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SKY HIGH

ON THE ROAD TO CANTON

Playoff Preview: Dive into Northeast Ohio's high school football scene as we gear up for the thrilling 2023 playoffs and more.

ON THE COVER

TY'REQ DONLOW

PHOTO BY TODD MITCHELL



Pictured: Tylan Boykin - Photo by: DJ Pelles

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SKY HIGH
—SPORTZ—



Pictured: Ty'shaun Harrell (Left), John Gordon (Right) Photo by: Lamar Sykes

The OHSAA Division 1 Football Playoffs, year after year, showcase some of the best teams and top talent in the state. For the past two seasons, the coveted title has been clinched by the St. Edward Eagles from Northeast Ohio. Entering this year's playoffs, the Eagles enter as the top-ranked team in both Region 1 and the Final AP Polls again.

However, the competition is fierce. The Olentangy Braves, rebounding from a lackluster 4-6 season, have turned things around with a 9-1 record. Their only blemish came at the hands of the Olentangy Berlin Bears, who, after an initial stumble in week 1, have not lost since.

Gahanna Lincoln, still nursing the wounds from their semifinal defeat to the Eagles last year, have roared back with a perfect 10-0 season, securing the #2 spot in the AP rankings.

Region 4 is equally competitive. Milford and Princeton, both with unblemished 10-0 records, lead the charge. However, their journey to glory won't be easy, with powerhouses like Archbishop Moeller, St. Xavier, Lakota West, and Elder ready to challenge their supremacy.

St. Edward's dominance is undeniable, having clinched the championship thrice in the last six years. Springfield, Pickerington Central and Mentor have been consistent threats, with Springfield's matches against Archbishop Moeller and St. Xavier being nail-biters. The OHSAA Division 1 Football Playoffs promise thrilling encounters, where past champions and rising stars battle for the ultimate glory.

