

THE WEEKLY AREA HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PREVIEW SECTION

Division VII State Championship Preview

Division V State Championship Preview

INDIANS **READY FOR** WILDCATS

By COLIN FOSTER cfoster@dailystandard.com

A budding football program (Fort Recovery) will face an already-established state power (Mogadore) for the Division VII state championship.

The Indians haven't been intimidated in games against tradition-rich programs the past two seasons and they won't be when they step onto the FieldTurf of Ohio Stadium at 3 p.m. on Friday.

Niekamp's bunch turned in A+ performances in the regional final and state semifinal scoring impressive victories over higher-ranked teams. First, the eighth-ranked Indians dethroned defending Division VI state champ/ fifth-ranked Minster 33-21 and then they handed fourth-ranked McComb a 35-14 loss.

'(State ranking) doesn't make a lot of difference to us," Fort Recovery coach Brent Niekamp said. 'Part of that comes from the challenges we've faced all year in playing in the MAC and playing against teams that are ranked in the state, playing against teams that are playoff-caliber teams pretty much week in/week out. Nothing's ever given. .. The last two games we played in, the score may have indicated one thing but they were not easy games — I promise you that. We're getting ready for another really tough challenge. We feel like if we play really well, we'll have a chance to win."



Mark Pummell/The Daily Standard The passing of Caleb Martin has been key for Fort Recovery's run to their first-ever state championship game.

Fort Recovery has been good in all phases throughout this playoff run. The offensive line has opened holes to free Will Homan for 607 rushing yards and nine touchdowns in the last four victories for the Indians. On the season, the sophomore running back has 1,094 yards and 13 scores. Junior quarterback Caleb Martin has been on point in his second season as starter, completing 151-of-270 passes for 2,021 yards and 17 touchdowns. His favorite weapon, Wes Wenning, has caught 66 passes for 1,022 yards and eight TDs.

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CAYS, CRUSADERS READY FOR ROUND TWO

By GARY R. RASBERRY grasberry@dailystandard.com

It will be a rematch at Ohio Stadium on Friday as Coldwater takes on Canton Central Catholic in the Division V state championship game at 10 a.m.

However, it will be two different-looking teams from last year's 62-21 effort that gave the Cavaliers their third straight state title and fifth in program history.

Last season's title game featured a battle of athletic quarterbacks in Coldwater's Brody Hoying, who rushed for 236 yards and four touchdowns, and CCC's Jake Boccuti, both of whom shared the state's offensive player of the year award.

With both quarterbacks having graduated, the teams have shaped their teams differently.

"It's kind of similar to us," Coldwater coach Chip Otten said. "They do spread the wealth a little bit more than last year with 4-5 good receivers, a quarterback that can

run and all the jet sweeps. Spreading the wealth makes it difficult on who to focus on defensively.'

"I think they're a little more diverse this year," CCC coach Jeff Lindesmith said. "Our kids are familiar with how they play. They taught us a lesson last year."

Dan Platek is at quarterback this season for the Crusaders. Platek has thrown for 1,592 yards and nine touchdowns in the run-heavy CCC offense.

Leading the running game is Justin Ditty. The 5-8, 180-pound senior has rushed for 1,126 yards and 23 touchdowns this season. Platek has added 452 yards rushing and three scores and John Colangelo, who had a touchdown and 53 yards of offense in the loss to Coldwater last season, has 390 yards and eight scores. Colangelo is the top receiver for Platek, snagging 39 passes for 368 yards and a touchdown. Colangelo also has five return touchdowns

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Nick Wenning/The Daily Standard **Coldwater's Aaron Harlamert looks** to help the Cavaliers win their fourth straight state title.

Division VII State Championship Preview

FLYERS, HORNETS HAVE PLENTY OF MUTUAL RESPECT

By COLIN FOSTER cfoster@dailystandard.com

Tradition vs. tradition. Talent vs. talent.

Tiger vs. Tim.

Marion Local and Kirtland for the Division VI state championship it's a matchup that's long overdue.

It'll finally happen on Saturday as the Flyers and Hornets — two of the most storied small-school football programs in Ohio — are scheduled for a 10 a.m. date at Ohio Stadium in Columbu Marion Local is vying for a fifth consecutive state title — a remarkable feat considering the number of talented players who graduated

on, some bumps in the road." The road wasn't too bumpy last

week as the Flyers handed Tinora a 34-10 loss in the state semifinal.

Kirtland's postseason resume can only be topped by that of Marion Local's. The Hornets are appearing in their fifth straight championship game and trying to claim a third title in that span. Kirtland already knows all about the Midwest Athletic Conference but it has never faced Marion Local.

