

THE COURIER

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Highlanders can't capitalize on late opportunities, fall to Cy-Fair

By Justin Maskulinski, Staff Writer
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SHENANDOAH — In a battle between two of Greater Houston's strongest programs, defense proved to be the deciding factor Saturday night at Woodforest Bank Stadium

Cy-Fair beat host The Woodlands 17-16, holding the Highlanders to one touchdown and forcing five fumbles. The Bobcats (1-0, No. 6 Greater Houston-area high school media poll) recovered three fumbles on the night. The third, recovered by Lawson Maddings on a fumbled snap with less than a minute to play, sealed the victory over the Highlanders (0-1, No. 8).

"Defense played outstanding," Cy-Fair coach Ed Pustejovsky said. "We had them on the field too much and we can't do that, but I thought the defense responded well and did what they had to do to win the game for us." The Woodlands trailed 17-3 at halftime, then battled back to within one point while keeping the Bobcats off the board in the second half. Turnovers and penalties - primarily of the holding variety - derailed critical second half drives.

“Our mistakes that we did - we have to get better at that,” Highlanders coach Jim Rapp said. “We can control when we fumble. We can work on that. But we can’t control some of those other things that went on. I’m proud of them. I’m not happy with the way things went down today, but at the same time, I’m proud of the way the kids responded.”

Defense ruled the game early as the first four offensive drives ended in punts.

On its third possession of the night, Cy-Fair found the end zone. Carter Cravens connected with Chase Davidson for a 37-yard touchdown with 4:05 to play in the opening quarter.

Cravens finished the game 7-of-16 for 99 yards. LJ Johnson rushed for 100 yards on 25 carries.

Early in the second quarter, The Woodlands began a drive inside the Bobcats’ 30-yard line after Dawson Shepherd recovered a fumble. A holding penalty and a sack prevented the Highlanders from scoring.

Cy-Fair took a 10-0 lead with 1:42 to play in the half when Jake Ruiz capped a 13-play drive with a 44-yard field goal.

The Woodlands found the scoreboard on the next drive. Ben Mills was 3-for-4 for 44 yards on the possession that ended with a 33-yard field goal from Fabrizio Pinton with 41 seconds to play in the half.

Mills was 11-for-19 for 158 yards on the night. Peyton Janecek also took snaps and rushed for 39 yards on nine carries. “They both are weapons and can do some things,” Rapp said. “Peyton’s a little different-style quarterback than what we’ve had in the past and can do some things that Ben can’t, and vice versa. Being able to utilize both of those guys, I think, will be effective for us moving forward.”

Bryeton Gilford led the Highlanders with 86 yards on 16 carries. Kansas commit Malik Johnson was banged up and didn’t play. “Anytime you take away a guy as explosive as Malik, it’s going to effect your football team,” Rapp said. “We have to step up and we had guys that stepped up today and played. I was really proud of how those guys played. Malik’s going to be fine and we’re taking care of him. We’ll need him further down the road. We don’t necessarily need him right this second.”

The Bobcats got into the end zone one more time before halftime, traveling 75 yards on four plays in 30 seconds. Johnson rushed for 41 yards on the drive’s first play, then capped it with a 5-yard rush after Cravens and Jaxson Chrest connected for 29 yards.

The Woodlands found the end zone in its first second-half possession. On third and 14, Mills found Jack Calhoun up the Highlander sideline. Calhoun made an over-the-shoulder grad, lost his defender, and scored. Pinton’s extra point made it 17-10 with 8:29 to play in the third quarter.

A sack by Will Krotee stalled the Bobcats’ next drive, then, with 1:27 to go in the third quarter, Pinton connected on a 33-yard field goal to cut the deficit to four.

Cy-Fair approached the red zone on its next drive, but a fumble recovered by The Woodlands' Dylan Binney ended it. A holding penalty led to a Highlander punt on the ensuing drive.

The Highlanders saw their next drive - which began after Cy-Fair muffed a punt - derailed by holding penalties. Pinton salvaged the drive with a 44-yard field goal that made it a 1-point game with 4:16 to play.

The Woodlands last two drives ended with fumbles in their own territory. The latter began with 38 seconds on the clock after Carter Doucet blocked a 41-yard field goal attempt.

"I thought we played well and I thought we played hard," Pustejovsky said. "There's some things we need to clean up, especially up front on the offensive line - four out of five are new starters. There's a little learning curve there, but I thought we played hard. As long as we do that, we'll continue to improve."

CY-FAIR 17, THE WOODLANDS 16

Cy-Fair 7 10 0 0--17

TWHS 0 3 10 3--16

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

CF—Chase Davidson 37 pass from Carter Cravens (Jake Ruiz kick), 4:05.

Second quarter

CF—Ruiz 44 field goal, 1:42.

TW—Fabrizio Pinton 33 field goal, 0:41.

CF—LJ Johnson 5 run (Ruiz kick), 0:11.

Third quarter

TW—Jack Calhoun 72 pass from Ben Mills (Pinton kick), 8:29.

TW—Pinton 33 field goal, 1:27.

Fourth quarter

TW—Pinton 44 field goal, 4:16.