Division 1 Preview

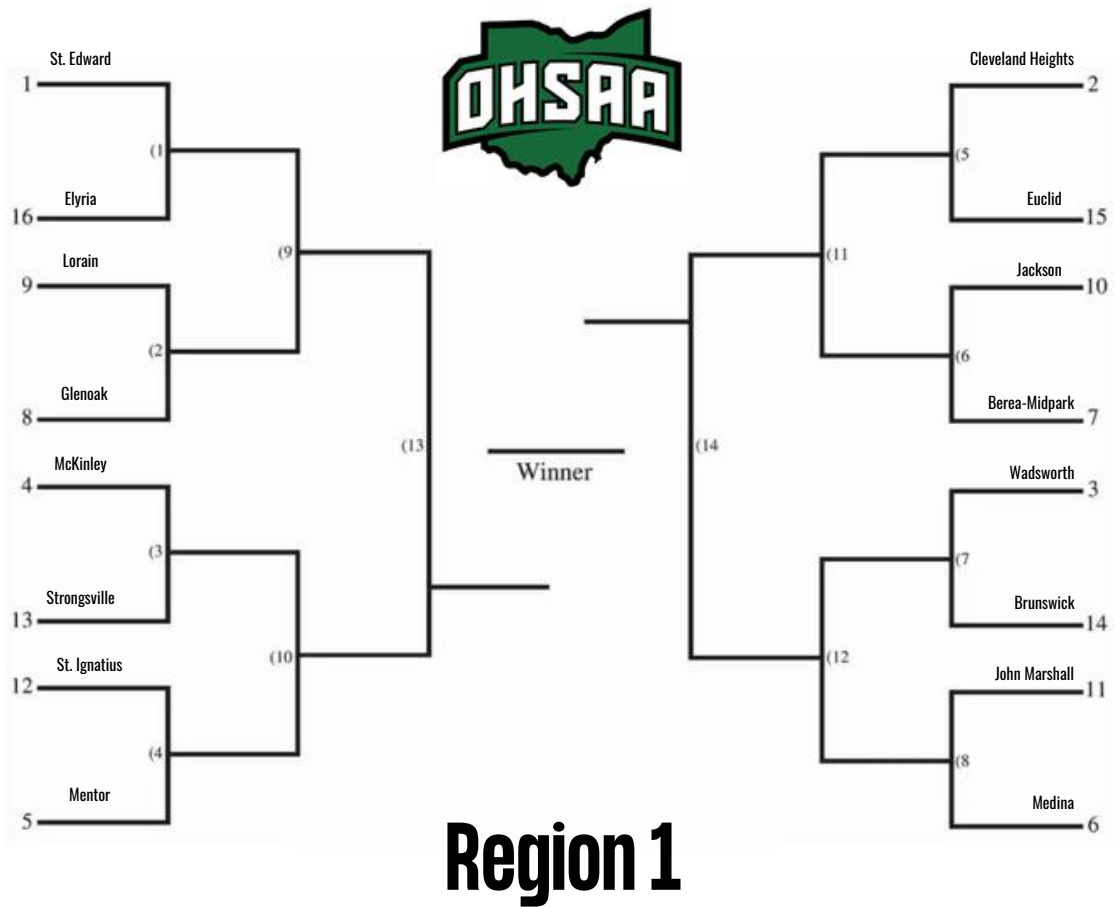
DIVISION 1 – STATE RANKINGS

NO	TEAM	W	L	PPG	PA	AP RANKING	CLEVELAND.COM
1	ST. EDWARD	9	1	30.5	13.5	1	1
2	GAHANNA LINCOLN	10	0	36.5	12.6	2	2
3	PRINCETON	10	0	30.7	9.5	3	4
4	MILFORD	10	0	36.5	15.4	4	NR
5	LEWIS CENTER OLENTANGY	9	1	36.4	18	5	8
6	HILLIARD BRADLEY	9	1	27.3	15.3	6	6
7	PICKERINGTON NORTH	9	1	35.1	19.4	7	3
8	OLENTANGY BERLIN	9	1	28.3	14	8	7
9	CLEVELAND HEIGHTS	9	1	36.2	24.1	9	5
10	CENTERVILLE	8	2	22.8	14.4	10	NR

AP and Cleveland.com Rankings



Pictured: Loghan Thomas, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Pictured: Danny Stoddard, Photo by: Austin Souvanarath

The Ohio high school football playoffs are gearing up, and Division 1 Region 1 is where the spotlight's shining. With a mix of seasoned champs and rising stars, here's a breakdown of some of the teams and their standout stats.

St. Edward Eagles are the talk of the town. Their track record is impressive, having reached the State Finals four times in the past six years, clinching the title three times. Their recent successes make them a favorite, with fantastic50.net giving them an 85% chance to win the region and a 49% shot at the state championship.

Cleveland Heights Tigers have been on a roll. With just one loss this season to an out-of-state team, they've otherwise dominated. Their offense, led by Marquis Davis, has been exceptional. Davis alone has clocked 2087 rushing yards with 32 TDs this season. Averaging 36.2 points per game, they've proven they can deliver when it counts.

Wadsworth boasts an 8-2 record, landing them a #3 ranking in computer points. Their offense isn't to be taken lightly, averaging a solid 38.3 points per game. They're set to face Brunswick in the opening round, but a potential rematch with Medina, who handed them one of their two losses, could be on the horizon.

Mentor had a rocky start but turned things around with five straight wins, each time scoring over 40 points. They're ranked #5, but their first playoff game won't be a walk in the park. They're up against St. Ignatius, a crosstown rival that beat them 16-14 earlier in the season.



Pictured: John Salaman, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Speaking of St. Ignatius, their 2-8 record might seem underwhelming, but it's worth noting they've faced some of the toughest teams from Ohio and Pennsylvania. Fantastic50.net has them with ranked #1 Toughest Schedule in the state. They're a team that's been tested and could surprise many.

Medina is a team with firepower. Led by Danny Stoddard and Austin Knowles, they've been lighting up the scoreboard. Stoddard has thrown 39 TDs for 3460 yards, while Knowles has made 77 catches for 1380 yards, resulting in 20 TDs. They're averaging a whopping 42 points per game, but their defense, giving up 24 points on average, might be their Achilles' heel.

McKinley Bulldogs had a strong mid-season but has slowed down towards the end. Their recent losses to Glenoak and Massillon have raised eyebrows, but the playoffs offer a fresh start. They're up against 3-7 Strongsville in the first round, a game that could set their momentum.

Lorain Titans and GlenOak Golden Eagles are two teams that have shown significant improvement from last season. Lorain, powered by John Salaman's record-breaking 341 yards in a single game and a season total of 1727 yards with 25 TDs, is a team reborn. GlenOak, on the other hand, has bounced back from last year's 4-6 record to finish this season at 6-4. Their face-off in the first round is one of the most anticipated games.



