

The Woodlands holds off Lufkin comeback



By David Arno

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SHENANDOAH — The Woodlands had to withstand a furious second-half from against Lufkin, but the Highlanders still stand as the class of District 14-5A after their 49-33 win at Woodforest Bank Stadium Friday night. The Woodlands came out and took the advantage early when blue-chip running back Daniel Lasco — in his first game back from an ankle injury that had him sidelined since Week 1 — scored on a five-yard run.

An 18-yard pass from Joseph Schneider to Jackson LaPlant gave the Highlanders a 14-0 lead going into the second quarter. The Woodlands built on that lead a few minutes into the second when Schneider scored on a 10-yard run.

With the Highlanders up 21-0, Lufkin finally got on the board when Nick Scott scored on a three-yard jaunt. A 95-yard return by Max Ward on the ensuing kickoff seemed to take the wind out of the Panthers' sails, however.

But The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid knew that his team's job was far from over. "At halftime, we talked to the kids. We said that Lufkin wasn't going to lay down. Lufkin was going to make a run at us, and we have to be ready," Schmid said. "We have to play to win, and not play to not lose. In the third quarter, I was worried about how we were playing, but we quickly rose and got back on our game."

Lufkin didn't lay down, and quarterback Deauntre Smiley came out of the break and scored on runs of three yards and one yard to pull his team within one touchdown, 28-21. On the next kickoff, the Panthers were awarded a safety on a controversial call when the ball rolled out of the end zone after LaPlant touched it. Lufkin then further cut into the lead on a 32-yard field goal by Luis Garcia with four minutes left in the third quarter.

While that field goal may have put Lufkin within two points of The Woodlands, Schmid thought it was the turning point of the game when the Highlanders went down and Lasco scored his second touchdown of the night on the next possession. "The third quarter was rocky for us. Momentum was clearly in their favor, but we had to ride it out," Schmid said. "We got a big stop toward the end of the third quarter, we got the football back, went down the field and made it a two-score game. And that really broke their momentum."

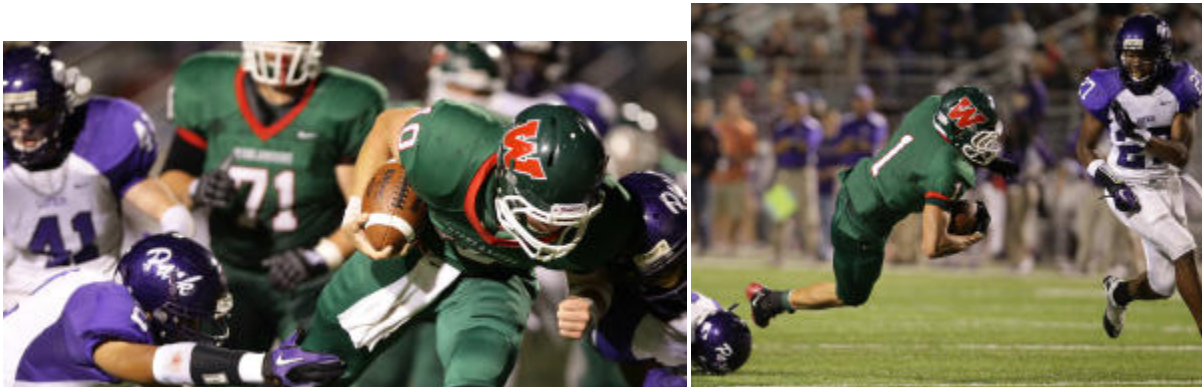
Lufkin scored again on a 20-yard Smiley run at the beginning of the fourth quarter, but a 13-yard run by Schneider put The Woodlands back in control of the game, 42-33

After trading possessions, a 39-yard Lasco run with 1:56 left sealed the game for the Highlanders.

"In the second half, (Lufkin) came out with a plan. They were going to kind of dink the ball down the field with short passes, and they decided that they needed to run the running back some more," Schmid said. "And they put two (touchdowns) on us in a hurry, like in a real hurry. I can't say enough about how we responded, because momentum was clearly going in their direction, and our kids rose up and fought back."

