

# STATE CHAMPS!

Kirtland, Chardon football teams deliver memorable seasons



PAUL DICICCO — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Left: Chardon's Vince Ferrante celebrates with the Division III state championship trophy after the Hilltoppers defeated Columbus DeSales. Right: Kirtland's Mason Sullivan runs for a touchdown against Ironton in the Division V state championship game.

## OPINION

# Kirtland, Chardon share paths to greatness

More than a decade ago, young Anthony DeMarco got into his defensive stance and peered across the line of scrimmage.



**John Kampf**

A player on Kirtland's youth football team who was a member of the Great Lakes Youth Football League,

DeMarco didn't really know anybody on the team they faced that day.

He only knew that team was from Chardon.

Today, the kids who met on the gridiron that day know a lot more about each other both as people and as student-athletes.

Many are friends with one another.

Most are ferocious competitors.

ALL are state champions.

Say this much about the Great Lakes Youth Football League. It knows how to raise state championship football players.

Just ask the Chardon Hilltoppers and the Kirtland Hornets, many — if not most — of their players who came up through the youth ranks playing against each other in the same league.

"That's kinda cool," said DeMarco, a running back/



PAUL DICICCO — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Kirtland celebrates after defeating Ironton to win the Division V state championship in Massillon.

safety on Kirtland's three-time state championship team. "We played them in football and played them in basketball in the youth leagues. It's pretty cool that both of us went on to win state championships

this season."

The parallels between the 2020 Kirtland and Chardon football teams go well beyond their roots in the Great Lakes Youth Football League.

The Hornets and the

Hilltoppers have a lot more in common than their start in youth football and their ending as the Division III (Chardon) and Division V (Kirtland) state championship football teams.

Consider the following:

## Culture

No one has to tell the kids of Chardon and Kirtland what the football culture is in their town.

For Kirtland, we're talk-

ing about a football program that has won six state championships and has three state runner-up finishes in the past 10 years. It's a program that has gone an unfathomable 185-17 (.916) in 15 years under Coach Tiger LaVerde.

Breaking that down a little more, Kirtland could lose 167 games in a row and LaVerde would still be one game over .500 as a Hornet.

Not like that would ever happen.

Then over at Chardon, you have a program that is as tough-as-nails as it gets. While the Hilltoppers don't have quite the playoff rate that Kirtland has — who does? — Chardon is well-known for its brand of football that thrives on excellence and doing things the right way under passionate head coach Mitch Hewitt and his staff.

Just like Kirtland does with LaVerde and his staff.

Former Browns coach Sam Rutigliano once said, "Character is doing the right thing when no one else is watching."

Everybody sees what Kirtland and Chardon do on Friday nights.

What they don't see are the countless hours in the weight room in the offseason. The personal workouts in the home gyms.

**KAMPF » PAGE 3**

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## Kampf

FROM PAGE 2

Guys like Chardon's Nick Fay shoveling mulch and doing landscaping with his father in the summers — good for muscle and cardio — or Kirtland's Mason Sullivan harnessing up and pulling his dad's F150 down the street for a leg workout.

That's culture.

Those are unspoken rules in Kirtland and Chardon.

Stuff no one sees, except for the results on Friday night.

### Style of play

Kirtland and Chardon embrace the physicality of the game.

In a day and age in which spread offenses have teams whipping the ball all over the field for 48 minutes, the Hornets and Hilltoppers would rather close down line splits and beat teams over the head with a sledge-hammer for an hour or so.

Relatively speaking, of course.

Kirtland's base offense — the Stack-I — is legendary around the area and around the state.

Chardon's base offense — the Wing-T — celebrated its 40th anniversary in the program this year.

Yeah, the Hilltoppers and Hornets can do other things than run their base offense. There are more frills than that. But that's

what they hang their hats on.

They run the ball. And when they DO play-action pass, 11 defenders, two coordinators and the majority of the fans bite on it, thus making for some highlight reel pass plays.

Defensively, the teams thrive on punishing hits, swarming to the ball and taking offense to any team gaining a yard, let alone scoring a touchdowns.

They are so good at what they do scheme-wise, the opposition might very well know what's coming — and they STILL can't stop it.

Few things are more impressive on the gridiron than that.

### Good kids

Nothing is worse than getting the ball rammed down your throat by the opposing team's offense, or getting de-cleated when you've got the ball in your hands.

Getting helped up by the opposing team — yeah, that's worse.

But that's the type of kids Chardon and Kirtland have.