Pictured: Will Stack, Photo by: Austin Souvanarath



Region 2 is shaping up to be one of the most competitive and intriguing regions in the playoffs.

The Olentangy Braves have made a remarkable turnaround from their 4-6 finish last season. With a 9-1 record this season, they've shown resilience and determination. A significant part of their success can be attributed to their star QB, Ethan Grunkemeyer. The Class of 2024 standout has thrown for an impressive 2851 yards and 31 TDs, making him a key player to watch in the playoffs. However, their only blemish came at the hands of the Olentangy Berlin Bears in a close 27-20 game during week 6. The Bears, on the other hand, have been on a roll since their week 1 loss, finishing the season 9-1. Both teams have secured spots in the final AP Poll, with the Braves at #5 and the Bears at #8.

Centerville, another top contender, finished the season with an 8-2 record, securing the #10 spot in the final AP Polls. Their journey, however, wasn't without challenges, as they suffered losses to Dublin Coffman and Wayne, both formidable Region 2 teams.

Springfield, the reigning champions of Region 2 for the past four years, have had a mixed bag this season. Starting with a 2-3 record, they managed to win three of their last four games, finishing the regular season at 5-5. Their history with Wayne adds another layer of intrigue to the playoffs. After six consecutive wins against Wayne, Springfield suffered a 27-22 loss to them in week 4. The playoffs offer a shot at redemption as they face Wayne on the road in the first round.



Pictured: Ethan Grunkemeyer, Photo by: Joshua Niemann



Pictured: Harrison Brewster, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Pictured: Drake Wells, Photo by: Joshua Niemann

Findlay, led by the sensational QB and Mr. Football hopeful, Ryan Montgomery, boasts an 8-2 record. Montgomery's record-breaking performance against Southview, where he threw for 491 yards, surpassing the previous record set by Ben Roethlisberger, showcases his talent. Their two losses came against the undefeated Toledo Central Catholic and Wayne.

Wayne has been a team to watch, especially within Region 2. With a 7-3 overall record, they've been unbeaten against Region 2 teams, going 5-0. Their performance this season, combined with their recent victory over Springfield, makes them one of the teams to beat.

According to the probabilities from fantastic50.net, the race for the Region 2 winner is tight. Olentangy leads with a 24% chance, followed closely by Olentangy Berlin at 19% and Findlay at 15%. Springfield, despite their past dominance, sits at 9.6%, indicating the competitive nature of this region.



Pictured: Angelo McCullom, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Region 3 is buzzing with anticipation, with several strong teams vying for the coveted title. Gahanna Lincoln stands tall after a remarkable 10-0 season, securing the #2 spot in the AP Division 1 rankings. Their undefeated streak against Region 3 teams and notable victories over title contenders like Pickerington Central and Pickerington North make them the frontrunners.

Pickerington North and Hilliard Bradley, both boasting 9-1 records, are hot on their heels. Each had their undefeated dreams shattered in week 10, setting the stage for potential redemption in the playoffs. Bradley's unexpected loss to Dublin Coffman and North's defeat at the hands of Gahanna Lincoln added unexpected twists to the narrative.

Pickerington Central has showcased resilience this season. After a challenging three-game losing streak, they've roared back with five straight wins. Their upcoming clash with New Albany in round 1 promises fireworks, and if they advance, a potential face-off against Upper Arlington awaits.

Gahanna Lincoln, the 2022 Region 3 champions, and Upper Arlington, the 2021 victors, are both in prime positions to make deep runs. Fans should keep an eye out for a potential Gahanna Lincoln vs. Pickerington Central semifinal, and a high-stakes final between either Gahanna Lincoln or Pickerington Central and Pickerington North. With so much talent and history in play, Region 3 promises unmatched football drama.

Pictured: Terrance Alexander, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Pictured: Jordan Marshall, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Region 4 is set to be a battleground of titans as the playoffs loom. Milford and Princeton stand undefeated at 10-0, with their eyes set on making history. While Milford seeks its maiden final 4 appearance, Princeton aims to revisit its 1990 glory. However, the path is strewn with formidable foes like Archbishop Moeller, St. Xavier, Lakota West, and Elder.

Princeton's impressive 9-0 record against Region 4 teams, including victories over potential semifinal contenders, sets them up as strong contenders. Their triumph over the #3 seed, Lakota West, further underscores their prowess. Speaking of Lakota West, after a shaky 0-2 start, they've mounted an impressive eight-game winning streak, showcasing their resilience.

