

Girls soccer

Rick Holland steps down as Highland coach.
Page B3



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FOOTBALL: DIVISION II, III ALL-OHIO TEAMS

Barnes' life-changing week

Bucks star commits to Citadel, named first-team All-Ohio in 24 hours

Albert Grindle
The Gazette

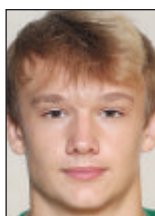
Ben Barnes has had one heckuva week. The Buckeye senior running back/linebacker/kicker committed to play at The Citadel, a Football Championship Subdivision school, Tuesday night. On Wednesday morning, he was named a Division III first-team All-Ohio linebacker by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association.

Barnes is the Bucks' eighth first-team All-Ohio player and first since current Ohio State offensive lineman Ryan Smith in 2018.

"He just always plays hard," Bucks coach



Barnes



Filips

Greg Demnison said. "He always does the right thing, and he always gives great effort. He's very physical and just a tough kid."

"It always seemed like he made big plays when we needed them. If we needed a

tackle for loss, he made it. When we needed a big run, he broke one off."

The 5-foot-11, 184-pound Barnes had one of the greatest all-around seasons in Medina County history, rushing for 1,320 yards, kicking six field goals, scoring 154 points and compiling 26 tackles for loss among 102 total stops. All statistics led the area except total tackles, ranking fourth.

Barnes will kick for the Citadel, which went 4-7 this season, and major in construction engineering. He also had significant interest from nationally ranked D-III schools.

See ALL-OHIO, B3



Buckeye running back/linebacker/kicker Ben Barnes was named Division III first-team All-Ohio by the Ohio Prep Sportswriters Association.

AARON JOSEFCZYK / GAZETTE

BOYS BASKETBALL: MEDINA 76, LAKEWOOD 31



Medina's Matt Spatny scores over Lakewood's Michael Hamdan.

AARON JOSEFCZYK / GAZETTE

The gridiron gang

Football players star in season opener on NBA floor

Brian Dulik
The Gazette

CLEVELAND — The thrill of competing on an NBA court was multiplied for the Medina boys basketball team Wednesday.

Thanks to a historic run by the school's football team, the Bees' game against Lakewood also wound up as their season opener.

Matt Spatny scored 10 points, Michael Rodak had nine and Drew

Hensley collected five points, a game-high five assists and three steals as Medina rolled to a 76-31 non-conference win over the Rangers at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

The aforementioned seniors

were 19 days removed from their final game with the football Bees, who reached the Division I regional finals before losing to eventual state champion St. Edward.

See BEES, B3

GIRLS BASKETBALL: SOLON 59, MEDINA 50

Learning experience

Comets score final 10 to steal GCC showdown

Brad Bournival
The Gazette

SOLON — The Medina girls basketball got to see what a playoff atmosphere is all about.

Unfortunately for the Bees, Solon stole a 59-50 Greater Cleveland Conference thriller Wednesday.

Olivia Klanac nailed a 3-pointer to put Medina (4-2, 1-1) up a point with 2:35 left, but the Bees didn't score again.

"I've played in big games before in AAU," Klanac said. "But it's all about defense and knowing you can come down, hit the shot and tie it. It's about knowing you can win it."

"Solon's defense is physical. They're strong. They pressure the ball. They're a really good team."

The Comets (3-0, 2-0) shrugged off Klanac's 3-pointer when Chyanne Hatcher drilled a 3-pointer 30 seconds later.

After that, steals by Mackenzie Blackford (16 points) and Hatcher (20) took a back-and-forth contest to Solon's favor, and the Comets scored the final 10 points.

"When you play Solon, it's always intense and high pressure," Medina coach Karen Kase said. "Medina knows that, but we have girls that are in new roles. They're young, inexperienced players and this is the biggest game they've ever played in so far. The scoreboard said what it said and we lost, but we grew in a lot of ways because we got the experience."

Up just two at the end of the second and third quarters, Solon lost the lead three times in the fourth but kept its cool by forcing 10 turnovers and holding Medina to just two baskets.

"Defense was huge, and Mackenzie Blackford did a great job of face-guarding (Hailey Tripp, 10 points)," Solon coach Trish Kruse said. "She really pressured her and took away their offense. (Hatcher) coming off the bench gave us some energy. She hit that huge three. We did a great job of moving the ball and attacking."

