

Helms makes jump from JV to varsity

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USA TODAY NETWORK

NEWARK — When the Newark Catholic football team needed a 2-point conversion against Fort Loramie in Week 4, the coaching staff did not call on standout junior running back Mason Hackett or the experienced receiver trio of Tanner Elwell, Brandon Buchanan and Grant Moore.

Instead, the Green Wave ran Moore on a slant as a decoy to open up room for sophomore Owen Helms in the flat. Helms, who was the reserve quarterback last season, reached the end zone at the varsity level, and he wasted no time returning, catching a touchdown pass later in the game.

"(Helms) made some great plays. I am very proud of him to step up," NC coach Ryan Aiello said. "He is a very talented young man. That's why he was playing quarterback, but we wanted to utilize him."

NC beat Fort Loramie 41-40 that night, receiving clutch plays from sophomore lineman Nate Willis and defensive backs junior Joe Stanley and sophomore Kelly Wendt. Sophomores and juniors again had to quickly grow up in last week's 49-28 victory against Licking Heights, helping the No. 2 Green Wave to their first 5-0 start in 28 years.

The contributions from NC's kiddie corps did not come by accident. The Green Wave dominated at the reserve level under coach Jake Nelson last season.

"Getting that playing time helped me



Newark Catholic sophomore Owen Helms catches a 2-point conversion pass at the goal line during a Week 4 victory against Fort Loramie.

JAMIE POTTS/THE ADVOCATE

tremendously," Willis said. "Without that, there is no way I would be able to go in like I did."

Helms had a strong season at quarterback a year ago, but with All-Ohioan Cole Canter returning, he again was going to spend a lot of time on the varsity sideline. Not so fast.

"(Reserve play) gave me a lot of reps to see what everyone else had to offer, and it was big to get a picture of how the varsity is and that I had to get better if I wanted to get on the field," Helms said. "In the offseason, they said they would

give me some looks at receiver, and I would maybe get some playing time there. I was really happy to hear that because I wanted to get on the field and play."

NC is loaded outside with Elwell, Buchanan and Moore all ranking among the Licking County leaders in receiving, but the Green Wave's depth already has been tested. Buchanan missed the second half of last week's due to injury, adding to their walking wounded.

"They make us look so much better," Helms said. "They just give us great

Schedule, results

Aug. 20: **NC 34**, Bishop Ready 8
Aug. 27: **NC 38**, Nelsonville-York 14
Sept. 3: **NC 35**, Col. Academy 15
Sept. 11: **NC 41**, Fort Loramie 40
Sept. 17: **NC 49**, Heights 28
Sept. 24: @Utica
Oct. 2: Johnstown
Oct. 8: @Lakewood
Oct. 15: Heath
Oct. 22: @Northridge

looks in practice, and it's a good example for me to see how they are doing it because it's my first year playing receiver. I have been looking at those guys who have been playing the position a while."

NC visits Utica (0-5) on Friday to open up Licking County League-Cardinal Division play. The Green Wave led Heights just 28-21 and 35-28 in the second half last week, but junior Bobby Franks helped keep them unbeaten, closing in on quarterback Deuce Caldwell from the back side on multiple occasions.

"We want those kids coming up the ranks gaining experience and having success," Aiello said. "If they show positive things, we are going to give those kids an opportunity to step in."

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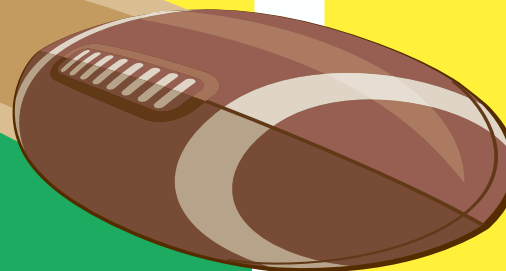
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