

Klein Oak shocks No. 4 The Woodlands 31-14



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By Keith MacPherson

SHENANDOAH – Pressure was the name of the game for Klein Oak Friday night. The Panthers used an aggressive defense to sack The Woodlands quarterback Joseph Schneider seven times and hold running back Daniel Lasco to 14 yards to knock off the No. 4 state-ranked Highlanders 31-14 at Woodforest Bank Stadium in Shenandoah.

Klein Oak (8-3) held The Woodlands to a season-low 36 yards rushing as a team and gave the Highlanders their first loss after a perfect 10-0 regular season. “We had trouble dealing with the pressure at times,” TWHS coach Mark Schmid said. “That made it harder to throw the football. That made it hard on us to do a lot of things.”

The tide turned for Klein Oak when the Panther defensive back Lemon Ford blocked a Highlander punt on The Woodlands’ first drive of the second half.

“We are all human beings and once we get rolling, we can get rolling,” Klein Oak coach David Smith said. “I’m a simple man. When the momentum gets rolling and your chemistry starts feeling good, it will all start feeling good. We got the momentum going and it was a special thing.”

Klein Oak would turn the special teams miscue into a touchdown four plays later on a four-yard catch by E.J. Fatu from Nicky Baratti to give the Panthers a 17-14 lead.

Fatu rumbled over the Highlander defense throughout the game and finished with 112 yards rushing with two touchdowns and his one touchdown reception.

Momentum swung the way of Klein Oak again midway through the third quarter when an errant snapped was lost and Schneider couldn’t recover.

Klein Oak would again turn that turnover into a touchdown – this time a two-yard from Fatu.

“Those two turnovers proved to be big plays in the game,” Schmid said. “It was a huge momentum shift in the game and gave them a two-score advantage. That’s tough to overcome.”

Ford stepped up and made another big play for Klein Oak again in the fourth quarter with a batted ball on a fourth-and-1 deep in Klein Oak territory and The Woodlands trying to make it a one-score game.

“We had a plan against them on fourth down,” Smith said. “We were able to get that tip when our (Ford) up and made a play on the ball.”

The Woodlands got out of the gate for a quick start and scored on a five-play, 80-yard drive that was capped by a 63-yard touchdown pass from Joseph Schneider to Blake Webb in the team’s first possession.

Schneider paced the team going 19 of 29 passing for 255 yards and two touchdowns. The Panthers limited the senior to just 22 yards rushing.

Schneider’s favorite target was Jackson LaPlant who had seven catches for 101 yards.

The Highlanders would strike again early in the second quarter when Schneider found Jeremy Dueitt for 16-yards in the corner of the end zone.

It was all downhill for the Highlanders from there though.

Fatu scored his first touchdown on a one-yard run with a little over a minute left in the second quarter.

“(Our kids) took over the game,” Smith said. “We told them ‘sic’em,’ and they went and did it.”

Baratti put the nail in the coffin for The Woodlands with a 17-yard touchdown scamper with 2:18 left to play in the game.

The loss makes it the sixth consecutive season in which the Highlanders have not gone past at least the area round of the playoffs.

“It’s real tough,” Schmid said. “You set your goals and the kids work so hard to achieve the goals and play deep in the playoffs and to get knocked out in the first round is hard. It’s real hard.”



Panthers pounce

Defense proves the difference for underdogs in upset win over the Highlanders

By **SAM KHAN JR.**
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SHENANDOAH — As he stepped over The Woodlands senior quarterback Joseph Schneider, who lay on the turf after yet another sack by the Klein Oak defense, senior defensive lineman Nathan Hughes strutted toward his sideline, looked toward the visiting crowd and made the shape of an “O” with his hands.

It stands for Klein Oak’s slogan, “Oak ’em.” The Panthers did just that to the Highlanders on Friday night.

In front of a near-capacity crowd, the Panthers upset the fourth-ranked Class 5A team in the state, defeating The Woodlands 31-14 at Woodforest Bank Stadium.

The Panthers (8-3) advance to the Class 5A Division I Region II area round to face Round Rock Stony Point, a 35-10 winner over Austin Westlake, next week.

