

THE COURIER

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Lufkin downs The Woodlands

By Howard Roden

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SHENANDOAH – The coronation was all set to take place, but the Lufkin Panthers were not ready to surrender their crown.

Highlander fans filled their side of Woodforest Bank Stadium on a sunny Saturday afternoon to witness unbeaten and state-ranked The Woodlands all but officially capture its first outright district championship since the 2003 season.

Instead, Lufkin stuffed the Highlanders' high-power offense for a 15-13 triumph that could have TWHS, the Panthers and Conroe High each wind up with a piece of the 14-5A title.

After averaging 40 points and nearly 400 yards in its previous seven wins this season, The Woodlands (7-1, 3-1) finished with 276 total yards against the Panthers – and only 38 of that came on the ground. It was Lufkin's defense, particularly its front four, that frustrated the Highlanders' offense for most of the game.

"Of course, it's disappointing," The Woodlands head coach Mark Schmid said. "We had the opportunity to win the title, but we didn't take care of business.

"It's hard for a team to go undefeated, but I was proud of the way our kids fought. They never gave up," he said.

The Panthers (5-4, 3-1) limited Daniel Lasco, the district's top rusher, to 55 yards on 18 carries. The only time the sophomore reached the end zone was on his 31-yard touchdown catch from quarterback Andy McCloud with 2:03 left in the game.

Ben Pruitt's extra point brought the Highlanders to within the final two-point margin, but they could not recover the ensuing onside kick or force the Panthers into punting.

"We knew it would be a battle," said Chad Lindsay, TWHS' junior guard. "They (the Panthers) came out ready. We just have to regroup and get ourselves ready for next week and the state playoffs."

The Highlanders can secure a bi-district rematch against Spring Westfield with a win at New Caney Friday.

For Lufkin, a win at home against Oak Ridge Friday clinches at least a portion of a fifth consecutive district title since the Panthers were reassigned to the Houston area.

Unlike two weeks ago, when Conroe High's 27-11 defeat of Lufkin brought an end to the Panthers' district win streak at 25 games, the Panthers arrived at Woodforest with a vastly different attitude. Highly recruited senior tackle JaMarkus McFarland and Germad Reed were the leaders of a defensive front that constantly put the heat on McCloud and Lasco, and created problems for a Woodlands offensive line that had been dominant throughout the season.

McCloud (14 of 30 for 238 yards) was sacked five times, including two on consecutive plays that brought the Highlanders' penultimate possession to an end at the Panther 32 with 5:27 remaining..

"We knew we had to play hard if we wanted to at least have a share of the district title," McFarland said. "We did a little more blitzing than we did against Conroe. We weren't ready to give it up."

Lufkin's offense didn't make any spectacular plays. Instead, it avoided the turnovers that plagued the unit most of the season.

"I've been telling people that our kids have never quit this season," Lufkin head coach John Outlaw said. "I knew eventually they would be rewarded, but I didn't know it would be today."

The first half was identical to that during The Woodlands' 34-10 win over Conroe High a week ago; only it was the Highlanders who were saddled with poor field position. Their best opportunity for points came early in the second

quarter when they had first down at the Lufkin six.

The Highlands attempted a 25-yard field goal, but a low snap contributed to the kick hitting the right upright.

Lufkin already had an 8-0 lead, thanks to Tre'von Lewis' nine-yard scamper through the middle of the TWHS defense with 1:01 left in the first quarter. Lewis finished with 108 yards on 16 carries.

Quarterback Jeffrey Claybon then successfully executed the swinging gate for the two-point conversion.

Momentum appeared to have shifted when the Highlanders marched 70 yards in eight plays on their first drive of the third quarter. McCloud connected with Ryan Eastman for 20 yards and Matt Pettitt for 39 along the way.

Eastman's second catch of the drive was an eight-yard touchdown with 7:48 left in the quarter. Hit at the five-yard and spun around, the durable Eastman maintained his balance and reached the end zone.

