

THE COURIER

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The Woodlands rolls past rival College Park

By Rob Tate
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SHENANDOAH — The hope for The Woodlands is to continue improving on offense as the season progresses. On Friday night against rival College Park, the Highlanders were steadily trending up in that department.

The Highlanders totaled a season-high in points and were above their scoring average on the year after a 34-7 win over the Cavaliers at Woodforest Bank Stadium in a District 15-6A contest. It's the third straight win for The Woodlands (3-1, 2-0), while College Park (2-2, 0-2) has now dropped two straight.

“As a football team, there’s a lot of things we need to work on, and we challenged the kids last week on a few things,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. “We worked on them a lot this week in practice to be able to come out on short fields and get scores. We’ve got to work on scoring touchdowns, and I think we got a little bit better doing that and just being good at what we do offensively.”

The Woodlands — on a kick return by Peyton Janecek to the 21 and a punt return by Teddy Knox to the 25 — were set up nicely on its first two drives on the night. Both resulted in points.

Senior Malik Johnson had his first of two touchdowns in the half when he grabbed an 11-yard reception on a batted forward jet sweep at the 9:53 mark. "It was really big," Johnson said. "It just felt really good starting out fast."

After College Park punted on its first drive, the Highlanders were stopped in College Park territory and settled for a 38-yard field goal by Fabrizio Pinton at the 5:13 mark to make it 10-0.

"Special teams wasn't strong for us in the first half," College Park coach Lonnie Madison said. "They got set up with two short fields. From what I understand, (The Woodlands) had seven drives and 90 yards of offense in the first half. We just gave them good field position, and it put us behind." Punts went back and forth on five straight drives between the Highlanders and the Cavaliers before the next scoring play.

Johnson caught a 25-yard swing pass from Ben Mills down the left sideline to make it 17-0 with 2:40 left before halftime. The senior Kansas commit missed the first two games of the year due to injury. He made three receptions total for 37 yards on the night.

"It's good to have him back and getting more in tune with what we are doing offensively," Rapp said. "So that's good."

The Highlanders clamped down defensively on College Park in the first half, holding the Cavaliers to 42 yards and four first downs.

The Woodlands had a great defensive stop, followed by offensive sequence early in the third quarter. Carter Doucet scooped up an interception before it hit the turf, setting up the Highlanders at the College Park 21-yard line.

The Woodlands then pulled a play out of its bag of tricks as wide receiver Cody Sims took a jet sweep, stepped back and threw to his left to quarterback Janecek, who rushed it in for a 21-yard touchdown and 24-0 advantage.

"One of the things that our coaches do is come up with trick plays," Rapp explained. "Each of them have a trick play, and we practice them. That was just the play we had on this week."

College Park scored its lone touchdown of the night as time expired in the third quarter. Ty Buckmon, the second signal-caller used on the night for the Cavaliers, found sophomore tight end Cody

Mladenka for an 11-yard touchdown. Mladenka helped set up his own scoring play with a 67-yard reception earlier in the drive.

The Woodlands scored the final 10 points as Pinton made his second field of the night — this time from 36 yards — and Mills scored on an 11-yard run (set up by a 55-yard run he had earlier in the drive) in the fourth quarter.

College Park used three quarterbacks on the night — sophomore Hank Hudson, sophomore Buckmon and senior Camden Farmer. Each brings something different to the table for the Cavaliers. “We’re trying to get some guys in that can make some plays,” Madison said. “I feel like all three are working hard in practice, and we’ll keep giving them a look.”

It’s just a matter of getting points on the board for College Park, which has 24 in the last two weeks after putting up 73 in non-district play. “We just can’t sustain drives,” Madison said. “It’s just some of the issues that we’re having. We can put some drives together, but then we just can’t finish them.”

Mills finished the night throwing for 110 yards and rushing for 75. The Highlanders totaled over 135 yards rushing, but a lot of those came late on behalf of Mills. The team is trying to fill the void of missing Bryeton Gilford, who’s out with an injury, in the backfield.

“As a play caller, it makes it difficult to adjust when you lose a player like that,” Rapp said. “I think we’re still in the process of trying to adjust in making that a better thing for us.”

The Woodlands has now won 12 straight against College Park and is 13-1 all-time in the series. “It was really big,” Johnson said. “These guys are like five minutes away from us. So beating them is like everything to us. It’s a tradition. We’ve got to keep it going.”