

## Mighty Mooney looking tough

Date

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With a few minutes left in Friday's game and Cardinal Mooney holding a commanding 21-10 lead over Mentor, a Plain Dealer reporter looked down from the Stambaugh Stadium press box and said, "They might as well give Mooney the Division IV trophy right now."

No one argued.

You always have to be careful not to take too much from the first week of high school football, but a few things became clear.

\*Mooney is really good.

I realize this is about as bold as saying sunshine is nice and pizza tastes good, but the Cardinals had a lot of questions about their offensive line coming into Friday's game against Mentor.

As I wrote in my story on Saturday, the Cardinals not only lost their starting offensive line to graduation, they were also missing standout John Simon (whose injured back limited him to the defensive line) and another promising lineman, who recently quit the team to focus on becoming an Eagle Scout.

Turns out, it wasn't a problem.

Take a bow, Mike Gemma, Brad Ericsson, Brandon Ericsson, Brian Ericsson, Chris Martin, Zach Larson and Greg Deniro. After a so-so first quarter, Mooney's linemen controlled the line of scrimmage over the final three quarters, opening up holes for the likes of running back Brandon Beachum, quarterback Dan McCarthy, fullback Michael Zordich and running back Taylor Hill -- all Division I recruits.

Speedy senior Tim Marlowe also looked very good on both sides of the ball, catching Mooney's only pass, a 48-yarder in double coverage. (You could almost see Marlowe thinking, "I better catch this one because we might not throw again.") And the Cardinals haven't even utilized senior wideout L.J. Sutton, one of the best athletes in the school.

Cleveland St. Ignatius is also very good.

The Wildcats haven't won a state title since 2001, but watching them on Saturday against Boardman I got the feeling they could contend for one this year.

I think the Spartans are still capable of their first winning season since 2002 (quarterback Nick Tuminello is going to be a good one), but they had no answer for the Wildcats. I don't know if anyone else will, either.

**Four teams could win the Metro Athletic Conference.**

**Before the season, I picked Poland to win it and last Thursday's win over Hubbard did nothing to change my mind. But Howland, Niles and Canfield all looked good. I saw the Cardinals' defense shut down a very explosive East team firsthand and was very impressed. Canfield's offense isn't quite as good as it was the past two years, but it should be good enough to help the Cardinals**

contend for a playoff spot.

"We'll just pound it down people's throats," wideout Colin Hoelzel said.

Liberty, which has been on an upswing for several years now, needs to beef up its non-league schedule.

The Leopards play Salem, Struthers and Campbell in the first three weeks -- three teams that combined to go 3-17 last year. Liberty, which has made the playoffs the past three years, went 9-1 last year and finished seventh in its region, something that could happen again this year.

"I really think Struthers is a good football team," said Leopards coach Jeff Whittaker, whose team defeated the Quakers 42-13. "And Salem is a decent football team. As time goes on, people are going to see that."

Whittaker is understandably defensive on this point, but Liberty's program is good enough to play a team like Poland or Howland in the first three weeks. Coincidentally, Hubbard plays both this year, along with Warren JFK, which is a Division VI school in name only.

South Range and Crestview seem like the teams to beat in Tier One of the Inter Tri-County League, but Mineral Ridge looks like it could be a league championship contender, too.

Player of the week: Niles senior running back Nate Ganyard, who carried 23 times for 327 yards and five TDs in a 35-14 win over Girard.

Quote of the week: From Campbell coach Jeff Bayuk, who lost his debut against Warren JFK after a long stint at Hubbard: "I wasn't used to wearing red but the fight songs are the same [as Hubbard's], so that helped," he said.

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