Chardon's Vince Ferrante, Christian Hall, Myles Mendeszoon and Kirtland's Mason Rus, Carson Andonian and Luke Gogolin are some of the most ferocious hitters in the area.

They've also been known to help the ball-carrier off the ground now and then after knocking them silly with a bone-jarring tackle.



PAUL DICICCO — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

The Chardon football team celebrates after it defeated Columbus DeSales to win the Division III state championship.

That's class.

On a more personal level, it never ceased to amaze me this season when Kirtland's Joey Grazia — a fellow golfer like myself — asked me during pregame warm-ups what I shot that day, knowing that I play golf on Friday mornings, or Chardon's James Pettyjohn — a hunter like myself — asking me if I got any big bucks on camera recently.

Good kids.

Easy to root for.

All of them.

Add it all up and you have two similar football programs.

Chardon and Kirtland have culture-plus programs. They work hard, even when no one is watching, and they have extraordinary leadership.

The Hornets and Hilltoppers embrace the same blue-collar type of play

that hangs its hat on running the ball effectively and playing spectacular defense.

The achieve their goals with hard-working, high-character, emotionally-peaked young men.

That they came up through the youth ranks in the same youth football league is just a testament to two towns that share a border having like-minded football families.

The state championships Kirtland and Chardon won were separated by a few hours. Kirtland won its championship the morning of Nov. 21, while Chardon won its title later that evening.

That the Hilltoppers and Hornets achieved the highest level of excellent on the same day is apropos, considering how much they have in common.



**Congratulations Hornets!  
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**GO HORNETS!**



## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

# LaVerde reflects on memorable season

By Tiger LaVerde  
Kirtland football coach

I am truly amazed at what these young men in Kirtland have accomplished these last three seasons — three state championships, 41 straight victories.

First of all, we were very blessed to have had the opportunity to compete this fall at all. The memories of playing will certainly be cherished forever by the athletes and their families.

I, however, will remember so many fun things about this group of boys. I will remember watching these kids play youth football together and coaching them in middle school basketball and middle school track. They love each other and care about each other so much, it is easy to see why they made such an amazing team. The work ethic, perseverance, and unselfishness of this group is why my coaches and I respect them so much.

I have received more than 1,000 emails and texts from alumni that are so proud of these kids. They are proud of how they win with class, character, dedication, and togetherness. These boys are so humble and are always very quick to defer credit to their teammates.

We have been very fortunate over the years to have



PAUL DICICCO — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Kirtland coach Tiger LaVerde with members of his family after the state-championship win over Ironton, including son Jake (left), son Phillip (No. 4) and wife Mary. Not shown is daughter Leah.

our best players at Kirtland always be kind, humble, and hard-working leaders. The younger kids always

see that formula for success and grow up to do the same. This year's group had to work through many addi-

tional challenges without the guarantee of being able to play. They had to be motivated to workout on their

own during quarantine and to encourage one another through videos. They had to approach every practice

and each game with enthusiasm and intent, as each one could have been the last played.

Seniors, I want to thank you for loving each other and working so hard to accomplish your goal.

I am also so thankful to all the coaches in our program (Kirtland youth football, Kirtland Middle School, Kirtland High School), the parents, and the alumni for being a huge part of building the Kirtland football program so that it is a place for young men to be positively connected to our group.

It is so important at this time in their lives for them to have a sense of belonging, to be a part of something greater than themselves, to work unselfishly, to learn teamwork and perseverance in the face of so many challenges.

Former players have left such a legacy of work ethic, family, and community, one that these students want to be a part of. Our alumni consistently show up at practices and games, they buy the team food, and offer so much encouragement.

I am so grateful that my two boys have had hundreds of wonderful and impactful "older brothers." My wife Mary and I feel very blessed to be a part of this program and community.



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## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

# Fetchik, Pettyjohn set school records in playoffs

By John Kampf

*JKampf@news-herald.com*  
*@NHPreps on Twitter*

There are a big group of young men from Chardon who can now call themselves state champions.

There are also a few who can call themselves record-breakers.

With a come-from-behind, 31-28 double-overtime win over Columbus DeSales in the Division III state championship game on Nov. 21, the 2020 Chardon Hilltoppers became the first state championship football team at their school since 1994.

Along the way, quarterback Drew Fetchik and running back James Pettyjohn forever etched their names into the lore of Hilltoppers football with their season and postseason accomplishments.