St. Xavier's mid-season slump saw them lose three out of four games, two of which were against Region 4 adversaries, Moeller and Elder. Meanwhile, Moeller's season began with a challenging out-of-state schedule, starting 1-3. However, they've since turned the tide, going 5-1 and notching wins over Elder and St. Xavier.

Fantastic50.net's probabilities paint an intriguing picture. Despite their perfect record, Princeton sits at a 12% chance of winning the region, while Moeller, with a 6-4 record, leads with a whopping 55%. This could be influenced by the fact that three Region 4 teams - Elder, St. Xavier, and Moeller - rank in the top 10 for the toughest schedules in the state.

Historically, Moeller has been the team to beat, clinching the title in 2022 and 2021 against Lakota West. St. Xavier and Elder have also had their moments in the sun in recent years.



Pictured: Chase Herbstreit, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Pictured: DaOne Owens, Photo by: Austin Souvanarath

The Division 2 playoffs are shaping up to be a spectacle, with powerhouses Massillon Washington, Archbishop Hoban, and Avon leading the charge. Interestingly, Toledo Central Catholic, the 2022 Division 2 champions, have shifted to Division 3, leaving the field open for these juggernauts.

Massillon Washington, boasting a pristine 10-0 record, sits atop the Division 2 state AP polls. Not far behind is Avon, also undefeated, holding the #2 spot. Archbishop Hoban, the 2022 state runners-up, have been nearly impeccable, marred only by a week 10 loss to Division 1's reigning champions, St. Edward. Each of these titans holds the #1 rank in their respective regions, setting the stage for epic regional battles.

Hoban's legacy is particularly noteworthy. With five state championships since 2015, they've been a dominant force in both Division 2 and 3. However, the past two seasons have seen them fall short in the state championship, adding a layer of redemption to their 2023 campaign.

A glance at recent D2 final fours reveals intense matchups. In 2022, Hoban bested Washington in the semifinals but fell to Central Catholic in a close final. 2021 saw Hoban overcome Avon, only to be defeated by Winton Woods in the championship. 2020 was Hoban's year, as they clinched the title against Washington.

Division 2 Preview

DIVISION 2 – STATE RANKINGS

NO	TEAM	W	L	PPG	PA	AP RANKING	CLEVELAND.COM
1	MASSILLON	10	0	39.9	8.2	1	1
2	AVON	10	0	42.7	8.8	2	3
3	HOBAN	8	1	35.2	7.4	3	2
4	CIN. ANDERSON	9	1	41	16.5	4	5
5	WALSH JESUIT	9	1	42.6	23.1	5	6
6	CIN. WITHROW	9	1	38.8	5	6	4
7	CANAL WINCHESTER	9	1	28.4	11.3	7	NR
8	TROY	9	1	37.6	5.3	8	8
9	ANTHONY WAYNE	8	2	39.9	15.1	9	NR
10	HUDSON	7	2	27.3	16.2	10	7

AP and Cleveland.com Rankings



Pictured: Rickey Williams, Photo by: Dane Gardner



The heat of the Division 2 Region 5 playoffs is set to ignite. At the forefront is Archbishop Hoban, a team with a storied legacy. With five state championships since 2015, including two in Division 3 (2015, 2016) and three in Division 2 (2017, 2018, 2020), they've been the team to beat. However, the past two seasons have seen them falter in the finals, adding a layer of intrigue to their 2023 campaign. Their only blemish this season? A week 10 loss to Division 1's reigning champions, St. Edward. Yet, their dominance was evident when they trounced Region 5's #2 seed, Walsh Jesuit, with a staggering 57-7 victory.

Speaking of Walsh Jesuit, they've been an offensive powerhouse, racking up 40+ points in eight of their ten games. Their only low-scoring affair? Against Hoban. They'll open their playoff run against Firestone, a team they blanked 49-0 earlier in the season.

Hudson stands out with just two losses, both against top-tier Division 1 teams. Their Region 5 credentials are solid, boasting wins over Nordonia and Twinsburg. Meanwhile, Riverside ended the regular season at 8-2, with recent losses to formidable Division 3 teams. Their Region 5 record is impeccable, and they'll be keen to replicate their week 4 victory over Maple Heights in the playoffs.

Nordonia began the season with a six-game winning streak but faltered towards the end. Their playoff journey starts with a rematch against Twinsburg, a team they narrowly defeated earlier.