“It feels wonderful,” senior linebacker Lemon Ford said. “We’ve been the underdog for a good amount of games. We’re just showing the people that we can do it.”

It was a dominant night for Hughes and the rest of the Panthers’ defense, even though it began with The Woodlands moving the ball at will.

The Highlanders (10-1) built a 14-3 second-quarter lead behind the deft passing of Schneider (21-of-31 passing, 291 yards) and his crop of talented receivers led by Blake Webb, Max Ward and Jackson LaPlant. Schneider found Webb twice for scores of 63 and 13 yards for the 11-point lead at the 8:48 mark in the second.

Klein Oak was able to pull close before the half with an E.J. Fatu touchdown run, leaving it only a 14-10 deficit to negotiate at halftime.

Bringing the heat

In the third quarter, Oak turned up the heat, dialing up more pressure on Schneider. It led to a six-sack evening, four of which came in the second half. On one third-quarter series, the Panthers’ front seven tackled Schneider for a loss three straight times. The Highlanders had little success running the ball (28 carries, 33 yards), allowing the Panthers to focus on Schneider.

“They’re so dang good throwing and catching,” Klein Oak coach David Smith said. “So we sent five (pass rushers) and they were picking them all up so I said ‘Bring more.’ ”

Hughes, linebacker Joe Matthews, Ford and defensive lineman John Lewis led the charge.

Two errors by the Highlanders also proved costly. The Panthers blocked a Lance Miles punt on the Woodlands’ first second-half possession, setting up a 4-yard touchdown pass from Nicky Baratti to Fatu for a 17-14 lead. Then, when the Highlanders looked to respond, they fumbled the ball away on a shotgun snap at the Klein Oak 20.

“The blocked punt and the turnover down here when we were going to respond to their score, those were two things that were really tough to overcome,” The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid. “It’s real tough.”

Widening the gap

The Panthers took advantage, going all 80 yards in 10 plays as Fatu (19 carries, 101 yards) scored on a 2-yard run to extend the lead.

The Panthers also came up with two fourth-down stops in the fourth quarter, and Baratti added a touchdown run to put the game away.

The second fourth-down stop, which Hughes punctuated with the team's signature hand gesture, ignited the players and the visiting crowd as time wound down.

"That's what I've been dreaming about," Hughes said. "My senior year, making a stop on fourth down and looking to my family in the stands and throwing up that 'O' letting them know that I do it for them. I couldn't be happier."

sam.khan@chron.com

Highlanders fall in football playoffs

By **GLENN SATTELL CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT**

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Overcoming adversity and the quick development of its quarterback were key factors in The Woodlands completing a second consecutive undefeated regular season.

That streak was brought to an end, however, last week in a 31-14 Class 5A Division I bi-district playoff loss to Klein Oak at Woodforest Stadium.

"The regular season was awesome and the team's resiliency was the reason why (it went undefeated)," Highlanders head coach **Mark Schmid** said.

"We lose our premiere offensive player in the first game and we play five games without him and each week it seemed like a new person was stepping up and making plays."

Daniel Lasco, who is headed to the University of California, played just half the season but still wound up with 837 yards rushing and 12 touchdowns.

"Our quarterback grew up during that time," Schmid said.

Joseph Schneider threw for 2,535 yards and 26 touchdowns this season, completing 61 percent of his passes. **Blake Webb** led the receiving corps with 903 yards and five touchdowns on 47 pass receptions.

"The chemistry and the confidence seemed to grow," Schmid said of the 2010 regular season.

"We had to come back from a 10-point deficit against Strake Jesuit. We were down at halftime versus Hightower. We had a goal-line stand against Tyler Lee up in Tyler to preserve the win.

"A lot of great things happened as far as kids stepping up, making plays, and just the character of the team. And then rolling through district and being undefeated. It was a great season."

But it ended prematurely as Highlanders expectations go.

"Unfortunately, everybody that enters the playoffs will go out a loser except for one team," Schmid said. "That's the bad part about the playoffs. Unfortunately, we went out way before I really wanted to."