A senior running back, Pettyjohn set new program standards of:

- Most yards rushing in a playoff game (240 in the state semifinal win over Tiffin Columbian). The previous record was 232 by Tommy Benenati in a regional loss to Warren Harding in 2016.

- Career playoff rushing yards (1,205), crushing the former record set by Chardon coach Mitch Hewitt (680).

- Touchdowns in a playoff game (4), which ties him



PAUL DICICCO - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Drew Fetchik, quarterback at Chardon, runs for yardage in the Hilltoppers' state championship win over Columbus DeSales.

with Gary Renner (1995 against Riverside).

- Playoff scoring record (78, with 13 touchdowns),

beating the previous record of 59 set by Scott Mackar.

A senior quarterback, Fetchik put his name in the re-

cord books with program standard of:

- Passing yards in a playoff game (249 in the final vs.

DeSales), which crushed the former record of Scott Neill (148) in a 1993 playoff game against Madison.

- Pass completions in a game (nine vs. DeSales), beating the previous record of eight set in 1987 by Howard Joiner.

- Touchdown passes in a playoff game (two), which tied him with O'Neill in that 1993 playoff game against Madison.

- Career playoff passing yards (571) and completions (26), surpassing previous marks held by O'Neill (404 yards, 24 completions).

Hewitt called both players' performances "incredible" when describing them.

"Drew had a remarkable performance," Hewitt said of the state championship win in which he threw for 249 yards and two touchdowns to lead Chardon back from a 14-point deficit with six minutes remaining. "It might be one of the greatest performances in the history of our program.

"When we can't run the ball and are struggling to stop the ball, we're like 0-100. That kid (Fetchik) threw for 250 yards, and that never happens at Chardon. That was incredible."

Pettyjohn was the workhorse in Chardon's backfield all year, rushing for more than 1,600 yards. He was held to 28 yards in the championship game, but Hewitt said DeSales' defense keyed on him all night.

RECORDS » PAGE 6

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## Records

FROM PAGE 5

“He didn’t necessarily fill up the stat column,” Hewitt said of Pettyjohn, “but he was such a big factor for us because DeSales spied and keyed on him so much that it freed up other players.

“What a season from him. Just an unbelievable effort from a really likeable kid. He’s 5-8, and I might be embellishing that a little, and probably 150 pounds. But he’s as talented a kid as we’ve had here.”

Fetchik chuckled when asked if he ever imagine himself — or any Chardon quarterback — throwing for 250 yards in a game, especially since Chardon is such a run-based offense.

“I just did what the team needed me to do to get back in the game,” he said.

As for his record-setting performances in the post-season, he said, “It’s an amazing feeling because I’m up there with those kinds of people. It’s a testament to all my teammates and coaches who helped me get there.”

Earlier this season, Pettyjohn told The News-Herald that he didn’t hit 100 pounds on the scale until he was a freshman in high school. So putting his name in the record books means a lot to him.

“No, I never would have imagined it,” the fleet-footed senior said. “What I was able to accomplish my two years of (varsity) football, what we accomplished



DAVID TURBEN — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Chardon runningback James Pettyjohn (27) runs during a game against New Philadelphia. Pettyjohn was a workhorse on the Hilltoppers’ playoff run in 2020.

as a team, has been such a blessing.”

That Pettyjohn passed his coach — Hewitt — on a few of the lists would seem to give the 18-year-old reason to give a good-natured

ribbing to his coach. But that’s not the case. In fact, Pettyjohn praised Hewitt and all the coaches for their tutelage over the years to him and his teammates.

“He told me records were

meant to be broken,” Pettyjohn said of his talks with Hewitt. “He’s a great coach. He said to have those records broken by someone on his team, a team that went on to win a state champion-

ship, is a dream come true for him.”

More than a week has passed since the Hilltoppers rewrote the record books with the state championship and the individual

records, but Pettyjohn said he’s still pinching himself.

“It’s like a dream. It still doesn’t feel real,” he said. “It’s like something you only read about, dream about. But it happened.”

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## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

## Powers brothers wrap up impressive run as Kirtland QBs

By John Kampf

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@NHPreps on Twitter

There are two undefeated quarterbacks in Kirtland football history, and they live under the same roof.

The next time Liam Powers and his older brother, Tommy, lose a football game, it will be on an intramural field at Ohio University.

With Kirtland's 38-0 white-washing of Ironton in the Division V state championship game on Nov. 21, Liam Powers wrapped up his varsity career with a spotless 26-0 record as the Hornets' quarterback.