"We just have tons of respect for Kirtland," Goodwin said. "Our kids are going to be excited because they thrive on competition and I'm sure the Kirtland kids are the same way."

knows his team faces a completely different challenge this week than it did against Minster in 2014.

"They're totally different teams," LaVerde said. "Minster threw the ball almost every single play against us last year. Marion has some good running backs and they're very good up front. They execute extremely well and they run the ball very well. They throw the ball well, too. That's why they're one of the best teams in Ohio — they execute whatever play's

Kirtland coach Tiger LaVerde Kirtland, they stick it out. They play JV as juniors and their senior years, they're ready to go. They know the systems and they have great years."

'We've had some talented kids who are playing Division I football right now. This team's different," LaVerde said. "We don't have the D-I guys anymore. We just have a bunch of great kids who work hard and they love each other and they are playing very well right now. They believe in themselves.

The Hornets' playoff path began with a 49-0 thumping of Western Reserve. They defeated Brookfield 27-17 in the regional semifinal and then Cuyahoga Heights 34-13 in the final. Defensive back Peter Gabor helped Kirtland secure a spot in the state final by intercepting Grandview Heights' QB Andre Readey in the end zone late in the fourth quarter for a 13-9 victory Kirtland returned only three



from last year's team. 'We graduated just a tremendous senior class last year that had started for three years," Marion Local coach Tim Goodwin said. "We kind of had to rebuild this team. We kind of had some younger guys who we liked but we were pretty inexperienced to start with. We had a rough-go early

The Hornets won their first title in the five-year run with a 28-7 victory over Coldwater in the 2011 Division V championship game. The Cavaliers got a little payback the following season with a 10-9 victory over Kirtland. In the 2014 Division VI final, Minster erased a late deficit to defeat the favored Kirtland 46-42 at Ohio Stadium.

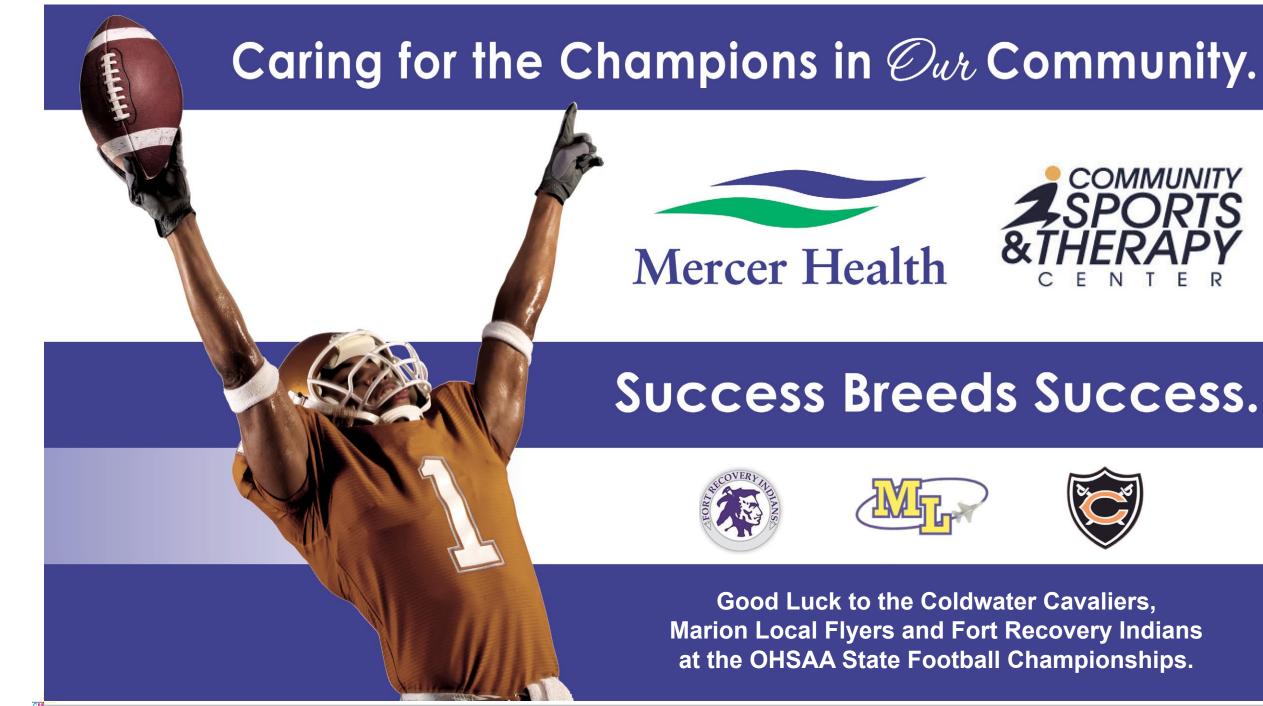
called and they do it very well.

