

THE COURIER

OF MONTGOMERY  COUNTY



The Woodlands tops Conroe for another key win

By Jon Poorman
Friday, October 18, 2019

SHENANDOAH — Homecoming was a joyous occasion for the Highlanders on Friday evening. The Woodlands kept its foot on the gas pedal in the race for the playoffs with a 31-16 victory over Conroe in a key District 15-6A matchup at Woodforest Bank Stadium.

The Highlanders (5-3, 4-2) have now won 12 consecutive meetings against the Tigers (4-3, 3-2) dating back to the 2007 season. The Woodlands entered the night in fourth place in the league standings, but now the team has pulled one half game ahead of Conroe as it attempts to extend its postseason appearance streak to 25 years. The Highlanders are now 30-11-1 against the Tigers all-time.

“I’m proud of the way they started the game,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. “We’ve talked about having a sense of urgency, and they’ve done that the past two weeks. They’ve really done a good job of coming out and being focused on the game plan, focused on being successful. These games are important to us because we’re trying to ensure we have an opportunity to play in the playoffs. They’ve been really focused, believing in the game plan on both sides of the ball, and it’s been good.”

The Tigers, who were just outside the top 20 of the latest Houston-area media poll, entered the night tied with No. 8 Klein Oak and No. 12 Klein Collins with just one tally in the loss column. Klein Oak (7-1, 5-1) defeated Oak Ridge on Thursday night, and Klein Collins (6-1, 4-1) will tangle with Klein on Saturday evening.

“We didn’t play our best, we didn’t play clean, and you’ve got to take your hats off to a program like The Woodlands,” Conroe coach Cedric Hardeman said. “They do a tremendous job over there. ... We have a great district, and we have certain programs that are the standard. They’ve been successful for a long time, and they’ve been in games where they’ve needed (to win). It’s a growth for a program, and we’re still growing. This is kind of our first atmosphere with a big game, and we didn’t play clean like we needed to. But we’ll be better, and we’ll be OK.”

The Woodlands got the scoring started when quarterback Ben Mills reached paydirt on a 6-yard run to cap the Highlanders’ opening drive. The senior signal-caller led the way for the offense in the first half, rushing for 67 yards and passing for 63.

The Woodlands made the score 10-0 with a 33-yard field goal from Fabrizio Pinton early in the second quarter. Brandon Wheeler found the end zone on a 10-yard run later in the period to put the home team ahead by three scores.

Conroe finally got on the board with 1:50 remaining before halftime as kicker Josue Santos connected on a 37-yard field goal. The Tigers had trouble sustaining drives in the first half and produced 139 yards on just 20 plays. Conroe entered the night with the No. 1 offensive unit in the district, averaging 480 total yards per contest.

The Highlanders’ defense also had two interceptions in the first half and allowed just five completions from Conroe quarterback Christian Pack. The first pick was made by Carter Doucet in the opening frame and ended the first drive for Conroe. The second interception was made by Dylan Binney, which then led to the touchdown run from Wheeler.

“Coach Hardeman and his guys do such a great job,” Rapp said. “Their offense is really high octane — a lot of points, a lot of yards, and they do a lot of really great things. Defensive coaches, our guys, did a great job game planning, and the kids did a great job taking in the game plan and executing it. It was really a great job by those guys because Conroe has a really good offense.”

The Woodlands added to its lead on its first possession of the third quarter as Mills connected with Ben Ferguson for a 19-yard touchdown pass. Conroe eventually found the end zone on a leaping 1-yard score from Pack on the first play of the fourth period, but the Highlanders answered right back as Mills scored on an 18-yard run to put his team ahead 31-9.

Jalen Williams gave the Tigers one last boost with a 54-yard catch-and-run on a screen pass from Pack with seven and a half minutes remaining in the game. That would cap the scoring for Conroe, however, as the Highlanders never gave the ball back after taking over on the ensuing possession. Instead, the running game bled out the clock.

The Woodlands rushed for 302 yards altogether, averaging more than seven yards per carry. Wheeler led the way with 116 yards on 13 attempts, and Mills added 111 on 22 carries. Receiver Teddy Knox chipped in with 72 yards on just four totes.

“The offensive line is probably one of our more experienced groups that we have, and they’re playing really well together,” Rapp said. “The running back corps, they’re still gelling and working, and Ben has done a great job running.”

Pack completed 13 of 24 passes for 191 yards for Conroe. He also added 84 rushing yards on 11 attempts. Williams had two catches for 69 yards, and Michael Phoenix II had six catches for 53. Conroe has three games remaining on its regular-season schedule — at home against defending co-champion Klein Collins, on the road against winless Klein Forest, and at home against eighth-place Oak Ridge. The Woodlands finishes out the regular season on the road against Klein Collins and at home against Klein Forest, respectively.

“Everybody gets enamored with the things that you guys write about — the stats and yards and stuff like that,” Hardeman said. “But the difference between good and average teams and great teams and great programs is that they take care of the things that are not written about — the hidden yardage on special teams, the turnovers and things of that nature. Tackling somebody for a one-yard gain instead of letting them go for a five-yard gain. Those are the yards that add up and are the difference between winning and losing. That’s what we’re learning, and we’ll get there.”