With the win over the Panthers, The Woodlands sits at 6-0 overall and with a perfect 2-0 mark in league play. The defending district champion Highlanders know that the title is theirs to lose.

"Anytime you beat Lufkin, it's a feather in your cap. They're a great football team with great tradition, great players, great coaches," Schmid said. "So anytime you can beat a Lufkin football team, I think that's a special thing, and I think it puts us in the driver seat for playing for a district title."



Highlanders prevail

Lasco returns to run for 161 yards, late TD to fend off Panthers' 2nd-half rally

By JENNY DIAL
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The Woodlands running back Daniel Lasco helped put the game away with a pair 30-yard runs in the fourth quarter.

SHENANDOAH — When Lufkin scored back-to-back touchdowns, a safety and a field goal in the third quarter Friday night, several players for The Woodlands had bad memories float through their minds.

Last season, in the second round of the Class 5A playoffs, the Highlanders lost to Stony Point after allowing them to come back in the second half and that seemed to be happening again.

But instead of watching the game slip away this time, The Woodlands found its footing, stole back the momentum and beat Lufkin 49-33 in front of an estimated 11,000 fans at Woodforest Stadium, as the Highlanders improved to 6-0 on the season and 2-0 in District 14-5A.

"They had all the momentum in the third quarter, but we calmed down and I think a lot of guys made the plays they needed to to keep us from letting it slip away," The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said. "We didn't ever give up and we beat a very good football team tonight."

The Woodlands were a complete team Friday with the return of running back Daniel Lasco, who missed the last five games with an ankle injury. Lasco made big contributions, carrying the ball 21 times for 161 yards and two touchdowns.

"It was great to be back tonight," Lasco said. "Beating Lufkin is a big deal for us and I was glad I got to be a part of it. It was great playing with all these guys tonight because so many guys on the team made big plays to help us win."

Those big plays were crucial as the Highlanders watched a 28-7 halftime lead slip away in the third quarter.

Lufkin scored two touchdowns in a six-minute span, both when quarterback Deauntre Smiley kept the ball, once for 2 yards and another for 1 to get within a touchdown. The Panthers continued to close the gap with a safety and a field goal that quarter, leaving The Woodlands with a 28-26 lead.

The Highlanders responded when quarterback Joseph Schneider scored on a 5-yard run set up by a 35-yard Lasco run to give The Woodlands a 35-26 lead entering the final quarter.

Lufkin started off the fourth quarter with a bang, when Smiley went untouched on a 20-yard run and put the Panthers right back in the hunt.

The Highlanders had a few big plays left, including a fumble recovery by Mitchell Meyers, a 31-yard pass from Schneider to Matt Lee and a Schneider 13-yard keeper to put them up 42-33 in the final minutes of the game. Lasco sealed it up with under two minutes to play with a 39-yard touchdown.

"We remember the Stony Point game last year and didn't want to repeat that," said linebacker Garret Hope, who had two sacks and caused a fumble. "This is a different team this year, and we were able to come up big in the end and win."

This is The Woodlands second straight win over Lufkin.

"It feels good to be 6-0 and to be 2-0 in district with a win over Lufkin," Schmid said. "This is a win that puts us closer to accomplishing some of the things we set out to do this year."



Lufkin can't overcome slow start in 49-33 loss to The Woodlands

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By JOSH HAVARD/The Lufkin Daily News

SHENANDOAH — The Lufkin Panthers went to Woodforest Bank Stadium on Friday night looking to avenge last season's loss to The Woodlands Highlanders.

Instead, a rough first half left the Panthers in a hole they simply couldn't climb out of. Lufkin fell into a 28-7 halftime hole before narrowing that deficit to two at two different points in the second half.

But in the end, Daniel Lasco, Joseph Schneider and the Highlanders' high-powered offense lifted the Highlanders to a 49-33 win, putting The Woodlands on the verge of a second straight district title.