Marion Local and Kirtland were each hit hard by graduation. Both have reloaded, worked hard and remained the class of small-school football.

"I think football is kind of a delayed-gratification sport for a lot of kids," Goodwin said. "We have kids every year who don't play a lot until their senior year. I think in other places they would probably quit and do something else, but here at Marion Local and at places like

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Mark Pummell/The Daily Standard Marion's Hunter Wilker, 21, looks to finish his high school football career with his fourth state football title.



Fort

(Continued from page 1B)

get past the other MAC powers. That's why what's happening now is so special.

"From Day One, I used to talk to people who didn't understand anything about football. They just couldn't see what the big deal about football was," Diller said. "I'd always tell them just wait until we have Friday night football, then you'll understand what I'm talking about. When we actually get to having successful football, do you understand what an atmosphere this is?'

"It used to be that you couldn't get people to talk about football," Bechtol said. "Now, you walk into the post office and people are like 'Hey, what's that team like that we're going to play?"

"I'd say the production has been down in Fort Recovery," Diller joked.

And the former players showed up in full support at Thanksgiving time as nearly 70 of them showed up to watch the finals last spring, has been a current team practice.

"Brent called them all together and said 'Look around. Everyone of those guys would like to be in your position,' "Wehrkamp explained. "A little bit of them is with that group. It took a lot of hard work to get to that point."

Fort Recovery athletic director Kurt Rammel said a big part of the Indians' recent success is the addition of a larger training facility three years ago.

"They've had the weight room. They had the circuit training prior, but this just opens it up to a whole new level," Rammel said. "You add the agility side of things and the speed training side of things to the power lifting. ... Now you go from the big and strong to the big, strong and fast, which is the ideal athlete these days.'

Postseason success in other sports, most notably the baseball team's trip to the state semi-

The wild card for the Crusad-

ers is kicker Dan Mills, whose

47-yard field goal as time expired

in the state semifinal against

Milan Edison sent CCC back to

Columbus. Mills is 49-of-55 on

point-afters

and a blister-

ing 14-of-18 on

Coldwater

quarterback

melgarn man-

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Jack

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the

senior has thrown for 2,737 yards

and 33 touchdowns this season.

CCC will have to deal with the

number of options the Cavaliers

have to either run the ball or

catch it. Five Cavaliers have at

least 22 pass receptions this sea-

son and Chris (Petey) Post (963

rushing yards, 18 touchdowns)

and Kraig Schoenherr (498 yards,

six TDs) are threats to run the

all over the field," Lindesmith

said. "Really impressed with

(Hemmelgarn) and how he con-

trols the offense. He doesn't run

it as much as Brody did, but he's

"They just have playmakers

Post

Hem

springboard to success on the gridiron, too, Rammel added.

"I believe having a large group of those kids who played on that baseball team allowed them to play with so much composure," Rammel said. "It allowed them to deal with that up-and-down, rise and fall throughout a game. I think you see that this year big time on the football field. It's like what Brent says, it's not a panic if we don't go down and score right away. It's not a panic if there's a fumble or if we turn the ball over. We've got a defense that does its job. We've got an offense that can score. Everybody is doing their part and trusting each other."

Brent Niekamp entered this year with a regular season record of 33-69. After the program's best season ever in 2014, the Indians encored with an even better 2015, winning a school record 12 games.

"It's something in our town

have been unthinkable 3-4 years ago," Brent Niekamp said during a state teleconference on Monday. "It's a big testament to our kids, our players, especially our seniors who were still battling through those lean years. They kind of saw the path to success with a little tournament run last year and they really took ahold of that with the idea that we could take it a couple steps further. They've had that in mind since last January and they worked really hard to get to this point and I'm really proud of them.'

Much like Fort Recovery's football founding fathers, Brent has been around the field for most of his life. Brent played for the Indians before helping construct a winning program. He also had a hand in constructing the field.

"I came home for lunch one

Division VI

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offensive starters this season in TE Evan Madden and OGs Michael Bragalone and Dylan Choe. Two starters returned on defense in LB Evan Madden and LB Joey Bates, also the team's marguee running back.

