



Klein Oak stuns 16-6A champion The Woodlands 38-20

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KLEIN — Klein Oak has been great at taking the ball away on defense all season, and Friday night was no exception.

The Panthers came up with seven turnovers — including four fumble recoveries and three interceptions — on their way to a 38-20 upset victory over The Woodlands in a Class 6A Division I bi-district playoff game at Klein Memorial Stadium.

The Highlanders entered the game with only 11 turnovers all season.

Klein Oak (8-3) will now face Austin Bowie in the area round. The Woodlands (9-2), meanwhile, will head into the offseason after having its nine-game winning streak snapped.

“Give Klein Oak credit,” The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said. “They were able to capitalize on our mistakes, but tonight, it was nobody’s fault but ours. When you turn the ball over seven times and three of them go for scores, that is tough for anybody to overcome. We did it to ourselves.”

Despite the early postseason exit, Schmid said he was happy about what his team was able to accomplish this season. The Woodlands captured its second consecutive outright league title with a 6-0 record in District 16-6A.

“I told the kids I was extremely proud of what they were able to accomplish,” Schmid said. “After our first football game at Cy-Fair, shut out 9-0, it would have been hard to convince me that we would win the next nine games. We found ways to do that. That says a lot about the character of the team and what they wanted to do.”

Klein Oak built an early lead thanks to its first forced turnover of the night, a three-yard fumble return by defensive lineman Richard Jones.

Noah Clark crushed quarterback Matt Bonaguidi as he was preparing to throw on the Highlanders’ first play from scrimmage, forcing the ball to fly backwards. Jones took care of the rest to give the Panthers a 7-0 lead with 9:31 on the clock.

The Woodlands was finally able to answer late in the quarter when Bonaguidi hit James Toups down the middle of the field for a 20-yard score. Strong runs of 23 and 16 yards by Patrick Carr set up the touchdown.

The Panthers fired right back, however, traveling 73 yards on nine plays to take a 14-7 lead. Quarterback Jose Blankenship connected with Austin Davis on a 48-yard completion to put Klein Oak deep in Highlander territory. The senior signal caller capped the drive four plays later with a one-yard touchdown run.

Turnovers continued to plague The Woodlands in the second quarter when Klein Oak defensive back Bart Baratti picked up another Highlanders fumble and raced 93 yards for a score.

The Woodlands drove right back down the field on the ensuing possession, but Seth Glenn picked off Bonaguidi's pass to the back of the end zone with 3:25 remaining in the first half.

The Panthers again capitalized on the turnover when Marcus Ripley hit a 26-yard field goal with 15 seconds left in the first half, giving Klein Oak the 24-7 halftime advantage.

"I think we did some uncharacteristic things with ball security and making bad decisions on some throws," Schmid said. "They've done that week in and week out — take the ball away from people — and they did it tonight. That's what good football teams do. They capitalize on other teams' mistakes."

The Highlanders got the ball to start the second half, but Josh Shantz picked off Bonagudi on the Highlanders' second play and raced for a 30-yard touchdown to put his team up 31-7.

Quarterback Chris Andritsos provided The Woodlands with a little bit of a spark on the next possession, connecting with Hunter Moore for a 14-yard score. But Blankenship extended the Panthers' lead again with a 17-yard touchdown run early in the fourth quarter.

Carr, who finished with 138 yards on 20 carries, broke off a 58-yard jaunt with 8:29 remaining to cap the scoring. The senior ball carrier finished his career as the school's all-time leader in rushing yards and touchdowns.

"I was happy to see Patrick bust a long run in his final game with us," Schmid said. "He's been a dynamic player for us and a great leader and teammate. I was happy to see that."



Turnovers doom Highlanders

The Woodlands finishes season 9-2

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SPRING, Texas -- It was simply a case of "Murphy's Law" for The Woodlands Highlanders on Friday night, everything that could go wrong eventually did.

The Highlanders, who had won nine straight football games to enter the Region II-6A Division I playoffs at 9-1 overall and ranked No. 2 in the Houston area, committed seven turnovers in falling to Klein Oak 38-20 at Klein Memorial Stadium.

The win moved the Panthers, who finished third in District 15-6A, to 8-3 overall and into the second round of the Region II-6A Division I playoffs.