"We did so many bad things in the first half that we just couldn't overcome them," Lufkin head coach John Outlaw said. "They're a good team and they executed beautifully on offense. They'll be a tough team to beat."

Lasco, seeing his first action since the season opener, was outstanding for The Woodlands as he ran for 159 yards and two touchdowns on 21 carries. He also had two receptions for 51 yards. Schneider threw for 171 yards and a touchdown on 9-of-16 passing and also ran for another 65 yards and three touchdowns.

"Lasco was back for them and he had a big game," Outlaw said. "And their quarterback has been good all season."

Meanwhile, Bush Smiley had a big game for Lufkin despite dealing with constant pressure from The Woodlands' defensive line. He threw for 295 yards on 21-of-31 passing with an interception and ran for 67 yards and three touchdowns on 34 carries.

Jamarcus Walker, who has missed the last three games, could make his return after next week's bye. "Bush had to be a one-man show for us," Outlaw said. "Our other running backs are good, but they just don't have the foot speed that Jamarcus has. I don't know if having Jamarcus would have made a difference, but I would like to think it would have."

JaVante Mack had another big night for Lufkin as he caught seven passes for 126 yards. Voshon Richardson had 11 carries for 57 yards.

It was all The Woodlands in the first half as the Highlanders dominated the Panthers in every phase of the game. The Woodlands scored on three straight offensive possessions and also added a 95-yard kickoff return for a touchdown by Max Ward. In addition, Lufkin's offense had a hard time getting anything going other than a 16-play, 77-yard drive.

The Woodlands scored first on its second drive as Lasco had a 5-yard touchdown run. That score was set up by a 49-yard run by Schneider on the first play of the drive. The Highlanders got back on the board five minutes later as Schneider hit Jackson LaPlant for a 17-yard touchdown that made it 14-0 with 1:01 left in the first quarter.

Things got worse for Lufkin on the following drive as Smiley was tackled for a loss of seven yards on a fake punt try to give the Highlanders the ball at the Lufkin 32. Five plays later, Schneider scored on a 10-yard run to give The Woodlands a 21-0 lead.

The Panthers finally got something going on the following drive as it went 77 yards on 16 plays in a drive that took 5:17 off the clock. Lufkin closed the drive as Richardson scored on an option pitch on a fourth-and-goal from the 3-yard line, narrowing the margin to 21-7.

That momentum didn't last long as The Woodlands' Ward took the following kickoff and returned it 95 yards for a score, giving The Woodlands a 28-7 lead.

Smiley was picked off late in the first half, but Travoskey Garrett intercepted a Highlanders' pass near the end zone to keep the deficit at 21 points. That lead quickly evaporated in the second half. Lufkin took the opening kickoff and drove 80 yards on six plays with Smiley scoring on a 2-yard run to narrow the margin to 28-14.

Lufkin then stopped The Woodlands on the next drive and drove for another score as Smiley went in from 1 yard out to cut the margin to 28-21.

A bizarre play gave Lufkin two more points as The Woodlands muffed a punt. It was almost recovered in the end zone by the Panthers, but was ruled a safety as Lufkin pulled to within 28-23 with 6:27 left in the third quarter.

JaBryce Taylor then had a long kickoff return, but Lufkin had to settle for a 31-yard Luis Garcia field goal to make it 28-26.

The Woodlands stopped some of that momentum on the following drive as Schneider scored from 4 yards out to make the score 35-26.

Lufkin wasn't done yet though as Smiley shook off a tackler and scored from 20 yards out to cut the deficit to two for the second time at 35-33. Lufkin then was driving for a potential go-ahead score when Smiley was sacked and lost a fumble on a fourth-down play at midfield.

The Woodlands then finally put the game away as Schneider scored from 14 yards out and Lasco broke free for a 38-yard run to make the final 49-33. Lufkin (6-1, 1-1) will have a bye before hosting Oak Ridge the following week.