

The Woodlands rolls by Mesquite into Class 5A Division I quarterfinals



Saturday, November 26, 2011

By Keith MacPherson

WACO – If last week was about getting a monkey off its back, this week was about making history for The Woodlands.

The Highlanders became just the third team in school history to reach the fourth round of the UIL football playoffs with a 24-6 win over Mesquite in the Region II-5A regional round at Waco ISD Stadium on Saturday.

“It’s an exciting win,” said The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid, who was showered in Gatorade after the victory. “They are always going to be exciting when you get this far but I thought we played well all around.”

The Woodlands (12-1) will take on Dallas Skyline back at Waco ISD Stadium at 4 p.m. next Saturday. Skyline beat Klein Oak 42-24.

A steady 30 mile-per-hour wind from the south kept the both offenses on the ground Saturday.

The Highlanders pounded out 229 yards rushing while throwing for a season-low 27 yards on their way to joining the 2000 and 2003 Highlander teams as the only teams from The Woodlands to reach the state quarterfinals.

“We wanted to keep it on the ground today with how the wind was blowing,” Schmid said. “We have a lot of confidence in our offensive line and our run game. We wanted to keep the ball out of their hands as much as possible.”

A week after scoring two touchdowns against Round Rock Westwood in the area round, Cooper Woodyard made it three against Mesquite.

Woodyard scored two 1-yard touchdowns and a 20-yarder as well while running for 30 yards on 11 carries.

Mesquite (7-6) had trouble getting much trouble getting anything going. The Skeeters were held to 11 first downs and 158 yards of total offense.

"We felt like it was going to be a defensive battle with how windy it was," Highlander linebacker Robbie Goldschmidt said. "We wanted to step up and come up big when we had chances and I felt like we did."

Highlander running back Randy Cooper led all rushers with 107 yards on 18 carries. Lance Miles had 52 yards on 11 tries.

"(Our offensive line) was amazing today," Cooper said. "There were holes for me almost every play. It seemed like any time we didn't have a big play, it was just me getting tripped up. They did a great job today."

The Woodlands blocked three kicks on the day – a PAT, a field goal and a punt. The Highlanders also got a season-high 76-yard punt from Garrett Hope.

Bayley Nowak blocked Mesquite punter Brandon Cantu's punt early in the second quarter. Mike Ciaramitaro recovered the block kick at the Mesquite 3 to set up Woodyard's second touchdown.

"Special teams were huge today," Schmid said. "With the wind like it was, I kind of figured that would be the case."

Woodyard would punch it in on a fourth-and-goal from the 1 moments after the blocked punt to make it 14-6 at the time.

Woodyard gashed the Mesquite defense for a 20-yard touchdown with 9:45 left in the second quarter. The score capped a 12 play, 68-yard drive in which the senior converted two fourth-and-1's from the wildcat formation to keep the drive alive.

Mesquite running back Junior Session found the end zone on a 3-yard touchdown run with 3:02 remaining in the first quarter to begin the scoring on the day. Session slipped a defender on a third down on the left side of the offense and the scatback would find pay dirt a step further.

Session finished with 14 carries for 62 yards on the day.

The Woodlands' Mitchell Meyers and Hope both had two sacks in the game. Linebacker Robbie Goldschmidt added another.

Meyers, an Iowa State commit, intercepted a pass two plays into the fourth quarter in what would lead to a 20-yard field goal from Marshall Bainton.

"I was hitting the quarterback on the play and then I look up and see Mitchell Meyers with the ball and was like 'Wow, that's crazy,'" Hope said. "It was a big play for us."

Woodyard punched in his final touchdown on the day with from Skeeters' 1 to cap off an eight-play, 58-yard drive to push the Highlander lead to 24-6.

The Woodlands' offensive lineman Jonathan Huckins made a touchdown saving tackle on a punt return in the third quarter. Mesquite's Dameon Gamblin took a punt from Hope 66 yards up the Highlander sideline before a hustling Huckins could cut him off.

The Highlander D would hold strong after Gamblin's long punt return, forcing a 28-yard field goal attempt that The Woodlands Charlie Warren ended up blocking.

Warren blocked two kicks in the game – the first being the PAT attempt following Session's first quarter touchdown.



ROADBLOCK: The Woodlands shuts down Mesquite in regional semifinals

By DEVIN HASSON, dhasson@acnpapers.com

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WACO--Mesquite had all the answers during the first two weeks of the playoffs in victories over Belton and Garland.

But the Skeeters finally encountered a riddle they could not solve on Saturday--The Woodlands' defense.