Pictured: Mike Maloney, Photo by: Dane Gardner



St. Vincent-St. Mary has had a rollercoaster season, starting strong but losing momentum. They'll be eager to replicate their earlier win against Harding in the first playoff round.

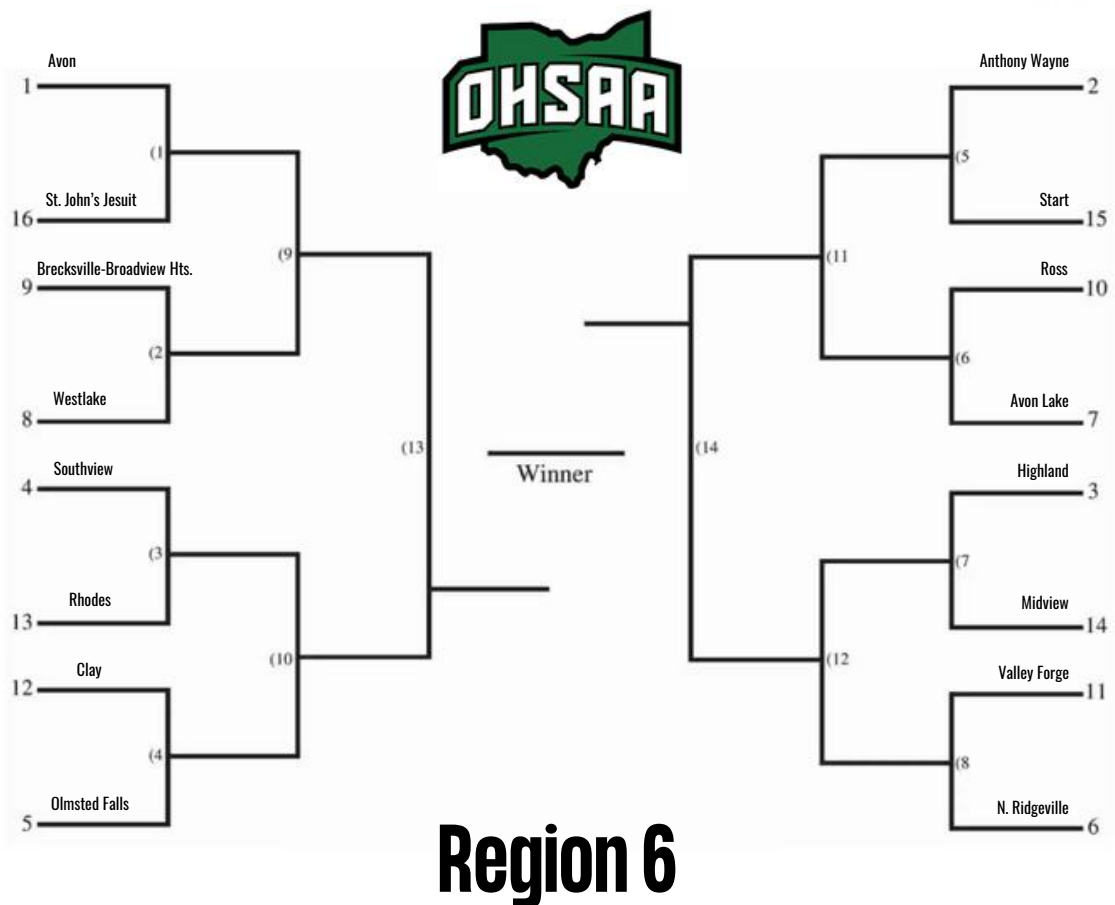
John Hay hosts Austintown Fitch, a team with losses only to the state's elite. The matchup promises to be electric. Lastly, the Barberton vs. Shaker Heights clash is one to watch. Shaker Heights, enjoying their best season in over a decade, faces a Barberton team that's been on a late-season surge.

In summary, Region 5 is a cauldron of competition. While Hoban might be the favorites, the road to the championship is fraught with challenges. Every game promises drama, and in this high-stakes playoff environment, anything can happen.

Pictured: Cornell Beard, Photo by: Lamar Sykes



Pictured: Michael Pace, Photo by: Dane Gardner



Pictured: Nolan Good, Photo by: DJ Pelles

Region 6 is set to witness another thrilling playoff season, with Avon leading the charge. According to fantastic50.net, Avon, with their 10-0 record, holds a 88% probability of clinching the Region 6 title. Their dominance is further underscored by their 5-0 record against Region 6 teams this year.