Couple that with the 15-0 record big brother Tommy Powers had as Kirtland's starting quarterback in the 2018 state championship season, and the Powers boys are 41-0 over the last three years.

It's a record that coincides with Kirtland's current 41-game winning streak and three straight undefeated state-championship seasons.

"It's really cool," said Liam. "But of us going undefeated in our varsity careers is awesome — 3-0 in state championship games, too."

Tommy, who attends Ohio University already (and who will be joined there next year by his



PAUL DICICCO - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Liam Powers of Kirtland looks over the Ironton defense during the Hornets' state championship win over Ironton Nov. 21.

younger brother) agreed.

But he showered more praise on Liam than himself.

"I'm really proud of him and the work he put in," Tommy said. "It comes down to all the team and

the work everyone does."

In the recently concluded season, Liam completed 54 of 80 passes (68 percent) for

940 yards, 13 touchdowns and two interceptions. He threw only two interceptions.

As a junior, he was 38-of-63 passing for 835 yards and nine TDs, with one reception for 7 yards (in the state title game), while also running 64 times for 252 yards and three TDs.

In his lone year as starting quarterback, Tommy was 55-for-80 passing for 1,040 yards and 13 TDs. He also ran for 329 yards and seven scores.

That the Powers boys have had the success they've had shouldn't come as a huge surprise. Their grandfather, Bernard Powers, who hailed from Dormont High in Pennsylvania, was the backup quarterback for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish behind All-American signal-caller Johnny Lujak in the 1940s.

Bernard Powers' career came to an premature end, though, because of a back injury.

Decades later, the Powers boys rose to prominence at Kirtland with their late grandfather watching from above.

"I would never have believed this," Liam said of the success he's had. "My grandpa played in college and I just wanted to do what he did."

Liam was a tight end and linebacker when he started playing youth football in second grade. He moved to safety a year later.

POWERS » PAGE 8



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## Powers

FROM PAGE 7

It wasn't until he was in fourth grade that he made the move to quarterback, but that was because "we didn't have anyone else to do it. So I did it even though I had never taken a snap in my life."

He's been a quarterback ever since.

Including freshman ball (9-1) and one year of junior varsity action (10-0), Liam's record as a high school quarterback is 45-1. Kirtland lost to Avon in the second-to-last game of his freshman year.

That being said, including all levels of high school play, Liam has won 37 games in a row as a quarterback.

"I'm very competitive," he said. "I hate to lose. I still remember when we lost the 2017 state championship game, how down everyone was. I never wanted to feel that way again."

Like most younger brothers, he grew up watching his older brother and learning from him. So after Tommy led Kirtland to the 2018 state championship, Liam took over the reins of the quarterback position the following year.

"I didn't think we were that similar at all," Tommy said. "Then when I watched him, I told my dad, 'He looks just like me. The way I run, the way I throw ...' It was weird how similar we look out there."

Now the Powers-play is over.

For the first time in four years, next season someone without the last name Powers will pilot the Kirtland offense.

"It's really been fun," Liam said. "Even going to practice every day, the coaches make it fun every single day. We come to compete and get better."

"It's been a great ride."



SUBMITTED

Liam Powers (left) and his brother Tommy show off four of the five state championship rings they've won as Kirtland's starting quarterbacks. The brothers are a combined 41-0 as the quarterback at Kirtland, Tommy 15-0 in 2018 and Liam 26-0 over the past two seasons.



## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

# Hewitt reflects on Chardon's championship season

By Mitch Hewitt

Chardon Football Coach

In some ways, I believe the 2020 season didn't happen by accident.

As a person of faith, I believe the challenges were by design. The tests were by design.

We won our first state championship in 26 years. When I look back at 2020, I knew the game wasn't going to be a blowout. It couldn't be.

The championship game was a culmination and summary of what 2020 was. Constant opportunities to give up.

I don't know how many teams down 14 with six to go win. I'd love to know that stat, but we did that. Without faith, hope and love, that doesn't happen. It's kids who really had love for each other to do what we did this year.

Here are a few things that will stick out to me for years to come:

March 13th, the last workout on the field: To me, I thought that was the start of 15 days off to slow the coronavirus curve. I thought it would be a few weeks of working out on our own "we'll see you in two weeks." It didn't turn out that way.

Push-up challenge on a random day: We tried to do things to compete at a high level and challenge each other as a team. We all competed to see who could do the most pushups when we were not allowed to work out together. The coaches were involved, too. It was fun.

