

The Woodlands stops Kingwood, wins outright 16-6A title

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By Keith MacPherson

SHENANDOAH – Kingwood gave The Woodlands its best punch. In the end, though, it wasn't enough.

The Highlanders topped the Mustangs 35-27 to clinch an outright District 16-6A championship and eliminate Kingwood from playoff contention in the process at the game at Woodforest Bank Stadium.

"We talked to the kids all week about how this would be a playoff game for Kingwood," The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said. "We knew that we were going to have to come in here and counter their punches. I told the kids after the game that this was like a playoff game. The kids on their side knew that their season was hanging on every play and they played like it."

The Woodlands (9-1, 6-0) made the most of its opportunities on the night, scoring its 35 points despite only having six offensive possessions. The Highlanders move on to play Klein Oak at Klein Memorial Stadium at 7 p.m. Friday in the Region II-6A Division I bi-district playoffs.

Highlander quarterback Matt Bonaguidi paced The Woodlands with 151 yards on 7 of 12 passing for two touchdowns while also running for 68 yards on three carries, including a 61-yard touchdown late in the third quarter that put the Highlanders up 35-20.

"I thought we were very efficient on offense," Schmid said. "We didn't have the ball often but we had some one-play scoring drives and short scoring drives in terms plays run. You would like to take more time off the clock but you would rather put the points on the board."

Kingwood (3-7, 2-4) had its best offensive performance of the year, putting up 27 points and 415 yards of total offense – the most of any team against the Highlanders this season.

The Mustangs used a steady run game and the play-action pass to sustain long drives.

"We had a really good week of practice this week and we played like it," Kingwood coach Barry Campbell said. "We played a really good game. They are a good team and they are going to make some plays. They took advantage of some mistakes that we made and it cost us."

The Woodlands' A.J. Mason stepped in front of a Kingwood pass and returned it 37 yards for a touchdown to put the Highlanders ahead 21-7 with 11:51 in the second quarter.

Kingwood would fight back to pull within 21-19 when quarterback Randall Graves found Chandler Teeters for a 3-yard touchdown as time expired in the first half.

That was the first of two touchdowns for Teeters, who also caught a 54-yard scoring toss on the first play of the fourth quarter off of a play action pass.

"We've played Cy-Fair and Katy, who are both play-action teams," Schmid said. "We've seen it. There were some things tonight that we need to be better at. I think sometimes you have to see it in a game to figure those things out."

Graves finished 14 of 26 for 200 yards with three touchdowns and a pair of interceptions. Teeters had three grabs for 108 yards.

After Kingwood's Sewo Olonilua scored on the game's opening possession, The Woodlands answered with back-to-back touchdowns on the arm of Bougandi to take a 14-7 lead with 35 seconds left in the first quarter.

Bougandi found Chris Bell on a 67-yard pass midway through the first quarter and then James Toups on a 20-yard corner route for a score to take the seven-point first quarter lead.

Graves started the Kingwood comeback attempt by hitting Daniel Giannavola on a 12-yard touchdown pass with 4:02 left in the second quarter. That cut The Woodlands' lead to 21-13.

Highlander senior running back Patrick Carr had 81 yards on 14 carries. He helped The Woodlands regain momentum in the second half by scoring a 7-yard touchdown on the Highlanders first drive of the third quarter.

"I thought our offensive line did a pretty good job," Schmid said. "We were able to make plays when we needed to."



Highlanders outlast Mustangs to take District 16-6A title

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SHENANDOAH, Texas -- Matt Bonaguidi did everything but sell popcorn on Saturday afternoon at Woodforest Bank Stadium. And he probably would have done that if the vendors would have let him.

Bonaguidi, who started the season under extreme scrutiny after The Woodlands was shut out by Cy-Fair 9-0, passed for 151 yards and two touchdowns, rushed for 68 yards, including a 61-yard touchdown, and had a pair of outstanding pooch punts, including one that went 48 yards before dying at the Kingwood 1-yard line, to lead the Highlanders to a district-title clinching 35-27 victory over the Mustangs.

The Highlanders, who ended the regular season 9-1 overall and a perfect 6-0 in District 16-6A play, will next take on Klein Oak (7-3) in a Region II-5A Division I bi-district playoff game at 7 p.m., Friday at Klein ISD Stadium. The district title was the Highlanders' sixth in the last seven years.