The two-time reigning champion Bees picked up a big night from Klanac (17 points) and held a 46-18 advantage on the boards thanks to Mylie Roberts (11) and Leora Owings (10).

The Bees even held Solon to a 1-for-21 showing in the second quarter but didn't have enough down the stretch and lost their second game in a row.

"I think they knew that I'm the one who controls my team," Tripp said. "They face-guarded me and were more aggressive. It definitely was because they were in our face. We have a lot of very inexperienced players. I think we were just frazzled in the moment."

See MEDINA, B2



Tripp



Klanac

GIRLS BASKETBALL: HIGHLAND 41, COPLEY 39

Double-digit deficit? No problem

Despite laying bricks, Hornets pull off wild rally from third-quarter hole

Albert Grindle
The Gazette

GRANGER TWP. — Maddie Miller, Delaney Lawson and Alayna Tessena had been down this road before, and it usually ended with a gigantic pothole or a brick wall that stopped the Highland girls basketball team with a tremendous thud.

Regardless of how many bricks the Hornets laid — and, boy, there were a lot — the veterans refused to let that happen again Wednesday in a key Subur-



Lawson



E. Miller

ban League American Conference game against Copley.

Down 14 midway through the third quarter and still unable to throw a ball in the ocean from the railing of a cruise ship, undefeated Highland made all the clutch plays to pull off a 41-39 manner that may end up as the banquet-defining win of the season.

The Hornets (6-0, 3-0) missed 27 of their first 31 shots for 12.9% and were 0-for-15 from 3-point range through 24 minutes yet won after scoring more than half of their total points in the fourth.

"I'm not surprised at all," Miller said in reference to both the 4-for-31 shooting and memorable comeback. "I just told everyone in the locker room, 'The shots will eventually fall.' We started driving and moving the ball a little more."

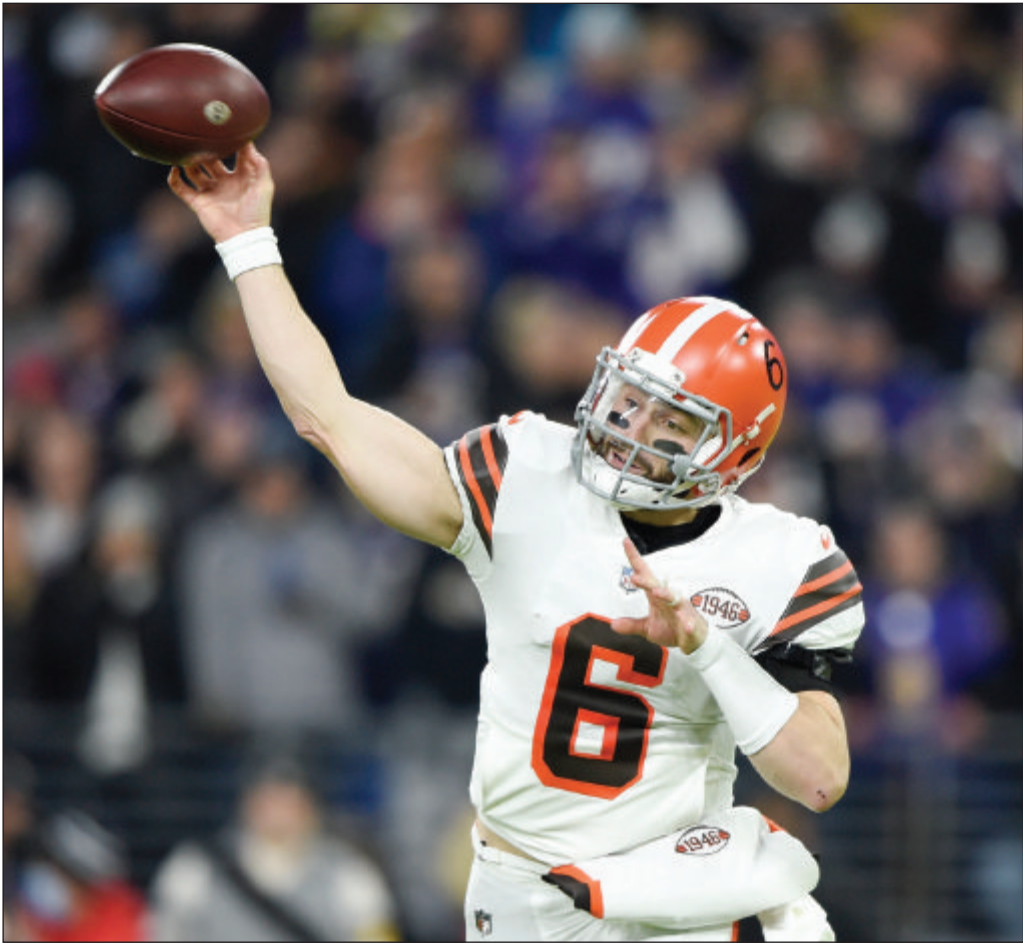
"Having Delaney Lawson, Alayna Tessena and myself out there definitely helps keep our team under control, because I definitely remember my freshman year being in a tight game like that, it's almost nerve-racking when you're not used to that pace."