Highland, the #3 seed, finished the regular season at 8-2. Their losses came at the hands of Hudson and Aurora. As they gear up for the playoffs, they'll be looking to regain their momentum, starting with a clash against Midview in round 1.

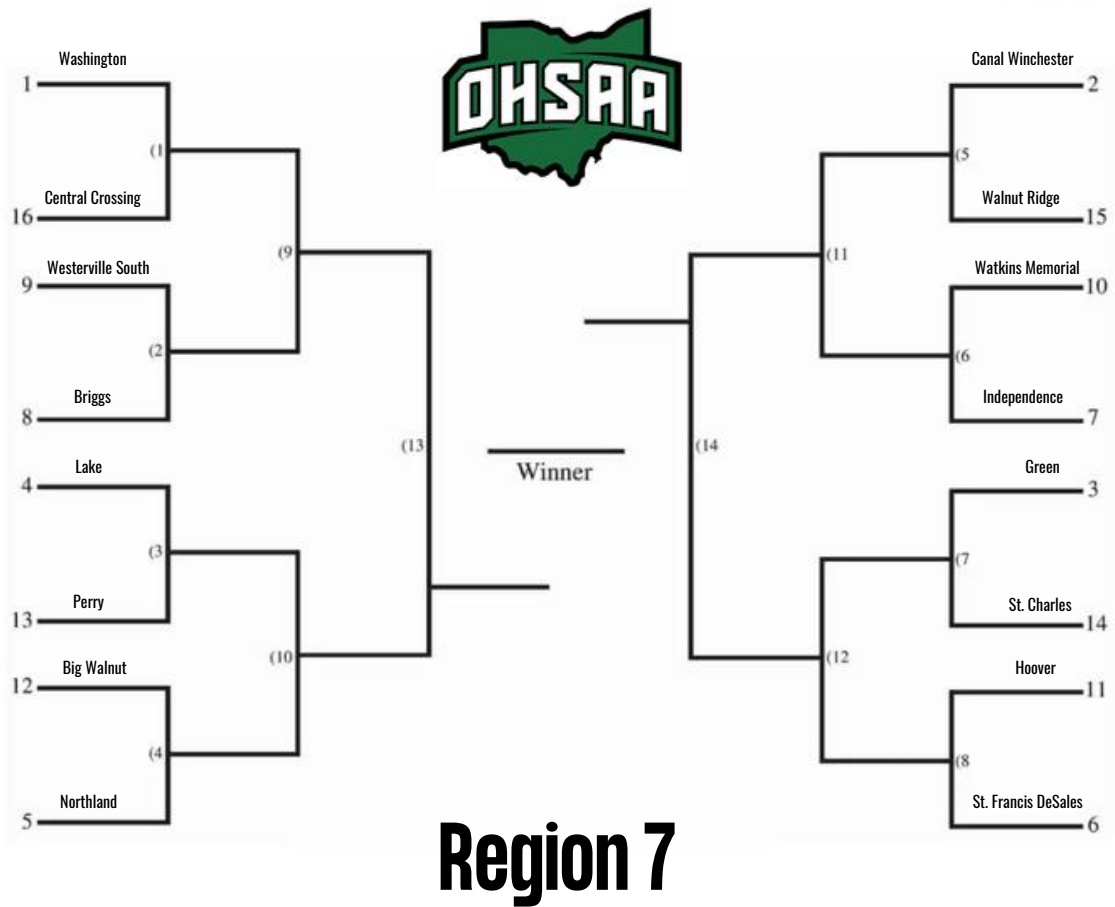
Avon Lake, despite a recent slump with three consecutive losses to Region 6 teams, remains a team to watch. Their historical tussles with Avon have mostly favored the latter, with Avon winning six of their last seven encounters, including a resounding 45-0 victory in week 10.

Last year's regional finalists, Olmsted Falls, secured the #5 seed with a 7-3 record. Their journey this season saw them go 3-2 against Region 6 adversaries, with losses to the dominant Avon and a spirited North Ridgeville. Speaking of North Ridgeville, their commendable 6-2 record against Region 6 teams earned them the #6 seed.

Looking back, Avon's supremacy in recent years is evident. They've clinched the Region 6 title for three consecutive years, with victories over Olmsted Falls, Toledo Central Catholic (now competing in Division 3), and their local rivals, Avon Lake.