The recruitment of four very talented players: Elliot Tyminsky, Blake Barker, Nathan Tager and Matt Kloski. We literally don't win a state championship if those guys don't come out to play. Elliot would have been a

starter on any normal year. Blake came back out after a few years off. Nathan, our kicker, was out for the first time. Matt Kloski, our starting left tackle. Without those guys, we don't win it.

Week 1 vs. North kickoff got pushed back because of lightning: That was right on par for 2020. A constant need to adapt. I think Eastlake North spent an hour on the buses because they weren't allowed to use locker rooms. Yeah, leave everyone on the bus — that makes sense.

Being the top seed in Region 9 and being able to host all playoff games in the region: I don't think there was ever a more important year to be a top seed. Being able to host a regional final was incredible. Canfield is a hike. New Philadelphia is a hike. Those are hour-long bus rides. Being able to play home games throughout was a big deal.

The Geneva playoff game being postponed a day: Classic 2020 right there. It was storming and the start was pushed back. Me and Coach Mysick drove to Walmart — people must have thought they were seeing things — and were buying towels, bagels, pretzels, Gatorade for the kids. Then the game got postponed to Saturday. It was crazy.

State championship game gets moved to Massillon 48 hours before kickoff: Again, the theme of 2020 — adapt and overcome. This move was a gift not having to drive to Columbus to play. When you think about it, moving the state championship games 24 hours before they're scheduled to be played, it's hard to comprehend. But then it's like, 'Yeah, it's 2020. Figures.'

The state championship game experience: I think any coach would tell you

that it can be challenging gauging the quality of your opponent, but we knew as a staff we were gonna have our hands full with DeSales.

The word out of Columbus was that this was their best team in a decade and what they did well was going to give us challenges. Because of what we saw on film and the size of their players we knew it was gonna be a last-possession type of game.

As we pulled into Massillon, we were just finishing up watching the 1994 state championship game that was also played at Massillon. Despite knowing how dominant DeSales was, we knew as a staff what we had in our players and their determination to finish the mission.

As DeSales lined up to kick the game-tying field goal in double OT, I just walked the opposite direction praying, waiting to hear from our crowd if we were indeed state champs. As soon as I heard the roar of our crowd, I fell to my knees in thanks.

I remember Coach V (Rob Vujaklija) picking me up and from that point the celebration with our players and staff was in full-out embrace. It was extra special embracing with my wife who for 22 years has cheered me on as both a player and now as a coach and she knows all the highs and lows associated with coaching. Fortunately for her, she got my hugs when I was still dry. For the third week in a row, the kids got me with water and this was a direct shot that got Dr. Leone pretty good as well.

At the end of the day, my staff was the same, and coached the same as it has for 10 years. The players deserve all the credit in the world.



PAUL DICICCO - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Chardon football coach Mitch Hewitt gets doused with the water bucket after the Hilltoppers' state championship win over Columbus DeSales.

Next year when we are trying to replace 26 seniors and we as coaches might not look as smart as we did this past year, but I can assure you we will be coach-

ing the same.

Thanksgiving came at the perfect time to be thankful and also a chance to get some much-needed rest. This year will go down

as a really hard year, but I am glad we provided a few weeks of unity and joy for those in the community and for current and past Hilltoppers.

## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

# Kirtland dominates Ironton for sixth state championship

By Chris Lillstrung

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**MASSILLON** » Each digit on that Route 306 sign where Kirtland resides carried particularly poignant meaning Nov. 21 after the Division V state final against Ironton.

The three stands for the consecutive state titles the Hornets have now amassed.

The zero stands for the perfection along the way in 2020, as in an unbeaten run with a shutout to punctuate it.

And the six stands for the state championships that now reside in the heart of Lake County, as one of the standard bearers for small-school football in Ohio.

Kirtland took firm control in the third quarter, getting a 17-yard touchdown run from Mason Sullivan, a 50-yard TD reception from Gage Sullivan and an eight-yard scoring jaunt from Anthony DeMarco to blow open a 38-0 win Nov. 21 at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium in Massillon.

"I mean, it's awesome," said linebacker Mason Rus, who helped key a dominant defensive performance. "We prepared, and we've been working since last summer after (the 2019 state final, also against Ironton). We've been ready to go."

The Hornets are the 11th



Kirtland's Mason Sullivan, center, celebrates with linemen Kiki Grman (50) and T.J. Green (52) after a touchdown in the Division V state final Nov. 21 against Ironton.

program all-time in Ohio to win six state titles on the gridiron.

