



The Woodlands holds on for victory over Klein Oak

By Jon Poorman
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SHENANDOAH — The streak lives on.

The Woodlands won its 35th consecutive district game on Friday evening, holding off a previously unbeaten Klein Oak team 21-19 at Woodforest Bank Stadium. The Highlanders' defense made a huge fourth-down stop with 3:15 remaining in the game, and the offense used its steady rushing attack to bleed out the clock.

Bryeton Gilford was the catalyst for The Woodlands offensively, collecting 158 yards on 21 carries. The Highlanders' defense, meanwhile, limited Klein Oak to just 196 yards and held its third straight District 15-6A opponent to under 20 points. The Woodlands (3-2, 3-0) remained tied atop the league standings with Klein Collins (5-0, 3-0), which defeated College Park 30-0 on Thursday night.

The Woodlands, ranked No. 17 in the latest Houston Media High School Football Poll, improved to 11-6-1 all-time against the No. 6 Panthers (4-1, 2-1) with the triumph and has started to gain some steam after dropping its first two contests of the season against Cy-Fair and Lamar.

The last time the Highlanders suffered a district loss was back in 2012 against A&M Consolidated. "How good does it feel? It's great," The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. "I told the kids, I'm so proud of them to be able to come back and fight from being down at halftime two weeks in a row. We can't continue to put ourselves in a hole against good football teams. I just told them that we stopped ourselves. We were the reason why we were down at the end of the first half. Our mistakes, our inability to be consistent on offense, I thought the defense played well, but we were the reason why we were down."

The first quarter was mostly uneventful with both teams struggling to find a rhythm on offense. The fireworks came to life with less than a minute to play in the period, however, as both capitalized on huge scoring plays.

The Panthers' defense put the first points on the board as Re'Lon Jones scooped up a Highlanders fumble and rumbled 60 yards to paydirt with 44 seconds on the clock. That lead stood for just 17 seconds as The Woodlands' Malik Johnson returned the ensuing kickoff 94 yards for a touchdown.

The Panthers found the end zone on their next drive when quarterback Montrell Bolton took a keeper up the left sideline for a 21-yard touchdown. Klein Oak got two more points from its defense just before the intermission when Jadon Wilson made a tackle in the end zone for a safety. That made the score 16-7, Panthers on top.

"I loved it," Klein Oak coach Jason Glenn said of the Panthers' defensive effort. "The defense made a whole bunch of plays. We flew around to the ball, and we didn't quit. With those guys, what's going to happen is, we're going to correct some of the mental mistakes, and we're going to go back to work."

The Highlanders responded on their first drive of the third quarter, marching 69 yards down the field in 11 plays for a touchdown to pull themselves within two points at 16-14. Gilford provided the finishing touches with a 6-yard dash to the left corner of the end zone. The junior tailback had seven runs that went for double-digit yards, including runs of 17 and 16 yards, respectively, on the final drive that iced the win.

"Bryeton is a tremendous talent," Rapp said. "We knew from last year what we had coming back. The linemen, the receivers, just the scheme — the coaches did a great job of getting everybody lined up where they're supposed to be, and he is a phenomenal talent, he really is. It's great to have him."

The Woodlands took its first lead of the game later in the third quarter when Cole Dodson hauled in a short pass from Casey Sunseri and rolled 24 yards for the touchdown and the 21-16 advantage.

Klein Oak cut into its deficit early in the fourth quarter with a 40-yard field goal from Seth Morgan. That was all the Panthers would get, however as the Highlanders made just enough plays to hold on for the victory.

Klein Oak will take on Klein Collins next Friday night at Memorial Stadium. The Woodlands, meanwhile, will be at the same venue at 6 p.m. on Saturday for a road game against Klein Cain.

“They have a great team, first of all,” Glenn said of The Woodlands. “They have some big offensive linemen. What they wanted to do was exactly what they did. They want to wear us down a little bit, and they started to run the ball on us a little bit. On offense, we can’t shoot ourselves in the foot with costly penalties and mental mistakes. So we’re going to come back next week, and we’re going to be ready to go.”