The offense features a pair of 1,000-yard running backs in Bates and David Allchin — both of whom are averaging more than six yards per pop. Bates has starred in his first season as the main man in the backfield. He has

carried the rock 255 times for 1,727 yards and 24 touchdowns. Allchin has amassed 1,031 yards and nine touchdowns on 157 carries. He is second on the team in receiving yards with 331 and leads the team in reception touchdowns with six.

Evan Madden is the first cousin of former Ohio Mr. Football Mitch Trubisky, who is now playing at North Carolina. He leads

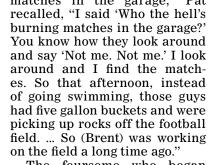
the team in receptions (24) and reception yards (455) plus ranks second on the team in receiving touchdowns with five. Quarterback Owen Lewis has completed 47-of-93 pass attempts for 813 yards and has a touchdown-tointerception ratio of 10-5.

Schoen

The Flyers have proved they can run with Aaron Nietfeld or Jack Homan. They can pass with Duane Leugers or Cole Griesdorn. They've got a plethora of receivers who can make plays, too. The defense — what Goodwin called the staple of the program — has been exceptional, allowing just 17 points in the last two games and 125 on the season.

LaVerde said he was impressed with Marion Local in all phases of the game. He mentioned the most important areas for his team to focus on were limiting big plays and taking care of the ball.

"I know Marion has a couple big kids on the



The foursome who began the program have all had sons play for the team. Ed had four (Kyle, Brian, Nick and Kevin, better known as "Pork"); Bill three (Chris, Collin and Nick); and Randy one (Tony). They also remained with the team in some capacity for its entire existence, whether that be coaching, chains crew, etc. And they've always remained optimistic through thick and thin.

For many years, Bill watched as St. Henry, Coldwater, Marion day from school and I smelt Local and Versailles won state

and with our program that would matches in the garage," Pat title after state title. Bill hoped it would someday happen for the Purple and White.

> "Did I ever envision this? No," Bill said. "But I certainly hoped for it because we started going to every playoff game and every time I watched Minster or Marion or whoever win state, I thought someday ... someday, we'll get to go. Although it seemed way out there, it was always in my heart that I just wanted to be one of them for our school, for our town."

> And now that Fort Recovery is on the brink of winning the state championship game, Bill is very proud to be in the same company as so many other proud traditions in the MAC.

> "We're one of them," Bill added.

> And that was the goal all along.

Division V -

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(two interception, two kickoff, one punt)

Ken Henderson adds 24 receptions for 355 yards and three scores and Jack Murphy has 320 yards and a score.

"Everybody has to do their job," Otten said about preparing for the Crusaders. "You have to take care of (defensive) responsibilities and (then) run to the ball like a wild man and try to stop them.'

The Crusaders pride themselves on defense, allowing just seven points in the first quarter during the postseason and 42 first-quarter points total. CCC has forced 24 turnovers this season.

'They're similar to us in one way. They're not a bunch of big guys on defense but a lot of guys who can run," Otten said. "They run to the ball well. That poses problems for the O-Line when you have quick (defenders). You really have to move your feet."

"We went with a little bit smaller lineup," Lindesmith said of his defense. "We really benefitted from that. Our front four has put some pressure on (teams). They get off the blocks well and can create tackles for loss.²

Division VII

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The Fort Recovery defense has been tough all season, too. The Indians have surrendered just 38 points over the last three weeks. On the season, the Indians have allowed 12.3 points per game and an average of





Nick Wenning/The Daily Standard Neal Muhlenkamp has been a key contributor on both offense and defense for Coldwater this season.

a student of the game."

The Cavalier defense is on trek to allow fewer than 100 points this season. Opponents have only managed 81 points this season with no points scored in the first quarter and only 26 first-half points. The bulk of the points given up has come in the fourth quarter after the Cavaliers have gone to the reserves to finish games.



Mark Pummell/The Daily Standard

Marion's Kevin Tangeman played a big part in the Flyers' shutting down Tinora in last week's state semifinal.

outside, a couple tall receivers," LaVerde said. 'We've got to limit their big plays for sure and we certainly don't want to turn the ball over on short field and give up easy points. Tinora turned the ball over in the end zone against Marion early in the (state semifinal) and they got a quick touchdown to get up 14 points. It certainly hurt them."

Marion Local surpassed Cleveland St. Ignatius for most consecutive playoff wins (24) last week. The Flyers can match St. Ignatius' five consecutive titles with a victory this week.

246.6 vards.

Even the special teams got involved in the act last week. Darien Sheffer continued his solid punting and kicked a career-long 28-yard field goal. Brandon (Speedy) Schoen lived up to his nickname when he returned a kickoff 82 yards for a touchdown against McComb.