Mesquite was held to 158 yards of total offense and the Highlanders scored twice late to pull away for a 24-6 victory in a Class 5A Division I Region II semifinal game at Waco ISD Stadium.

The Woodlands (12-1) advances to the regional championship game, where it will meet the winner of the Skyline/Klein Oak game next week. The Skeeters finish the season with a 7-6 record.

In this the 10th anniversary of the 2001 state championship team--the school district's only football title--Mesquite's playoff run conjured up memories of that team and helped people forget about the last two seasons that featured one win each.

But with strong, swirling winds affecting both teams in the passing game, the Skeeters never could get untracked on offense.

To compound things, the Highlanders won the battle on special teams in resounding fashion, blocking a punt, an extra point and a field goal, resulting in an 11-point swing.

Mesquite actually started strong, taking advantage of the field position battle and they were in good shape midway through the first quarter when The Woodlands was forced to punt into a stiff breeze and they got the ball at the Highlander 32-yard line.

With the help of a fourth-down conversion, the Skeeters moved 32 yards in six plays, with Junior Session, who had 16 carries for 61 yards, scoring from three yards out.

The Woodlands blocked the extra point and Kolbi Brown scooped up the loose ball and was off to the races. But Charles Grant hustled all the way down the field, finally catching Brown at the 2-yard line to prevent the Highlanders from cashing in on the two-point conversion.

Little did Mesquite know at the time, but that would be their final points of the game.

The Woodlands, who only mustered 258 yards of their own, was able to put together their best drive of the game in response to the Skeeter score. The Highlanders took up nearly six minutes in a 12-play, 68-yard drive, capped by a 20-yard touchdown run by Cooper Woodyard.

The Woodlands was 1-of-13 on third-down attempts for the game, but converted twice on fourth down to extend the drive. The third-down misery was something Mesquite could relate to, as it failed on all 11 of its attempts.

With both teams struggling to move the ball, the Highlanders were able to provide another spark with special teams and it might have been the biggest play of the game.

With Mesquite backed up in its own territory, Bayley Novak flew in from the left side and blocked a punt. The Woodlands pounced on the loose ball at the 4, and Woodyard converted on fourth down from a yard out to give them a 14-6 lead with 8:31 left in the second quarter.

The Highlanders missed a field goal later in the quarter and the score remained the same through halftime.

Mesquite got a boost of its own from special teams early in the third quarter when Dameon Gamblin had a 63-yard punt return down to The Woodlands' 12-yard line.

But the Skeeters went nowhere from there and the Highlanders blocked the 28-yard field goal attempt.

The defenses continued to dominate, but it was The Woodlands who were able to produce the big turnover on an interception by Mitchell Meyers. That led to a 20-yard field goal by Marshall Bainton that made it 17-6 with 9:19 left in the game.

On the ensuing kickoff, Anthony Canady had a 42-yard return into Highlander territory but the drive stalled and Mesquite turned the ball over on downs.

The Woodlands then put the game away with a 58-yard drive, with Woodyard scoring for the third time, this one on a 1-yard run to make it 24-6 with just 3:56 left.

Mesquite got another good kickoff return by Canady, but once again, was unable to capitalize, as they turned it over on downs.



The Woodlands' defense overwhelms Mesquite in 24-6 win

By STEVEN THOMSON

WACO — Defense and special teams led the way as The Woodlands beat Mesquite 24-6 on Saturday at Waco ISD Stadium.

The Highlanders (12-1) advance to Saturday's 5A Region II Division I finals against Dallas Skyline.

Mesquite (7-6) was averaging over 300 yards per game in its unexpected run to the third round of the playoffs. The Skeeters never approached that form Saturday as they were held to 148 yards.

Mesquite quarterback Alex Cooper began the contest with 2,395 passing yards and 21 touchdowns. Cooper managed just 63 yards against the Highlanders on 7-of-19 passing with one interception.

Highlanders senior [Garrett Hope](#), who moved from linebacker to defensive end at the beginning of the week, sacked Cooper twice and was in the backfield on several other opportunities.

"They wanted me to rush the outside and keep (lineman) [Mitchell Meyers](#) in the middle," Hope said. "We wanted to keep them contained in the middle and keep them off the edges.

"(Mesquite) is an edge rush team and we kept them from doing that. I think we had a good pass rush."

Meyers came up with an interception in the fourth quarter that set the Highlanders up at the [Mesquite 10](#).

"(Cooper) was rolling out and I saw him," Meyers said. "I saw his eyes, read them and pick him off.

"It was team effort with the D-line and the secondary."