Pictured: Kyler Wiggins, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Region 7 is poised for an exciting playoff season, with Massillon Washington undeniably at the forefront. According to fantastic50.net, the Tigers, boasting a perfect 10-0 record, have a staggering 98% probability of securing the Region 7 title. Their recent 35-0 triumph over McKinley extends their regular-season winning streak to 18 games. Notably, for two consecutive years, they've been the only team to defeat the Division 1 defending state champions, St. Edward Eagles.

Looking at the recent regional championships, Massillon Washington's dominance is evident. They clinched the title in 2022, 2020, and 2018. However, 2021 saw an upset when Green narrowly edged them out 26-25. This season, all indications suggest that Massillon Washington is on track to sail through the region, with eyes firmly set on a potential rematch against Archbishop Hoban, who bested them in last season's state semifinals.

Green, the #2 seed in Region 7, they've had a commendable season, winning four of their last five games. Their victories include triumphs over Region 7 opponents Hoover and Lake. However, their Week 8 setback against the #13 seed Perry serves as a reminder that, apart from Massillon, there are no guarantees in this region.

Canal Winchester, the region's #2 seed, whose undefeated streak was halted by Big Walnut in week 10, will be eager to rebound against Walnut Ridge in the opening round.



Pictured: Nasir Phillips, Photo by Joshua Niemann



Pictured: Sean Patrick, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Division 3 Preview

Last year's Division 2 State Champions, Toledo Central Catholic, have transitioned to Division 3, bringing with them a 10-0 record, an average score of 40.7 points per game, and a defense that concedes a mere 10.3 points. However, they're stepping into a fiercely competitive division. The final Division 3 AP poll showcases six undefeated teams and four with just a single loss.

Hamilton Badin stands out with a remarkable 38-game regular-season winning streak, thanks to their recent week 10 victory. Meanwhile, Ursuline has delivered their first undefeated season since 2010. Their memories of the 2021 Division 4 state championship loss to Clinton-Massie by a single point will undoubtedly fuel their drive for redemption.

Bishop Watterson experienced a minor setback in week 10, losing 27-24 to St. Francis DeSales, but they remain a formidable contender, holding the #4 spot in the AP rankings.

Region 9 is a hotbed of talent. Kenston, Geneva, and Aurora have all turned in impressive 9-1 records, making them top contenders in what's arguably the state's toughest region. Not to be overlooked, the 2022 defending state champions, Canfield Cardinals, despite a 6-3 season record, are entering the playoffs on a high with a five-game winning streak.

DIVISION 3 – STATE RANKINGS

NO	TEAM	W	L	PPG	PA	AP RANKING	CLEVELAND.COM
1	TOLEDO CENT. CATH	10	0	40.7	10.3	1	1
2	HAMILTON BADIN	10	0	31.8	12.3	2	3
3	URSULINE	10	0	39.7	13.9	3	2
4	BISHOP WATTERSON	9	1	35.9	9.9	4	4
5	NORTON	10	0	43.4	10.1	5	NR
6	LONDON	10	0	45.2	10.6	6	10
7	KENSTON	9	1	40.8	22.1	7	6
8	GENEVA	9	1	40.1	15.4	8	NR
9	AURORA	9	1	32.6	11.2	9	8
10	GRANVILLE	10	0	33.8	9.3	10	NR
10	MADISON	8	2	33.7	11.7	10	5

AP and Cleveland.com Rankings



Pictured: DC Ferrell, Photo by: Lamar Sykes



Pictured: Bo Jackson, Photo by: Lamar Sykes

Region 9 will be a battleground of Division 3's finest. With four of the AP's top 10 teams, this region is a testament to the depth and quality of Ohio high school football.

Leading the charge is Ursuline, who, after a decade, has turned in an undefeated season. Their last heart-wrenching appearance in Canton was in 2021, where they narrowly lost the Division 4 state championship to Clinton-Massie. With a 10-0 record and a 52% win probability from Fantastic50.net, they are the team to beat.

However, the competition is fierce. Kenston, Geneva, and Aurora have all posted impressive 9-1 records. Canfield Cardinals, the 2022 defending state champions, despite a 6-3 season, are on a roll with a five-game winning streak, making them a dark horse contender.

Chardon, the back-to-back state champions from 2020 and 2021, might be the #7 seed, but their pedigree cannot be ignored. Their losses this season include one to Kenston, indicating the level of competition in the region. They'll be looking to start their playoff journey with a win against CVCA.

