

TWHS holds off Tyler Lee

By Chris Parry

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TYLER - Robert E. Lee got the turnover it needed and the chance it desperately wanted to snap its three-game losing skid. It wasn't to be. Trailing 13-6 with two minutes remaining to No. 9 The Woodlands and facing fourth-and-goal from the 6, Joseph Seeber bought as much time as he could before firing a pass into the end zone. It was tipped away before a receiver could catch it. The Woodlands then needed only to run out the clock, and on third-and-five, Highlanders quarterback Joseph Schneider kept it himself and got just enough for a first down.

The 13-7 loss Friday at Trinity Mother Frances Rose Stadium spoiled a gutsy defensive performance by REL. Using a bend but don't break approach against an offense averaging 38 points per game, the Red Raiders gave up 336 yards. That's half the story. Lee's defense twice stopped The Woodlands on fourth down, highlighted by a goal-line stand at its own 1 yard-line just before the half. The Red Raiders also blocked a field goal late in the fourth quarter. The loss drops Lee to 0-4 while The Woodlands is now 4-0.

Seeber finished with 124 yards passing, most of it coming on a 73-yard touchdown pass to Josh McKenzie. It was Lee's first points at home this season. Schneider completed 16 of 22 passes for 215 yards and a touchdown in the loss. His favorite target was Blake Webb, who led all players with seven catches for 129 yards.

The Red Raiders trailed 10-0 late in the third quarter and had been stymied all night by The Woodlands defense until one play swung everything in the home side's favor. Facing third-and-10 from its 27, Seeber fired to McKenzie on a quick out pattern. The Woodlands defensive back tried to jump the route and intercept the pass, but missed. McKenzie caught it, turned upfield and raced 73 yards for a touchdown. Lumi Kaba's extra point made it 10-7 with 3:01 remaining in the third quarter.

The Woodlands used a 41-yard field goal by Ben Pruitt to increase its lead to 13-7 and looked ready to tack on more after driving inside Lee territory. But on third-and-two, Schneider was flushed out of the pocket and it forced his pass to be incomplete. Pruitt, who had also kicked a 34 yarder in the first half, stepped up to try and give The Woodlands a two-score advantage. Reese never allowed it to happen, racing in and diving to block Pruitt's 44-yard attempt.

Lee's offense was stopped again, but the lost fumble by the Woodlands gave the Red Raiders new life inside Highlanders territory. But like how The Woodlands couldn't punch it on four cracks from the 1 in the first half, Lee was denied on four attempts from the 10. The Red Raiders were held without a first down until the closing minutes of the first half and finished with 38 yards total in a frustrating first 24 minutes. In fact, the Woodlands held the ball for nearly 17 out of 24 minutes in the first half.

Lee's defense was its saving grace. The Red Raiders denied the Highlanders on their opening drive, stopping Schneider on fourth and inches. The next two possessions yielded points as The Woodlands went 71 yards in seven plays, but Schneider's pass was broken up in the end zone by Bryson Simon. Pruitt booted a 34-yard field goal for a 3-0 lead.

The Woodlands then marched 77 yards in 15 plays, capped by a 6-yard scoring pass from Schneider to Jayme Taylor. A third-straight three-and-out for Lee's offense looked to be disastrous as REL's punter was pressured into a 7-yard kick. The Woodlands started at Lee's 31 and looked destined to add to its lead. The Red Raiders defense responded with their biggest denial of the season. The Woodlands had first-and-goal from the Lee 1, but were stopped on four consecutive rushing plays. It gave Lee the ball back with 3:40 remaining in the half.

The Red Raiders, starting from their own 1 and needing any kind of spark, got it when Hayden Tomlinson broke through for a 10-yard gain and Lee's first, first down. It occurred with 2:17 remaining in the half. Seeber followed it up with a pass to McKenzie and 12-yard screen pass to LaQuintas Wallace. Lee didn't get past its 30 yard-line, but did enough to run out the clock, leaving it a 10-0 deficit at halftime.