Coach Tiger LaVerde

couldn't help but marvel at the totality of the defensive shutdown against a squad paced by Ohio State recruit

and two-way stalwart Reid Carrico.

"Look at that," LaVerde said, staring at the south

scoreboard with final game statistics. "They had 13 passing yards?"

Indeed the Tigers did,

along with 45 yards on the ground and three first downs.

It spoke volumes of the totality with which Kirtland operated.

"(Defensive coordinator) Ryan Beeler did a great job," LaVerde said. "He had these guys ready. We had a great week of preparation, and what they did in the off-season gets them ready to face a team with size and strength like (Ironton). I am so proud of the defense and Coach Beeler and what these kids did in the off-season, and what Ray Sullivan does in the weight room is the reason we were able to hold them like we did."

What appeared to be a tight title tilt, with Kirtland leading, 10-0, at half-time, turned anything but in the second half.

Mason Sullivan, in a balance and yards-after-contact clinic, scored on a 17-yard run early in the third as the Hornets opened a 17-0 advantage.

"Mason had a ridiculous run," LaVerde said. "I think he put his hand down about five times on that run. It was an incredibly athletic run."

On Ironton's next possession, Rus jarred the ball loose for his second forced fumble of the afternoon, which was recovered by Nick Schwartz.

**KIRTLAND** » PAGE 11

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# Kirtland

FROM PAGE 10

Kirtland went for the proverbial dagger, as Mason Sullivan floated an option pass down the right side for Gage Sullivan, who got behind the secondary for a 50-yard TD reception and a 24-0 Hornets' lead.

"Even if we give them a 10-yard play, we've just got to get back on the line and shut them down," Rus said. "Everybody started to get a little more confident (in the third quarter) and comfortable in the game. And I think that's when we really started to roll on offense and defense."

"We just had to take on blocks and follow (Carrico) wherever he was. Carrico is a good football player. We just had to hold them. We did a great job on defense."

DeMarco found paydirt on an eight-yard run late in the third, and the rout was on.

Kirtland took a 10-0 lead into the locker room.

Mario Rodin opened the Hornets' account with a 30-yard field goal with 1:32 left in the first quarter.

After forcing an Ironton punt, Kirtland embarked on a 14-play march. The key play came on a 25-yard pass from Powers to Joey Grazia that was initially ruled incomplete, as Grazia was deemed out of bounds.

But with instant replay available for state finals,



PAUL DICICCO — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Kirtland's Mason Sullivan keeps his balance amid a 17-yard TD run during the third quarter Nov. 21 of the Division V state final against Ironton in Massillon.

the call was reviewed and overturned, with Grazia's toe drag keeping the reception in bounds.

"I mean, I didn't really realize where I was on the sideline," Grazia said. "I

wound up making a play and got a toe down. They called me out of bounds, I saw the replay and I was like, 'I was in,' and they reversed it. I did know. (A photographer) had a cool

picture and zoomed into it. My foot was in, and they reversed the call."

Four plays later, Powers punched it in from the 1 to punctuate a 76-yard drive.

From there, it was all

Kirtland in pursuit of history.

And at this juncture, every digit on that Route 306 might as well be golden, because they all carry significance.

"All the hard work you put in the past four years, the summer days out in the heat ..." Grazia said. "It's been huge. It's been great. To go out like this, there is no better feeling."



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## HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

# Chardon reaches hilltop once again

By Chris Lillstrung

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@CLillstrungNH on Twitter

**MASSILLON »** The peak seemed out of sight for these Hilltoppers.

Then Chardon, improbably, reached the zenith anyway Nov. 21 in the Division III state championship game against Columbus DeSales in Massillon.

The Hilltoppers rallied from two touchdowns back in the fourth to force overtime, Nathan Tager kicked a 33-yard field goal in double OT and DeSales had a field-goal attempt go wide left as Chardon recorded a pulse-pounding 31-28 win.

For the first time since 1994, an immortalized autumn in the capital of the snowbelt, the Hilltoppers are state champions on the gridiron.

"You know, it's unbelievable," Chardon quarterback Drew Fetchik said. "I told my guys, 'We've got to stay level.' We weren't going to quit on this community and this team.

"We stayed level, and we did it. We won it, and I am just so grateful to bring this title back to Chardon."

In the fourth and under eight minutes to go, trailing, 28-14, Chardon faced a fourth-and-goal from the DeSales 14. The Hilltoppers

went for a hook-and-lateral, but the receiver was ruled down before the lateral was made.