The Woodlands, which beat Klein Oak in overtime in the first round of the 2013 playoffs, ended the year 9-2. The Highlanders sandwiched a nine-game winning streak in between losing their first and last games of the 2014 season. But in the playoffs, one loss is all it takes to steal the dream of capturing the school's first-ever state football championship.

The Highlanders, for the first time since Week One, looked vulnerable in last week's 35-27 victory over Kingwood, which won only three games all season. The Mustangs controlled the line of scrimmage for much of the game, something that hadn't happened to the Highlanders since losing to Cy-Fair 9-0 in their season opener.

Klein Oak obviously took a page right out of Kingwood's playbook as it dominated the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball and cruised past the Highlanders.

For the Woodlands, the game, which was played in 45-degree temperatures, took an ominous turn on its third offensive snap as quarterback Matt Bonaguidi was belted in the back as he attempted to throw, and defensive tackle Richard Jones tried to grab the ball, kicked it, and eventually fell on it as he bounded back into the Highlanders' end zone. Marcus Ripley added the point-after and it was 7-0 Klein Oak at the 9:04 mark of the first quarter.

The Highlanders looked like they had shrugged off the miscue when Matt Bonaguidi hit James Toups with a 20-yard scoring strike to knot the game at 7-7 with 1:15 left in the first quarter. But Klein Oak rattled off 17 straight points -- thanks to two Highlander turnovers -- to head into the popcorn break with a commanding 24-7 lead.

After quarterback Jose Blankenship scored on a 1-yard run with 10:31 left in the second quarter, The Woodlands marched to the Klein Oak 10 before the Panthers stripped running back Patrick Carr of the ball and Bart Baratti returned the loose pigskin 88 yards to give the Panthers a 21-7 lead with 6:36 left in the second quarter.

The Woodlands once again looked like it was going to put disaster in the review mirror as it drove from its own 37 to a first-and-goal at the Klein Oak 6. But the Panthers intercepted Bonaguidi's attempted pass to fellow quarterback Chris Andritsos in the end zone to kill the drive with 3:25 left in the quarter. The Panthers then drove from their own 20 to The Woodlands' 9 before Ripley kicked a 26-yard field goal just before the half.

The Highlanders received the kickoff to start the second half, but the Panthers all but ended the contest when Josh Shantz stepped in front of Bonaguidi's attempted quick screen pass and returned it 34 yards for a touchdown to give Klein Oak a commanding 31-7 advantage.

Andritsos came on to replace Bonaguidi on the Highlanders' next possession. And his entrance into the game seemed to inject some life into the club as he drove the team 69 yards in only four plays to cut the lead to 31-14. The touchdown came on a 14-yard scoring strike from Andritsos to Hunter Moore.

The Highlanders forced Klein Oak to punt, but then fumbled the ball back to the Panthers at their own 29-yard line. The Woodlands' defense, which had been getting pushed around for much of the night, stuffed Klein Oak on fourth-and-two to give the offense the ball back at The Woodlands' 20. But the Highlanders were forced to punt it right back to the Panthers three plays later.

The Panthers then put the finishing touches on the victory with a 13-play, 64-yard march. On fourth-and-one from the Highlanders' 16, Blankenship called his own number and ran a mis-direction play into the end zone untouched to give Klein Oak a 38-14 lead.

Carr scored on a 58-yard run on the Highlanders' next possession to cut it to 38-20, but Carr was ruled short on the Highlanders' ensuing two-point try, leaving The Woodlands three scores down with 8:29 left in the game. The Woodlands would get two more cracks at the Panthers on offense, but both drives ended in turnovers as Carr fumbled and Bonaguidi tossed his third interception of the game.

The Highlanders managed 356 total yards to 318 for Klein Oak. But the Panthers did not commit a turnover in the game.

Klein Oak's Jones also was a one-man wrecking ball on defense, coming up with four sacks, a caused fumble and a fumble return for a touchdown.

Derrick Durden rushed for 117 yards for Klein Oak, while Blankenship accounted for 191 yards of total offense, completing 11-of-17 passes for 113 yards and rushing for 78 yards and two scores. Austen Davis also caught six balls for 83 yards.

Carr had 140 yards rushing to pace The Woodlands, while Chris Bell caught seven balls for 102 yards.

Andritsos completed 4-of-10 passes for 80 yards, while Bonaguidi completed 12-of-20 passes for 154 yards.