	10
10	JACKSON	8	2	37.9	16.1	10	NR

Region 9

Pictured: Jason Hewlett, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Hands down, Region 9 has been our favorite to cover this season. We have seen 7 of the top 8 teams (computer points) in person. We have also seen several of them play each other. We believe from the #1 to #16 team that this is the most evenly competitive in the entire state. Not one team that made the playoffs in this region has a losing record.

Outside of two or three games in the first round, we anticipate close matchups, even with teams that came in at much lower seeds. New Philadelphia (16), Kenston (15), and Hawken (14) are all very capable of playing spoiler in the first round. Aurora (10) is a team many would not want to face in the playoffs after starting off the season 6-1, which included a victory over the #6 ranked Tallmadge Blue Devils.

Hawken (8-2), VASJ (8-2) Ursuline (8-2), and Gilmour Academy (8-1), all made the jump from Division four last year and have shown that they not only belong, but can make a deep run.

University School locked in the #4 seed with a 8-1 record after finishing 1-7 in Division 2 last year. They will face off against Kenston (7-3) in Round 1. Two other turnaround programs that are competitors for the top spot will face off in what we believe is the best game in Round 1 for the Region. Chaney finished 4-5 last season and Alliance finished 3-7, both missed the playoffs. This year, Chaney is the #5 seed with a 9-1 record and Alliance is the #12 seed with a record of 8-2.

Pictured: Christian Lynch, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Pictured: Lawrence Tinsley

Canfield (2), Ursuline (3) and Chaney (5), three of the top Youngstown area teams can make things very interesting. Ursuline handed Chaney its only loss of the season in a 30-27 battle back in week 6. Chaney gave Canfield their only loss of the season the week before in a 16-13 contest. So while the community may be unsettled as to which team is better heading into the playoffs, these teams will get to settle things on the field. An ideal scenario for Youngstown area fans would be a match between Ursuline and Canfield in the Regional Semifinals, and the following week, Chaney takes on the winner of that game in the regions championship.

The Tallmadge Blue Devils are the #6 seed at 8-2 and they are a force to be reckoned with; they are a team that can score in a hurry. They scored 40+ points seven times, with two 60+, and one 70+ points games. Their only losses of the season came from 10-0 Highland, and a one-point heartbreaker to Aurora.

We say all of that just to say, Chardon is still the top dog in the region and Division, as they look to win their 3rd straight state championship. Their 53% probability to win Region 9 according to fantastic50.net, is only rivaled by the 20% probability given to Ursuline, and the 13% chance given to Canfield.

Pictured: Broc Lowry, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Region 10

The past two seasons, the Holy Name Green Wave has fallen just short of a Regional Championship. In 2021, they fell to West Holmes 31-21. In 2020 they fell to Columbian 17-14 in the Regional Championship. Holy Name comes into the 2022 playoffs as the #1 seed in Region 10. With West Holmes now in Division 4, the Green Wave may like their chances to come out on top of this region.

Fantastic50.net has Holy Name at 17.3% probability to win the region. Ahead of them are Tiffin Columbian 28%, and Mansfield Senior at 30%. Mansfield Senior is the #5 seed with an 8-2 record. Their only losses of the season came from Massillon Washington and West Holmes, both Top Seeds in their respective regions.

Lutheran West enters round one sporting the best record of all teams in the region at 9-1. Their only loss came from D5 Powerhous, Kirtland, who is 10-0 on the season. The Longhorns have not had the toughest schedule but they have also won convincingly in all of their other games. They are certainly a team to watch in the region. They will host Toledo Scott who enters the contest at 8-2.

Buckeye (7) and Padua (10) will go to battle in round 1. Buckeye lost their last two games in a row, while Padua may be starting to click at the right time. They started off the season 1-4 but closed it out at 4-1. Both teams could play spoiler in Region 10.

Pictured: Ja'Marrion Banks, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Pictured: D'shawntae Jones, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Pictured: Datone Washington, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Divisions 4–7

Due to this being our first year truly covering football in Northeast Ohio, our coverage primarily focused on Divisions 1-3. Although limited, we did have the opportunity to see some teams from Divisions 4-7 Therefore, for this section we will highlight some of the teams we did have a chance to see that we believe will be strong contenders in this year's playoffs.

Glenville

Glenville lost to Ursuline last year 42-38 in the Regional Semifinals but this year they look even more equipped to finish what they started. The 9-0 Tarblooders finished the season ranked #1 in the Division 4 AP Poll. Additionally, their starters should be well rested as they obliterated their league schedule by not allowing a single point in their last 6 games while a scoring an average of 47 points. The Tarblooders signature win came when they took down Avon, the #1 seed in Division 2 - Region 6, 27-21

Perry

Last year the Perry Pirates season came to a close after they were defeated by the West Branch Warriors 26-19 in the Division 4 - Region 13 Semifinal. This season, they matched their regular season record of last year, 8-2, while landing the #3 seed in Division 5 - Region 17. Their only losses this season came from 9-1 Riverside, and 10-0 Kirtland. Although they moved down a division this year, the road to Canton will still be rough, as they will now likely have to face South Range to get there. South Range currently holds a 30 game regular season win streak.

Cuyahoga Heights

Cuyahoga Heights started the season off 6-0 before losing a hard fought game to Lutheran West (9-1), 14-8. They lost the following game 16-10 to Cardinal but finished out strong with a 35-7 win over Wickliffe. Their defense has only allowed double digit points twice this season (14, 16), so hopefully their defense can aid them into a deep playoff run. They will get a rematch against Cardinal in round 1.

Kirtland

The Kirtland Hornets are the heavy favorites to win Region 21 with fantastic50.net giving them an 80% probability of making it to the final four. The Hornets currently have a 55 game regular season win streak after finishing undefeated, yet again. Kirtland is no stranger to the State Championship game, as they have either been State Champs (6x) or State Runner Up (4x) since 2011. After losing in the Division 5 Championship game 20-16 to Versailles, the Hornets look to bring another trophy back home, although this year will be for the Division 6 title.

Warren JFK

The 9-1 JFK Eagles are more than ready to make a run in this year's playoffs. They look to make their 3rd straight trip to the State Final Four where they could face a familiar foe, Newark Catholic. The Eagles cut the Green Wave's season short in 2020 with a 20-13 win in the State Semifinals. The Green Waves returned the favor last year with a 14-7 win over the Eagles in the State Semifinals as well. Both teams come into the playoffs as #1 seeds in their regions.

Pictured: George Prusock, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Pictured: Seth Kucia, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Pictured: Caleb Hadley, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

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