Chardon forced a quick punt. For the second time on the evening, a Fetchik connection with Blake Barker proved fruitful. The signal-caller found his fellow senior for a 36-yard TD to pull within 28-21 with 6:09 left.

The Hilltoppers forced a three-and-out, including a third-down TFL by Barker, to get the ball back.

Chardon, which until this game had not trailed all season, marched 91 yards to tie it at 28. Brady Toth hauled in a 47-yard reception after an initial tip of the pass as it was coming in, and Alex McDonald had a 34-yard grab to the 10. Evan Ash went in from the 9 two plays later to make it 28-all with 2:13 to go.

"We were down one or two touchdowns, so we knew we had to throw," Fetchik said. "It's just a testament to the coaches for enhancing the passing game. Because we knew we had to beat the better teams by throwing. It's what we practiced — and we're state champions."

The teams traded blocked field goals in the first overtime, the first coming from the Hilltoppers' Trey Liebhardt.

In the second OT, Tager was true from 33 yards out with room to spare.

Chardon bore down on defense from there. DeSales' Quintell Quinn, who had 216 yards and three TDs on 28 carries in a yeoman's performance, ran for two yards on first down. Myles Mendezsoon stacked Quinn for a two-yard loss back to the 20, and a pass fell incomplete in the back of the end zone on third down.

DeSales went for a tying field goal, but it sailed wide left into the cool autumn night — allowing the 2020 Hilltoppers to traverse into school and local lore for all time.

"It's what I've seen all season long," Chardon coach Mitch Hewitt said of his squad's resiliency. "It's what I saw starting back in June. It's what I knew was going to be the case in June. And I couldn't be more proud for these kids and this community. For a brief moment in time, we got to put all our worries and fears away and celebrate together. And it's neat to see."

Chardon found itself in a 14-14 game early in the third, after Fetchik connected with Barker on a well-executed screen for a 63-yard TD. But a key sequence swung the tide.

**CHARDON » PAGE 13**



PAUL DICICCO - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Chardon coach Mitch Hewitt is doused after the Hilltoppers' 31-28 double-overtime win over Columbus DeSales in the Division III state final Nov. 21 in Massillon.

*Congratulations*  
**Chardon**  
**Hilltoppers!**

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# Chardon

FROM PAGE 12

The Hilltoppers forced a punt and went for a half-back option on their first play, which was intercepted.

On the next play, Quinn scored on a 60-yard run to open a 21-14 Stallions advantage.

Later in the quarter, following a Hilltoppers' turnover on downs, Jordan Johnson (six catches, 145 yards) made two pivotal catches for DeSales. The first was for a 32-yard first-down completion, and the other came on a 31-yard TD. The latter was a tremendous grab in traffic along the sidelines.

Just when the peak seemed out of sight, the Hilltoppers claimed it in the end.

The last time Chardon was in a state final, heart-break struck when Lebanon workhorse Kelton Lindsay took a hook-and-lateral to the end zone for a TD as the Hilltoppers fell, 27-21, dropping to his knees and raising his arms to the sky a la Deion Sanders as he crossed the goal line.

Twenty-two falls later, as the peak seemed unreachable, Chardon reigned in prime time.

"I'm biased, but it's a special community," Hewitt said. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be. With all the things we've gone through — and this goes



PAUL DICICCO - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Chardon's Vince Ferrante reacts during the Division III state final on Nov. 21 in Massillon.

for everyone. It's everyone minutes, there's a slice of communities coming together, "I haven't seen this many nine months. I'm grateful to be a small part of it." hugs and smiles in the last

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# Hornets, Hilltoppers have a day

Kirtland, Chardon cash in on Nov. 21 with D-V, D-III state championship victories



PAUL DICICCO — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Kirtland's Joey Grazia makes a first-down catch along with sideline Nov. 21 during the Division V state final against Ironton at Massillon. It was initially ruled incomplete before being overturned by replay review.



PAUL DICICCO — FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

The Chardon football shows off its newest hardware — the Division III state championship trophy.