Lasco was stopped well short of the end zone when the Highlanders attempted a two-point run.

Backed up to their own two on their next possession, the Highlanders appeared to be on the move again, especially when – on third-and-12 at their 27 – Rob Irvine made a sensational leaping catch at midfield that he ran down to the Lufkin 39. But The Woodlands' hopes died on downs.

Lufkin upsets The Woodlands 15-13

By **TODD HVEEM** For the Houston Chronicle

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SHENANDOAH - The Lufkin Panthers, who have one of the most storied football programs in the state, played another memorable game Saturday afternoon, stunning the state's sixth-ranked Woodlands Highlanders 15-13 at Woodforest Bank Stadium.

"All year, we have been working on getting on the bus right," said Lufkin all-state defensive tackle JaMarkus McFarland, who teamed with Germad Reed and Shaquille Teel to dominate The Woodlands' vaunted offensive line.

"We would make mistakes here and there that would kill us," added the 285-pound McFarland. "This time, we had all Friday to focus on this game. We wanted this game. This was like a playoff game."

The Panthers held The Woodlands (7-1, 3-1) to minus-17 yards rushing in the second half and 45 yards rushing for the game.

Running back Daniel Lasco, who came into the game averaging almost 130 yards per contest, managed only 50 yards on 18 carries.

"We knew Lasco was fast," McFarland said. "We just tried to get him before he ever got started."

With 2:03 left in the game, however, Lasco managed to catch a 31-yard touchdown pass from Andy McCloud to cut Lufkin's advantage to 15-13. The Woodlands almost recovered the onside kick, but Lufkin's Tez Hailu emerged from the pile with the ball.

Tre'von Lewis, who finished the game with 101 yards rushing and a touchdown, bulled his way 24 yards on third-and-7 to ice the game.

"Hopefully, we will learn a lesson from this and be a better team for it," The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said. "Any loss at this point is disappointing. But when you play a great team like Lufkin, there is a chance you are going to lose." They have played great defense all year."

Lufkin took an 8-0 lead when Lewis scored on a 9-yard run and quarterback Jeffrey Clabon ran in the two-point conversion from the swinging gate formation with 1:01 left in the first quarter.

The lead stayed at eight until McCloud, who completed 14-of-30 passes for 238 yards, hit Ryan Eastman with an 8-yard scoring strike with 7:48 left in the third period. Eastman, who bounced off two tacklers on the play, finished the game with seven catches for 82 yards.

Clabon, however, put the game out of reach when he scored on a 15-yard run with 8:05 left in the contest. He finished the game with 105 yards passing and 66 on the ground.

Both teams missed key field goals in the first half.

The Woodlands' Ben Pruitt hit the right upright on a 25-yard attempt when he had to rush the kick after a low snap, while Zach Hohman blocked Lufkin's 34-yard field goal attempt late in the second quarter. It was Hohman's second blocked field goal of the season.

"We missed a field goal that would have given us 16 points," admitted Schmid. "It was an opportunity missed. But our kids never backed off and never let up." The Woodlands, Lufkin and Conroe will tie for the district title if they all win next week.

Pack stuns Highlanders, 15-13

By JOSH HAVARD
The Lufkin Daily News

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THE WOODLANDS — With the Lufkin Panthers' district title hopes on life support, the high-powered The Woodlands Highlanders entered Saturday's game looking to deliver the final knockout punch.

Instead it was the Panthers that came out swinging. Lufkin's defense frustrated the No. 6 state-ranked Highlanders for most of the afternoon, and the Pack offense came up with some key plays down the stretch as the Panthers came away with a surprising 15-13 win over the Highlanders at Woodforest Bank Stadium.



Joel Andrews/The Lufkin Daily News

Lufkin Panthers Tre'von Lewis rolls over The Woodlands Highlanders Aaron Charbonnet and touches the end zone to score the first touchdown of the game Saturday afternoon at Woodforest Bank Stadium. The Panthers won 15-13.

