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Pinton kicks The Woodlands into third round

By Justin Maskulinski
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SHENANDOAH - Fabrizio Pinton's 55-yard field goal gave The Woodlands a 53-50 win over Round Rock Cedar Ridge on Friday at Woodforest Bank Stadium.

The Highlanders (9-3) and Raiders (9-3) combined for over 1,000 yards of offense and over 100 points, but in the end, it was defense that set up the game-winning drive.

With 55 seconds to play, Ben Langston picked off a Cedar Ridge pass in the end zone. The Highlanders drove 42 yards in 52 seconds, which set up the winning try from Pinton.

"I knew going into the fourth quarter it was going to come down to me," Pinton said. "I just felt it. I've wanted to have that happen this season and I never got it. I was really happy that I got it."

The win sends The Woodlands into the regional semifinal, where they'll face Allen (12-0), a 52-40 winner over Rockwall (8-3) on Friday night. The Highlanders were the last team to defeat the Eagles, back in the 2016 state semifinal. The game will be played at 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 1 at Baylor's McLane Stadium.

On Friday, the opening quarter was the only quarter that didn't see both teams score in double digits. The Highlanders led 7-3 on Casey Sunseri's touchdown pass to PJ Villarreal. Sunseri unofficially finished 13-of-23 for 207 yards. Villarreal caught five passes for 48 yards.

The teams combined to score 34 points in the second quarter.

“Really, we just do what we’ve been doing,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said of adjusting to a shootout. “We don’t change anything - we have to score. That’s the object every time we go out on the field. ... When it’s a shootout like that, when you get a stop, it’s imperative that you get a score the next time.”

Jacoryan Isaac punched in a 1-yard run for the Raiders with 10:42 to go in the half. The scoring drive was kept alive after an encroachment penalty allowed the visitors to convert on fourth down near midfield.

The Woodlands took a 14-9 lead with a 1-play drive. Bryeton Gilford scored on a 70-yard run. Gilford unofficially rushed for 273 yards on 25 carries.

“He’s an incredible talent, he really is,” Rapp said. “Offensive linemen love to block for him and he did a great job. He’s patient when he needs to be, he’s fast when he needs to be. It’s incredible.”

Gilford, who scored four times, gave all the credit to his teammates. “It feels really good, but I can’t take the credit,” he said. “My receivers were blocking good. My o-line was doing a crazy good job tonight. My defense was doing their thing too. It was a hard game and it was a good game.”

A 15-play, 75-yard drive that lasted over six minutes put the Raiders ahead 16-14 with 4:20 to play in the half. Isaac capped it again with a 1-yard leap over the line.

The teams scored in quick succession to end the first half. First, Gilford ran in an 11-yard touchdown out of a heavy package on fourth and inches. Then, just 34 seconds later, Jalen Brown connected with a well-covered MarkAnthony Walker II for a 44-yard score on a reverse flea flicker. Brown completed 17-of-26 passes for 328 yards and two scores. The Raiders led 23-21 at halftime.

The Woodlands took the lead back on Malik Johnson’s 22-yard touchdown run with 6:28 to play in the third quarter. Johnson rushed for 90 yards and two scores on just five carries.

Deuce Vaughn’s 67-yard run gave the lead back to the Raiders. Up 29-28, Cedar Ridge went for two to try to take a 3-point lead, but failed. Vaughn rushed for 53 yards on 15 carries in the first half, but finished with 246 yards and three scores on 27 carries.

“He did great,” Gilford said of his counterpart. “I remember going against (Texas A&M commit) Isaiah Spiller at Klein Collins, I felt the same way. It was a back-and-forth type thing.”

Gilford’s third rushing score of the night, a 43-yard run, gave the Highlanders a 35-29 lead with 3:07 to play in the third quarter. A little more than two minutes later, Vaughn rushed in a 45-yard score to make it 36-35 Raiders.

On the third play of the fourth quarter, Gilford ran in a 1-yard score and a two-point conversion. With 10:28 to play, the Highlanders led 43-36. Just 17 seconds later, Brown connected with Jaylen Ellis for an 81-yard score to tie the game. Ellis caught six passes for 157 yards.

Vaughn scored a 31-yard touchdown with 7:39 to play to make it 50-43 Raiders.

Three empty drives - two from The Woodlands - followed. But Johnson rushed in a 48-yard run with 1:48 to play to get the Highlanders within a point. Pinton’s extra point tied it at 50.

Less than a minute later, Langston picked off a pass in the end zone. “We’re here because of what our defense has done all year long,” Rapp said. “Offensively, we were able to score enough points to get it done and those guys (on defense), when they needed to, they got a stop.”

Then, with three seconds to go, Pinton lined up with the game on his foot. His 55-yard kick sent the Highlanders to the next round. “It means a lot because those boys were tired, especially Bryeton, he was running back and forth down the field,” Pinton said. “The team was doing really good and they were really tired. I didn’t want them to go to overtime. I had to make it for my brothers.”