Kingwood, which put up a season-high 27 points and 415 yards against the normally stout Highlanders' defense, finished the season 3-7 overall and 2-4 in the league. Kingwood ended the year tied for fourth with Summer Creek and College Park, but College Park wound up with the league's fourth playoff spot due to the point differential among the three teams.

"Kingwood came out really ready to play," Bonaquidi said after the game. "They made us work for everything we got. They were very physical."

But it could be just the type of game the Highlanders need heading into the second season.

"This team has the potential to go a long ways (in the playoffs)," said Bonaguidi, who is trying to decide between going to an academic school or taking some offers football offers from Division III colleges. "We just have to come out and play our game."

Trailing 35-27, Kingwood took over at its own 14-yard line after Bonaguidi's second pooch punt of the game, one that traveled 26 yards into a stiff wind, then died at the Mustangs' 14-yard line with 8:41 left in the game. The Mustangs, like they had done much of the game, pounded the ball right at the Highlanders on nine of their next 10 plays to earn a first down at The Woodlands' 49. But after an incomplete pass, a three-yard run from Sewo Olinula, and an A.J. Mason deflection, the Mustangs faced fourth-and-seven from the Highlanders' 43 with 2:59 to play.

"It was a big stakes game," Bonaguidi said. "We knew we had to make plays."

After a Mustang timeout, A.J. Schneider dashed Kingwood's playoff hopes as he picked off Randall Graves' pass at his own 30, and returned it 16 yards to the Highlanders 46. From there the Highlanders managed to make a pair of first downs before Bonaguidi took a couple of knees and celebrated his full-time return to the starting lineup with a district championship.

Bonaguidi, who has split time with senior quarterback Chris Andritsos for much of the season, was held out of action much of the last two games due to an ankle injury.

"I just said the heck with it tonight, I am running," said Bonaguidi, who gave the Highlanders a 35-20 lead by scoring on a 61-yard read-option scamper with 2:24 left in the third quarter. "When I saw that hole open up, I didn't even think about my ankle. I just ran."

Kingwood took the opening kickoff and marched 70 yards to grab a quick 7-0 lead. Olinula, who finished the game with 73 yards rushing on 13 carries, rumbled in from 20 yards out to put the visitors in front.

But it took the Highlanders only two plays to strike back as Bonaguidi hit speedy Chris Bell with a 67-yard scoring strike with 6:18 left in the quarter. Two possessions later, Bonaguidi hit James Toups with a 20-yard scoring strike to give the Highlanders a 14-7 lead. Mason, who was a ball hawk all night, then upped the ante at the 11:57 mark of the second quarter as he intercepted Graves' badly overthrown pass and returned it 35 yards to give the Highlanders what looked like a comfortable 21-7 advantage. Mason wound up with two interceptions and a batted down pass.

Graves, who completed 14-of-26 passes for 200 yards, didn't get discouraged. He found Daniel Giannavola with a 12-yard touchdown pass with 4:02 left in the quarater, then hit Chandler Teeters with a 3-yard scoring strike in the back of the end zone on the final play of the first half, to cut the lead to 21-20.

"We had a really good week of practice this week and we played like it," Kingwood coach Barry Campbell told the media after the game. "We played a really good game. They are a good team and they are going to make some plays. They took advantage of some mistakes that we made and it cost us."

The Woodlands' Patrick Carr, who was a decoy much of the first half, got into the act in the second half as he scored on a 7-yard run to cap the Highlanders' 63-yard drive to open the final 24 minutes of play. Carr, who set the Highlanders' touchdown record in last week's 63-14 rout of Summer Creek, finished the game with 81 yards on 14 carries. He now has 50 touchdowns during his illustrious high school career. He also rushed for more than 1,100 yards on the season.

"I knew we were going to score a touchdown on that drive," Bonaguidi said. "We were very determined coming out of the lockerroom."

After Bonaguidi's 61-yard TD run, Kingwood's Graves hit Teeters with a 54-yard touchdown with 11:50 left in the game. Most of Graves' completions came off play-action fakes to Griffin Lay or Olonilua, who also started at free safety. Lay finished the game with 81 yards rushing, while Teeters had three catches for 108 yards. He also had the Highlanders' secondary beat on two or three other occasions, but the football was just off target.

"We've played Cy-Fair and Katy, who are both play-action teams," Highlanders Coach Mark Schmid told the media. "We've seen it. There were some things tonight that we need to be better at. I think sometimes you have to see it in a game to figure those things out."