"We feel like we're playing at a high level right now," Niekamp said. "The last two games we feel like were our best performances of the year so far. It's a good feeling because looking back at the season, we feel like we made a pretty steady progression week in/week out, which is something you always hope for as a coach. We're pretty confident, although it's hard to get a real good feel for a team just watching a team on film. We know these guys are physical. We know they've beaten a lot of good football teams. Obviously, we're planning on this being a major challenge.'

Mogadore (13-1), ranked second in the final AP state poll, enters feeling rather confident about itself, too. The Wildcats gave top-ranked Danville its only loss in last week's state semifinal. Mogadore controlled the line of scrimmage, shared the wealth among a plethora of backs and made a point of harassing Danville's All-Ohio quarterback Ridge Durbin in the 35-21 win.

Mogadore's playoff path has also included wins over Jackson-Milton (63-20), last year's state runner-up Norwalk St. Paul (28-0) and John F. Kennedy (35-7).

"We were very nervous as a staff when we came up against Norwalk St. Paul," Mogadore coach Matt Adorni said. "You've got a team that was the state runner-up, a great team, a well-coached team that really pummeled us the last time we played them, so we feel like we've been tested. It's a big stage and our kids are confident, not cocky. That's a good thing."

Mogadore's offensive attack is spearheaded by bigframed, dual-threat QB Zeddie Pollock along with running backs Luke Cramer and Austin Williams. The Wildcats lone loss came at the hands of Elyria Catholic, a 6-4, Division V team. In 14 games, the Wildcats average offensive-defensive scoring average has been 35.2-10.9.

Niekamp said he expects an MAC-type battle against a physical, smash-mouth and fundamentally sound Mogadore team.

'Mogadore is a really physical team — that's the thing that stands out looking at film," Niekamp said. 'They want to run the ball offensively. They get into tight formations, running formations, two tight ends, two or three backs in the backfield. And they've got some big, strong kids, tough running backs, guys who find the holes. That's going to be a major challenge. We're going to have to slow down their running game.

"Defensively they look like they've got a really nice front four. (OL/DL Collin Kelly) is a really nice player and they're pretty multiple defensively, so they're going to try to confuse us and confuse our quarterback I'm sure. They just look like a very solid, fundamentallysound team, and one that also plays at a pretty physical, high level. They can run the ball and that's usually what you've got to do to advance in the postseason."

Adorni, like Niekamp, heads a program for which he once played in high school. Adorni sees this week's game as a mirror matchup, he said.

"I think the teams are so similar," he said. "They do

Mark Pummell/The Daily Standard Fort Recovery's Brandon (Speedy) Schoen helped the Indians' cause last week against McComb with a kick return touchdown.

it out of the gun mostly. We do it under center. It's sort of that old-school power, iso, play action-type attacks for both teams. Really they do so many things well. (The focus) is going to be preventing the big play, making them drive the length of the field and trying to make them make a mistake. They're very efficient on offense. They keep you on your toes. They're definitely not onedimensional. They have a couple different athletes that touch the football. Like I said, the coaching staff kind of feels like we're a mirror image of each other in terms of the way we do things and the types of plays that we run.

"Both have big, athletic quarterbacks. Both have good receivers and it's going to be interesting."

Mogadore is trying to earn its first state football championship in 13 years. This is the eighth time Mogadore has reached the title game and they've been to the state final four on 17 occasions. The Wildcats are no strangers to the MAC, having defeated St. Henry for the state title in 1996 and then losing to Marion Local in the 2000-01 championship games.

"That's going to be the biggest thing: Can anybody beat the mighty MAC?" Adorni asked. "Obviously, we as much as anybody have as much respect for them after playing a St. Henry in '96 and playing a Marion Local. We scheduled Delphos. A lot of teams from over here don't have the courage to do that, which we kind of pride ourselves on. We understand what they're all about.

"MAC schools are so fundamentally sound and it's tough to stereotype them all, but anybody who has ever watched them knows they're very machine-like and Fort Recovery's really no different. We can't give them short fields. They're too efficient on offense. We've got to play our game. We've got to play our physical brand of football and we can't be in awe of the MAC."

Even though the Indians are an MAC team, they are by no means familiar with this big of stage. But they'll be fully prepared as they attempt to win the school's first football title and first state title since the boys cross country team did so in 1996.

"It's okay to go out there and to have fun and to enjoy the moment. We hope they do," Niekamp said. "I think by doing that we'll be able to stay loose and focused on the game."