See HORNETS, B2



RON SCHWANE / GAZETTE

Highland's Maddie Miller puts up a shot against Copley's Lena Conzaman (2) and Lexy Strandberg.



AP FILE

Banged-up Browns quarterback Baker Mayfield says he feels healthier after the bye.

‘Now it’s crunch time’ Mayfield feels healthier after bye week

Scott Petrak
The Gazette

BEREA — The calendar reads December. The standings show a 6-6 record and last-place position in the AFC North. The Browns better have a heightened sense of urgency.

“That’s kind of the mentality we went into it the last two weeks is we still have everything in front of us, but now it’s crunch time,”



Mayfield



NEXT UP

WHO: Baltimore at Cleveland
WHEN: 1 p.m. Sunday
WHERE: FirstEnergy Stadium
TV/RADIO: WKRK 92.3-FM; WNCX 98.5-FM; WKNR 850-AM



Mayfield, who’s made a career out of being the underappreciated underdog, believes he excels when backed into a corner. The week off for the bye helped heal the body and sharpen the focus for the stretch run.

“Any time you can kind of step back and kind of re-evaluate everything and come back with a fresh mindset and realize where we’re at right now and have that one-week-at-a-time mentality,” he said. “So that’s where our heads are at and that’s where I play my best.”

General manager Andrew Berry said last week he expects Mayfield to play “his best stretch of the year” coming out of the bye. Berry’s not alone.

“Everyone in this building believes in him,” tight end Austin Hooper said. “No matter where you stand with anything, anybody, you can’t ever question Bake’s toughness, and for him to have a week to just heal up alone is huge.”

“We all believe in him. We’ve believed in him. We’ll continue to believe in him. He’s the leader of our football team, so we’re ready to watch him be him.”

A return to health could go a long way.

Mayfield has called playing with a torn labrum and fracture in his left, non-throwing shoulder his “new normal” but was slowed last month by a sore left heel, bruised right knee and strained groin. He was starting to feel better before the bye and said the week of “much-needed rest” — he went to Arizona and home to Austin, Texas — helped the recovery.

“I mean quite a bit, to be honest with you,” he said. “I

haven’t had any major setbacks the past few weeks and I had another week off, so I’m looking forward to keep getting better as the weeks go on.”

He practiced Monday and Wednesday after resting to open the practice week before the previous two games.

“He looked good Monday,” coach Kevin Stefanski said before practice. “He was moving around. He looked like himself.”

Mayfield’s inconsistency throughout the season has mirrored that of the team. He posted a season-best 132.6 passer rating in a 41-16 win over the Bengals on Nov. 7, but with the lower-body injuries mounting completed 50.6 percent for 496 yards, three touchdowns, three interceptions, 5.7 yards an attempt and a 65.1 rating over the last three games.

He was hurt by at least four drops in the 16-10 loss to the Ravens before the bye as he completed 18-of-37 and threw for 247 yards — his most since Week 5 — and a touchdown and lost a fumble. The defense intercepted Baltimore’s Lamar Jackson four times, but the offense managed only three points off the takeaways.

“We’re just looking to overall be better on offense, score more points, convert on third downs, just be better overall in those critical situations and capitalize when our defense is playing like it has been,” Mayfield said. “There were plays to be made, that’s for sure. But situationally we need to expect they’re going to bring pressure and we need to have better answers.”