Round 1 promises some electrifying matchups, notably Aurora vs. Alliance and Canfield vs. Akron East. Additionally, Gilmour Academy and VASJ are teams that could potentially shake up the playoff landscape.



Pictured: Marquan Braswell , Photo by: DJ Pelles



The Division 3 title race is heating up, and leading the charge is last year's Division 2 State Champions, Toledo Central Catholic. With a flawless 10-0 record, they are the team to beat. Their dominance is further solidified by their 25-game winning streak, the second-longest active streak in the state.

However, the road to the title is fraught with challenges. According to fantastic50.net, Toledo Central Catholic has a 95% win probability, but teams like Tiffin Columbian, Norton, and Mansfield Senior are not to be underestimated.

Norton has had a dream season, going undefeated and will be determined to maintain their winning streak. Tiffin Columbian, with an 8-2 record, has shown resilience, with their only losses coming against an undefeated Perkins team and Bishop Watterson.

Mansfield Senior is another team to watch. Despite two losses, they boast a victory over last year's Division 3 State Champions, Canfield, and have been on a seven-game winning spree. Their experience and momentum could prove vital in the playoffs.

Lutheran West, the dark horse of Region 10, is ranked #11 and faces a challenging first-round against 9-1 Ontario. With a 7-3 record, their losses have come against teams with a combined record of 29-2, showcasing the level of competition they've faced. Their five consecutive wins to end the season could be the momentum they need.



Pictured: Daquarius Bradley, Photo by: Ghainous Williams



Pictured: Damarion Witten, Photo by: DJ Pelles



Divisions 4-7

Divisions 4-7 are gearing up for some intense action. While they might not always grab the headlines, these divisions are packed with teams that have proven their mettle this season. From comeback stories to dominant streaks, here's a closer look at the teams to watch in the upcoming matchups.

Glenville

The Cleveland Glenville Tarblooders stand tall as the defending Division 4 State Champions. Their 7-3 record this season might seem unimpressive at first glance, but a deeper look reveals that their losses were against formidable opponents, including the nationally recognized IMG Academy. Their roster is studded with stars, including Ohio State commits Bryce West and Damarion Witten. Add to the mix one of the state's top running backs, D'Shawntae Jones, and the Tarblooders are a team that no opponent would take lightly.

Lake Catholic

Lake Catholic Cougars have scripted one of the most remarkable turnaround stories. From a dismal 3-7 record last year, they've rebounded to an impressive 8-2 this season, securing the #2 seed in Division 4 Region 13. Their transformation was punctuated by a signature win over Division 3 title contender Kenston. With Frankie Trinetti orchestrating plays at QB, and the dynamic duo of DJ Sears and Cross Nimmo, the Cougars are roaring and ready.

Poland

The Poland Bulldogs have displayed sheer consistency. After a middling 5-5 season last year, they've come back stronger, registering a 9-1 record. Their only blemish came against last year's Division 5 state champion, South Range. However, with four consecutive wins to close the regular season, they're entering the playoffs with momentum on their side.



Pictured: Cole Fulton, Photo by: Todd Mitchell

Streetsboro

Streetsboro Rockets have been nothing short of spectacular. With a 9-1 record, their only setback was against the undefeated Norton. But with star RB Preston Hopperton leading the charge and a six-game winning streak that includes victories over three Division 3 teams, they're a team on the rise.

Perry

The Perry Pirates have been the epitome of dominance in Division 5. Their flawless 10-0 record is a testament to their prowess on both sides of the ball. Averaging 37.2 points per game while allowing a mere 6.4, they've been a nightmare for opponents. Their defense, in particular, has been a fortress, with four shutouts to their name.



Pictured: Walt Moses, Photo by: Dane Gardner

Kirtland

The Kirtland Hornets, despite an early-season stumble, have been a force of nature. Their response to a week 3 loss was to ramp up their intensity, resulting in a nine-game winning streak. Their aim is clear: to clinch their 7th state championship. Their track record is intimidating, with three consecutive titles from 2018-2020 and runner-up finishes in the subsequent two years.

Marion Local

Finally, the Marion Local team is the juggernaut of Division 7. With a pristine 10-0 record, they sit comfortably atop the AP Poll. Their 42-game winning streak, including playoffs, is a testament to their consistency and dominance. Having clinched two consecutive state championships, they're on a quest for a third, which would be their 14th in school history.



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