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## Chardon Hilltoppers» 2020 statistics

By John Kampf

*jkampf@news-herald.com*  
@NHPreps on Twitter

### SCHEDULE

Chardon 42, North 7  
Chardon 50, South 0  
Chardon 37, Kenston 6  
Chardon 35, Riverside 7  
Chardon 35, Mayfield 14  
Chardon 55, Brush 7  
Chardon 49, Howland 14  
Chardon 57, Geneva 13  
Chardon 3, New Philadelphia 0  
Chardon 38, Canfield 6  
Chardon 47, Tiffin Columbian 7  
Chardon 31, Col. DeSales 28 (2 OT)

### STATISTICS

#### PASSING

Name	Comp-Att	Yards	TDs	Int
Drew Fetchik	53-93	1,089	12	3

#### RUSHING

Name	Attempts	Yards	TDs
James Pettyjohn	141	1,589	20
Drew Fetchik	147	750	14
Sean Carr	79	420	7
Evan Ash	36	262	4
Elliot Tyminski	16	132	0

#### RECEIVING

Name	Rec.	Yards	TD
James Pettyjohn	12	190	1
Brady Toth	9	217	1
Blake Barker	7	204	4
Alex McDonald	6	198	2
Sean Carr	6	125	1
Nathanael Sulka	6	122	3

#### SCORING

Name	TD	2-pt	Points
James Pettyjohn	21	0	26
Drew Fetchik	14	1	86
Sean Carr	8	0	48
Blake Barker	5	0	30
Evan Ash	4	0	24

#### KICKING

Name	XPT	FG	PTS.
Nathan Tager	66-66	5	81

#### TACKLES

Name	Tackles	TFL	Sacks
Vince Ferrante	104	28	5
Cade McDevitt	82	13	1
Nathanael Sulka	60	2	0
Christian Hall	60	21	7
Myles Mendezsoon	60	23	6
Blake Barker	59	10	1

#### INTERCEPTIONS

Name	Interceptions	PBU
Kevin Doyle	3	12
Nathanael Sulka	3	5
Brady Toth	3	5
Trey Liebhardt	2	13
Cade McDevitt	2	1

#### TEAM STATISTICS

Offense	Defense	Differential
4,689	2,234	2,455



PAUL DICICCO - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Evan Ash of Chardon runs through the Columbus DeSales defense during the state championship game.

## Kirtland Hornets» 2020 statistics

By John Kampf

*jkampf@news-herald.com*  
@NHPreps on Twitter

### SCHEDULE

Kirtland 31, Lake Catholic 15  
Kirtland 35, Shaker Heights 10  
Kirtland 55, Cardinal 0  
Kirtland 58, Grand Valley 0  
Kirtland 27, Solon 7  
Kirtland 42, Akron Manchester 0  
Kirtland 56, Sandy Valley 28  
Kirtland 43, Garaway 6  
Kirtland 49, South Range 35  
Kirtland 39, Tontogany Otsego 13  
Kirtland 38, Ironton 0

### STATISTICS

#### PASSING

Name	Comp-Att	Yards	TDs	Int
Liam Powers	54-80	940	13	2

#### RUSHING

Name	Attempts	Yards	TDs
Mason Sullivan	163	1,475	20
Anthony DeMarco	104	664	8
Liam Powers	64	381	9
Philip LaVerde	31	213	2
Ramon Lescano	24	157	1
Danny Davidson	17	128	1

#### RECEIVING

Name	Rec.	Yards	TD
Gage Sullivan	20	323	6
Joey Grazia	20	32	4
Anthony DeMarco	10	196	2
Danny Davidson	4	142	3

#### SCORING

Name	TD	2-pt	Points
Mason Sullivan	20	2	124
Anthony DeMarco	11	0	66
Liam Powers	9	0	54
Gage Sullivan	6	0	36
Joey Grazia	6	0	30
Danny Davidson	4	0	24

#### KICKING

Name	XPT	FG	PTS.
Mario Rodin	5-52	6-6	70
Nico Pod-Schl	6-6	0	6

#### TACKLES

Name	Tackles	TFL	Sacks
Mason Rus	102	3	5
Carson Andonian	97	7	2
Luke Gogolin	68	4	1
Anthony DeMarco	61	0	0
Joey Grazia	59	3	0
Joseph Coleman	59	6	2
Danny Davidson	56	2	0

#### INTERCEPTIONS

Name	Interceptions	PBU
Joey Grazia	5	25
Anthony DeMarco	3	10
Danny Davidson	1	24
Gage Sullivan	0	11

#### TEAM STATISTICS

Offense	Defense	Differential
4,397	1,888	2,509



PAUL DICICCO - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

Mason Sullivan looks for someone to block as Anthony DeMarco runs for a touchdown for Kirtland in the state championship win over Ironton.



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**Congratulations** to the  
**Kirtland Hornets and Chardon Hilltoppers**  
for winning their respective  
**2020 state football championships!!**

We salute the determination and teamwork that resulted in these victories.

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