The Ravens (8-4) loaded the line of scrimmage to stop the run and brought their patented blitzes. Pro Bowl cornerback Marlon Humphrey was placed on injured reserve Wednesday with a torn pectoral, but Mayfield doesn’t expect defensive coordinator Don “Wink” Martindale to dial back the aggression despite missing an “extremely key component.”

“I wouldn’t go there,” Mayfield said. “They’re good at their defense. No matter who’s in there, Wink’s going to call it and call those plays, call those pressures and expect his guys to execute it.”

Stefanski said the answer is to make the Ravens pay for stationing so many defenders near the line.

“We have to put together a game plan that can account for those types of things and go make a big play,” he said. “There should in theory be some grass opened up in the defensive secondary.”

The Browns went 6-2 after the midseason bye a year ago as they ended a 17-year playoff drought in Stefanski’s first season. Hooper is confident the team can make another run.

“This is the latest bye week I’ve ever had. To be honest with you, the last couple games it looked like we were just out of gas,” he said. “It was good to just unplugged. There are a lot of ailments

people are going through. Having that was just awesome to get your legs back under you, get some juice back there.”

The week without a game allowed Stefanski and his staff to tweak the plans on offense and defense.

“It’s been awesome seeing the stuff we’ve done through self-scout, seeing where we are, seeing the things we do well, see what needs improvement and having a clear plan, a clear vision to get to where we want to be,” Hooper said.

The rematch with the first-place Ravens starts a final five-game stretch that includes a Monday night game at Pittsburgh and a home finale vs. the Bengals. The three AFC North games will go a long way in determining the division winner and if the Browns make it back to the playoffs.

“It’s beautiful. It’s awesome how the NFL has shaped our schedule to go against our greatest rivals at the end of the year when it matters most,” Hooper said. “If you want to be the team you want to be, this is the time we have to go out there and show what we’re made of.”

Despite the injuries, inconsistencies and frustrating losses, the Browns have a chance.

“Everything that we can accomplish is still in front of us, so if we handle it correctly it will happen that way,” Mayfield said. “I feel confident where I’m at, where we’re at and where we’re headed.”

Contact Scott Petrak at 329-7253 or spetrak@chronicle.com.

Hooper to have larger role

Scott Petrak
The Gazette

BEREA — Coach Kevin Stefanski isn’t going to ignore the tight end position even though he could be without two key ones Sunday against the Ravens. He will just rely more on Austin Hooper.

“We are featuring that tight end group as opposed to just one guy. Now without those guys, certainly you can expect Hoop’s number of plays to go up, and we are counting on him,” Stefanski said Wednesday. “He relishes those type of opportunities.”



Hooper

Harrison Bryant (16 catches, 211 yards) has been ruled out for Sunday with a high ankle sprain, and David Njoku (27, 407, three) is a long shot to play after being placed on the COVID-19 list Tuesday.

“You just do not know,” Stefanski said of Njoku’s availability. “We have to plan if we do not have him. If we have him, that would be great.”

Njoku tweeted and told Hooper he didn’t have any symptoms.

“Hopefully he goes through these next couple tests with no issues and we’ll welcome David back in the building here soon,” Hooper said.

Hooper was one of the first free agent signings of new general manager Andrew Berry in 2020. He signed a four-year, \$42 million deal to give Stefanski a reliable target at the position.

The Browns kept Njoku, drafted Bryant and adopted a three-tight end package used heavily by Stefanski. Hooper’s statistics have suffered in the crowd.

In his final two seasons with the Falcons — he was voted to the Pro Bowl in both years — he averaged 73 catches, 723.5 yards, 9.9 yards a catch and five touchdowns. Last year with the Browns, he caught 46 for 435, 9.5 and four TDs in 13 games. In 12 games this year, he has 28 for 261, 9.3 and two TDs.

“He has been instrumental in what we do as an offense — run game and pass game,” Stefanski said.

Without Njoku and/or Bryant, Stefanski will have to change the personnel packages. Undrafted rookie tight end Miller Forristall was signed off the practice squad Tuesday, and Blake Hance has been practicing as an extra lineman in the jumbo package.

“It’s no secret we love running trio,” Hooper said. “We love being in bigger sets. It’s been an advantageous personnel group for us throughout the year.”

“We all got to do what we’ve got to do. It’s the next guy up.