The win keeps Lufkin's district hopes alive with one game left in the season. The Panthers would earn at least a share of the district title with a home win over the Oak Ridge War Eagles at home Friday.

"We've had a lot of records broken this year," Lufkin defensive tackle JaMarkus McFarland said. "We had our first district loss in a while, our first time to lose four games. We didn't want to have our streak of district titles broken.

"When people are doubting us, we always seem to play at our best. We all played together today, and this win means a lot to us."

The Woodlands entered the day needing a win to clinch the outright district title, while Lufkin needed wins in the final two weeks to secure a share of the championship.

From the opening kickoff, Lufkin's defense showed it was not ready to relinquish its grasp on the district title.

The Woodlands was held scoreless over the first 20 minutes of the game, and did not string together many successful plays until after Jeffrey Claybon gave Lufkin a 15-6 lead with a 15-yard touchdown run midway through the fourth quarter.

The Highlanders gained just 39 yards on 32 carries for the game. Andy McCloud threw for 236 yards on 14-of-30 passing, although Lufkin's defense pressured him for much of the afternoon.

"You don't get to 7-0 without having a good football team," Outlaw said referring to the Highlanders' undefeated streak that had moved them among the top teams in the state. "We did something that no one has been able to do to them in stopping the run. Then we brought the house on them passing."

Lufkin's offense also came up with several of the plays they have failed to make in several close games this season.

Tre'von Lewis came up with one of his best performances of the season, running for 107 yards and a touchdown on 16 carries. Claybon ran for 63 yards and a touchdown on 16 carries and also threw for 106 yards on 12-of-29 passing.

Quinn Trimble led Lufkin's receivers with 69 yards on five receptions.

"Tre'von had a bad cold all week long," Outlaw said. "We needed him to have a big game for us and he came through. Our offense made some plays when we needed them."

The game was a close one for much of the day as Lufkin built an early 8-0 lead on Lewis' 9-yard touchdown run late in the first quarter.

The game stayed that way until The Woodlands finally got on the board on a Ryan Eastman 8-yard touchdown reception from McCloud. Lufkin kept the lead after stopping the two-point conversion attempt.

Lufkin's defense held The Woodlands on a fourth-down attempt from its own 37 early in the fourth quarter, and the Panthers' offense took advantage with an eight-play, 63-yard drive that finally gave them some breathing room.

Claybon finished the drive with a 15-yard touchdown run to make it 15-6.

The Woodlands made one final effort to get in the game as Daniel Lasco caught a 31-yard touchdown pass from McCloud to make it 15-13 with 2:03 remaining.

But Tez Hailu recovered an onside kick and Lewis came up with a 24-yard run on third and seven, carrying several Highlander defenders for the final 15 yards to put the game away.

"We've had a lot of big wins here in Lufkin," Outlaw said. "But with all these kids have had to go through this year, this was a huge victory for them."

The Panthers' defense dominated in the early going, holding The Woodlands' high-powered offense to no points, 81 yards and five first downs in the first half.

Lufkin's offense turned the ball over twice in the first half but took advantage of a short field for the only score of the half.

After Lufkin took over on The Woodlands' 47, the Panthers needed just four plays to get on the board.

Claybon hit Trimble with a 34-yard pass to move Lufkin to The Woodlands' 7, and Lewis scored from nine yards out two plays later to give Lufkin the lead.

Claybon added the two-point conversion on a run to make the score 8-0.

The Woodlands appeared poised to narrow the gap on its following drive as a 53-yard kickoff return by Brett Felton set the Highlanders up at the Lufkin 40.

The Highlanders drove to the Lufkin 5 before their drive stalled, and The Woodlands clanked a kick off the right upright as Lufkin kept its shutout intact.

The Panthers tried to add to that lead just before the half, but a 34-yard field goal attempt was blocked, leaving Lufkin with an 8-0 lead.

Lufkin (5-4, 3-1) closes out the regular season at 7:30 Friday night at home against Oak Ridge. The Woodlands (7-1, 3-1) plays at New Caney Friday.