

## The Woodlands blanks College Park, earns 17th straight playoff berth



By Mike Taylor – Saturday, October 29, 2011

SHENANDOAH — The Woodlands' Garrett Hope and his fellow defenders are hell bent on making a historic stand. The Highlanders clinched their 17th consecutive playoff appearance by wiping out College Park 38-0 on Friday night at Woodforest Bank Stadium. It was The Woodlands' third consecutive shutout, only the second time that's happened in program history and the first time since 1981.

Early in the game, as the Cavaliers put together a promising opening drive, the crosstown rivals' No. 11s squared off. Zach Wright, College Park's senior quarterback, lowered his shoulder into Hope, The Woodlands' senior linebacker, at the end of a 16-yard pickup that moved the ball into Highlander territory. "He told me he would be on me all night, and I took it to heart," Hope said. "Nobody's really ever said that to me, so I just toughened up and I was on him all night."

Hope and the Highlanders (8-1, 4-1 in District 14-5A) turned up the pressure. Lane LeBouef broke up a pass, Wright was stopped after a gain of 4 yards, and then he was dropped for a 4-yard loss.

The Cavs (6-3, 3-2) punted, and The Woodlands' offense was off to the races. Quarterback Lance Miles completed each of his three passes on the ensuing drive and Randy Cooper ran five times for 45 yards.

Junior wide receiver Houston Brown beat his defender down the seam and reeled in a 45-yard scoring strike from Miles.

It was all the Highlanders needed. They held College Park to 126 yards of total offense, forced and recovered two fumbles and allowed one first down after halftime.

Thomas Adams and Zachary Dunn — on a muffed punt — recovered the loose balls and Hope, linebacker Tyce Johnson and defensive lineman Mitchell Meyers forced their way into the backfield all night.

“Ever since (a 30-10 loss to) Lufkin, we’ve been pretty pissed off,” Hope said. “Our defense is out to get some. It’s only happened once in The Woodlands since 1981, and that was our goal.”

The Woodlands since its only loss at Abe Martin Stadium on Oct. 6 has beaten Oak Ridge (52-0), Kingwood (28-0) and now College Park.

“It’s hard for people to beat you if they don’t score any points,” Highlanders coach Mark Schmid said. “I’m really proud of them. They’re playing great as a unit. We’ve got some guys that play solid every week, and every week we have new kids stepping up and playing well.”

Miles, Cooper and the rest of the offense are playing well too. Miles completed 15 of 20 passes for 231 yards and three touchdowns with one interception while Cooper ran for 75 yards and a pair of scores on 12 carries.

Oklahoma State commit Blake Webb, in his return to action after missing the last two games, made five receptions for 69 yards and touchdowns of 26 and 4 yards.

“The first half, the only thing that stopped us was ourselves on the one turnover, on the interception,” Schmid said. “Every time we had the ball in the first half we put points on the board, and I was real happy to see that. We were efficient. The quarterback threw the ball well, we ran well, the offensive line did a great job.”

And the defense played its pivotal role as its offensive counterparts built a 24-0 halftime lead with 17 second-quarter points.

College Park moved the ball on its first two drives of the game, but came up empty. The Cavs opened the game by marching 43 yards in eight plays to the Highlander 37 before having to punt.

Trailing 7-0, College Park picked up three more first downs to The Woodlands’ 20-yard line. But the Highlander defense stood tall, stopping three consecutive runs for 1 yard, minus-1 yard and 2 yards, respectively.

Ander Gosselin then missed a 35-yard field goal wide left.

“It was huge,” Cavs coach Richard Carson said. “We just lost some momentum there. We stalled out, missed a field goal and then we turned the ball over when we were down there. It was big. They’re real good. They’re a good football team. They’re big and physical and they run well, and they took advantage of our mistakes.”

The Cavs gained 75 yards on 13 plays over their first two possessions, but lost a fumble and had two three-and-outs before a four-play, 10-yard drive of 1 minute, 39 seconds was cut short by the halftime break.

“I think with what they do offensively with their option attack, it takes a while for you to get adjusted to it,” Schmid said, “because there’s nothing we can do during the week that can simulate the speed and the efficiency of what they do.”

The Woodlands will aim for an unprecedented four straight shutouts in next week's regular season finale at Conroe (2-7, 2-3). In beating their new rival for the fifth time in six tries Friday night, the Highlanders also eliminated from postseason contention their old rival, the Tigers.

"I'll just take my hat off to them," Carson said. "They coached a good game, they played a good game, their kids played hard. They were fighting to get a playoff spot and they came out and played like it. We didn't take advantage of some things early. Would it have been different? I don't know, but I'd sure have felt better about it if we had done what we needed to do."

College Park's Chris Albores made an outstanding leaping interception of a scrambling Miles near the line of scrimmage after the Highlanders took over following the missed field goal. But two plays later Austin Boudreaux fumbled after picking up 12 yards.

The Woodlands needed only five plays to capitalize, moving 76 yards in 1:52 as Cooper scored on a 12-yard run.

The Highlander defense then buckled down, stymieing the Cavs into two consecutive three and outs. Marshall Bainton kicked a 22-yard field after an eight-play, 47-yard drive before Webb turned a short pass into a 26-yard touchdown and 24-0 lead with 1:39 to go before halftime.

The Highlanders had taken over at the College Park 32 after pushing the Cavs back to their own 2-yard line. A running play didn't pick up anything, but Webb caught one 6-yard pass and then sped through the defense for the score on the next play.

The Woodlands opened the second half with two punts, but Dunn recovered a fumble after the second one. Two plays later, Cooper ran in from 6 yards out.

The Highlanders forced another punt, and Webb grabbed his second touchdown reception from Miles on a back-shoulder throw along the sideline. Cooper Woodyard ran four times for 28 yards, and Miles completed all three of his passes for 45 yards on the eight-play, 81-yard march.

College Park closes the regular season against Lufkin (8-1, 5-0) on Friday at The Bank.

"We're definitely playing some playoff teams," Carson said. "Probably the negative part of them back to back is it's going to be pretty physical back to back. Not that the other teams that we've played are not, but both teams are very physical. As far as playoff speed and playoff intensity, it's going to be good for us."