“We’ve got to keep rolling.” Stefanski will likely use fewer three-tight end sets as he searches for the best combination of skill position players and play calls, which could lead to running backs Nick Chubb and Kareem Hunt on the field together.

“They are both ready for a big workload,” Stefanski said.

Key change

Stefanski wouldn’t reveal who will start at right tackle after All-Pro Jack Conklin’s season-ending ruptured patellar tendon, but all signs point to rookie fourth-round pick James Hudson III.

Hance started four games in place of Conklin earlier in the season and replaced him after the torn patellar Nov. 28 vs. the Ravens, but he was a guard playing out of position and struggled in pass protection.

He had remained the choice over Hudson, but the coaches apparently made a change coming out of the bye. Hudson had issues in pass protection in his lone start Week 6 against the Cardinals when Hance was needed at left tackle.

Spotting a pattern

The passing game has regressed this season, ranking 24th in the NFL with 207 yards a game, and the Browns have scored 17 points or fewer in six of the last seven games. Hooper was asked if defenses have caught up to Stefanski’s offense in Year 2.

“It’s a fair question. I think it just comes down to execution,” he said. “We just have to execute at a high level. That’s me, that’s everybody.”

“I really think it’s more than defenses calling out our plays. I’ve been around defenders who have done that before. I wouldn’t say teams we play necessarily have a bead on us all game. There are some tendencies we do have, just like every team has. There are things we can disguise a little better, but it’s the National Football League. Defenders are really smart. Sometimes they guess right.”

Family ties

Cornerback Denzel Ward shared the credit with his mom, Nicole, after being named the team’s Walter Payton Man of the Year on Tuesday. She runs the

Make Them Know Your Name Foundation in honor of Ward’s father, Paul, who died of a heart attack in 2016.

“She’s the backbone of the foundation, and my brother as well and the rest of my family,” Ward said. “She should be standing up here with me, explaining, talking about this. She definitely deserves it.”

The foundation’s mission is to prevent heart-related deaths with early detection and intervention.

“I wish my foundation didn’t have to start for the reason that it did,” Ward said. “It was inspired obviously from my father passing, but I think he’d definitely be proud. “Just looking forward to continuing to build on the foundation and be an impact in this community.”

Hard road

Safety Grant Delpit was voted the Ed Block Courage Award winner by teammates, coaches and the training staff for his comeback from the torn Achilles tendon that cost him all of his rookie season.

“It definitely makes me revisit everything I’ve been through, everybody that’s helped me along the way and I was super glad for that,” said Delpit, who had Thanksgiving with Ward’s family. “I’m the healthiest I’ve been in two years, that’s a great feeling.”

Extra points

Receivers Anthony Schwartz (concussion) and Jarvis Landry (knee), defensive tackle Malik Jackson (knee) and Bryant didn’t practice. Landry and Jackson have rested on recent Wednesdays.

Schwartz was concussed Nov. 14 vs. the Patriots and remains in the protocol. Stefanski said he’s been at team headquarters.

● Safety Ronnie Harrison Jr. (ankle) was limited.
● For the Ravens, cornerback Anthony Averett (knee), tight end Nick Boyle (illness, knee), defensive tackle Calais Campbell (illness), defensive back/linebacker Anthony Levine Sr. (knee), right tackle Patrick Mekari (hand) and fullback Patrick Ricard (back) didn’t practice.

● The Browns protected quarterback Nick Mullens, kicker Chris Naggar, guard Hjalte Froholdt and defensive back Herb Miller from being signed off the practice squad this week.

Contact Scott Petrak at (440) 329-7253 or spetrak@chronicle.com.

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<p>In Loving Memory of MARY CHRISTINA Mary Christina Mendel 1928 - 2021 Nov. 21, 1928 - Nov. 7, 2021</p>	<p>In Loving Memory of MARY CHRISTINA Mary Christina Mendel 1928 - 2021 Nov. 21, 1928 - Nov. 7, 2021</p>	<p>In Loving Memory of MARY CHRISTINA Mary Christina Mendel 1928 - 2021 Nov. 21, 1928 - Nov. 7, 2021</p>	<p>In Loving Memory of MARY CHRISTINA Mary Christina Mendel 1928 - 2021 Nov. 21, 1928 - Nov. 7, 2021</p>

Call 330-725-6040 or stop in at 885 West Liberty, Medina