

## TWHS shows good things in loss to No. 4 Rangers

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TWHS QB Tyler Eckenrode, who threw for 176 yards, lets one fly vs. Smithson Valley. (Photo by Colter Ray)

**ROUND ROCK - The Woodlands did some good things late in its season-opening game against No. 4-ranked Smithson Valley. The Highlanders, however, didn't take care of the football early in the contest and it wound up leading to a 37-25 defeat Friday night at Round Rock ISD Stadium.**

The game, delayed nearly 90 minutes after lightning, thunder and howling winds swept through the stadium just prior to the national anthem, began almost like a replay of The Woodlands' 17-3 loss to Smithson Valley in last year's season-opener, when four critical turnovers cost the Highlanders. A fumble near the goal line, a penalty on a potential scoring play and a bad snap helped the Rangers fashion a 14-0 lead in the first quarter.

Although the Highlanders kept fighting back, they just couldn't get over the hump by game's end.

"We fumbled on the 1-yard line; we score a touchdown and had a block in the back that had no bearing on the play; we snap the ball over the punter's head - those three things right there meant a huge swing," Highlanders head coach Mark Schmid said. "They got points out of the botched snap; we missed the touchdown, they wound up throwing the play-action pass for a touchdown; (on the penalty) we should've scored.

"I told the team that you can't do things against a team like Smithson Valley and expect to win," he said.

Quarterback Tyler Eckenrode completed 10 of 21 passes for 176 yards and two TDs. Both of his scores went to wide receiver Ryan Eastman, who snared three passes for 44 yards.

Tailback Tracy Milo picked up 139 yards and scored twice on 29 totes.

However, Milo's fumble ended The Woodlands' first series at the goal line,

and Smithson Valley answered with a 98-yard scoring pass from David Pawelek to Cody Renken for a 7-0 Rangers lead just four minutes into the game.

A block in the back was called on an apparent 80-yard scoring pass from Eckenrode to Lance Dozier, and another Woodlands fumble a play later gave the ball back to Smithson Valley. The Woodlands defense held, but its next series ended with the ball snapped over the punter's head and near the end zone.

The ensuing 6-yard punt put the Rangers on the Highlanders 32 and Smithson Valley completed a five-play series on Trent Rios' 3-yard run for a 14-0 lead with 2:29 left in the first quarter.

The Woodlands, however, roared back in the second period, as Milo's 8-yard run capped an 11-play series. Herman Watson's interception of Pawelek set up Eckenrode's first TD to Eastman, a 14-yarder that got the Highlanders to within 14-12 after the two-point conversion run failed.

The teams traded scores before Smithson Valley completed a six-play series that ended in Pawelek's 14-yard pass to Renken, putting the Rangers up 27-18 seconds before halftime.

The Rangers defense stiffened in the second half, shutting out both Highlanders' third-quarter series.

The Rangers led 37-18 with 8:02 left. The Woodlands responded with a six-play series that culminated in a 9-yard TD pass from Eckenrode to Eastman that made it 37-25 with 5:44 remaining. Two subsequent Woodlands series fell short, with the ball going to the Rangers on downs with 17 seconds to play.

The Highlanders out-gained the Rangers 375 yards to 342, but both teams managed roughly 80 yards offense in the second half.

"You've got to give The Woodlands credit - they played good defense and offensively there were times when they ran the ball real well," Smithson Valley coach Larry Hill said. "We're pleased to win it because we knew they were a quality opponent and we were

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glad to get out of here with a win."

Schmid told his team he'd like to see it get another shot against the Rangers in the playoffs.

"I was proud of the way they fought back and fought hard and they made some plays when they had to," he said of his team. "But it was not good enough to win. I was really proud of our effort, but we have some things to do on the execution end."

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