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Tigers rock TWHS: CHS ends Highlander run

By: Howard Roden , Assistant Sports Editor



Conroe High School's D.D. Johnson rambles for 45 yards ahead of The Woodlands' Tyler Reno during Friday night's battle at Buddy Moorhead Memorial Stadium. (Staff photo by Jerry Baker)

There was no heart-stopping finish. Nor was there a last-minute controversial call that would have fans on either side arguing for years about the outcome.

No, Conroe High's 35-14 victory over The Woodlands was every bit as dominating as the final score would suggest.

With Draylon Booker, Lou Greenwood and D.D. Johnson each rushing for more than 100 yards, the Tigers football team and their fans on the visitors' side of Buddy Moorhead Memorial Stadium celebrated their first victory over The Woodlands in 11 years.

In addition to eradicating that decade-long dry spell, the Tigers administered the largest margin of victory on the Highlanders since the 1980 season - the third meeting in this 30-year-old series.

As Conroe High players danced and their coaches joyfully embraced during the final seconds of the District 15-5A contest, the victory was particularly satisfying for Tiger head coach Roger Holtkamp. He returned to his alma mater in 2003, seeking to return the program to its previous status.

Although he reached the Class 4A state semifinals while at Oak Ridge, Holtkamp

admitted the win Friday night was an equal achievement.

"I told the guys this was the biggest win I've had," he said. "This is right up there with that season (at Oak Ridge). It's been a long time since Conroe High football has reached this level. There has been a lot of hard work and a lot of sacrifice.

"I'm just proud of these kids and my coaching staff did a great job. It's been a labor of love," he said.

As important as finally breaking The Woodlands' spell, the Tigers (7-0, 2-0) may have upset the balance of power in 15-5A. In recent years, Lufkin has been the dominant force with the Highlanders automatically seeded the second place in the league standings. But The Woodlands (2-5, 1-1) is staring at its first .500 regular season since 1997.

Conroe High is now one of those teams ready to fill the void.

"Two wins (in district) is big. Three wins makes you feel good about the district race," Holtkamp said.

The Tigers were feeling good at halftime with a 21-7 lead. Their mood was even better after they scored on the first two possessions of the third quarter.

Booker, who scored on runs of 1 and 41 in the first quarter, sprung through a wide gap off left tackle for a 33-yard touchdown with 6:41 left in the third quarter. The Woodlands answered with a 10-play, 74-yard drive capped by tailback Tracy Milo's 7-yard run - his second TD of the night.

The Highlanders trailed 28-14 with two minutes in the third quarter. But their hopes of a dramatic comeback were dashed by Lou Greenwood's 67-yard sprint three plays later.

As they had all evening long, the Conroe High blocking corps of Robert McAlister, Allen Woodum, Kyle Bishop, Jordan Wilson and Marcus Fletcher carved open another gap in The Woodlands defense.

Greenwood, missing in action for most of the past month with a knee injury, raced almost untouched to the end zone with 27 seconds before the end of the quarter.

"I thought that was huge," Holtkamp said. "I thought we had a chance, but I needed to know how we would respond after (The Woodlands) scored. We came right back at them."

The Highlanders got inside the Conroe 10 early in the fourth quarter, but the Tiger defense held, forcing a change on downs. But the celebrations really didn't begin until linebacker Jacob Fidge interception a Tyler Eckenrode pass with 3:15 remaining.

When Greenwood gained 10 yards on fourth-and-three at the Highlander 27, and assuring the Tigers would run out the clock, Holtkamp turned to the Conroe High faithful with his arms raised to the evening sky.

"I told everybody I thought we had some special," he said. "It was like a heavyweight fight. Ur kids could have folded their tents anytime, but they kept answering."

D.D. Johnson finished with 111 yards on 12 carries, Greenwood 115 on six and Booker another 115 on 15 trips.

Quarterback Justin Smith completed 7 of 8 passes for 78 yards and a 27-yard toss to Ronald Stine.

Milo gained 147 yards on 21 carries. After throwing for 261 yards last week against Oak Ridge, Eckenrode was under constant pressure by the Tigers and completed 12 of 24 attempts for 154 yards. The senior quarterback was intercepted twice.

Conroe High led 14-7 after completing its first two possessions with touchdown runs of 1 and 41 yards by Booker. It was an eerily similar situation for the Highlanders, who trailed Oak Ridge last week by the same score in the opening minutes.

But while The Woodlands recovered to take a halftime lead in its district opener against Oak Ridge, Conroe High kept applying the pressure. Trying to connect with Alex Tweedy on third-and-eight at the CHS 49, Eckenrode's toss sailed over the Highlander receiver and into the arms of Conroe defensive back Mookie Lewis at the Tiger 30.

Johnson, Booker and Greenwood each contributed to the 70-yard march, but it was Smith's precise aerial to Stine pushed the Tigers' lead to 21-7.

Facing second-and-two at the TWHS 27, Smith took advantage of single coverage on Stine. The senior quarterback laid the ball into Stine's hands as he crossed the goal line with defender Logan Rowe right on Stine's hip.

Omar Lira tacked on the point-after with 4:59 before the Highlanders' homecoming activities at halftime.

Eckenrode would have been victimized for another interception on The Woodlands' ensuing series, but the Tigers were flagged for roughing the passer. The Highlanders went on to reach the Conroe High 28, but Rowe was tackled for a two-yard loss on first down, while Tiger lineman Jordan Wilson sacked Eckenrode for a six-yard loss on the next play.

Eckenrode tried to hit Randy Knust in the end zone on fourth-and-13, but the sophomore wide receiver was well-covered by Bookie Sneed. Taking over with 1:27 to play, the Tigers needed just four plays to reach the Highlanders' 24 with nine seconds remaining. But the Highlanders blocked Clayton Noviskie's 41-yard field goal to end the first half.