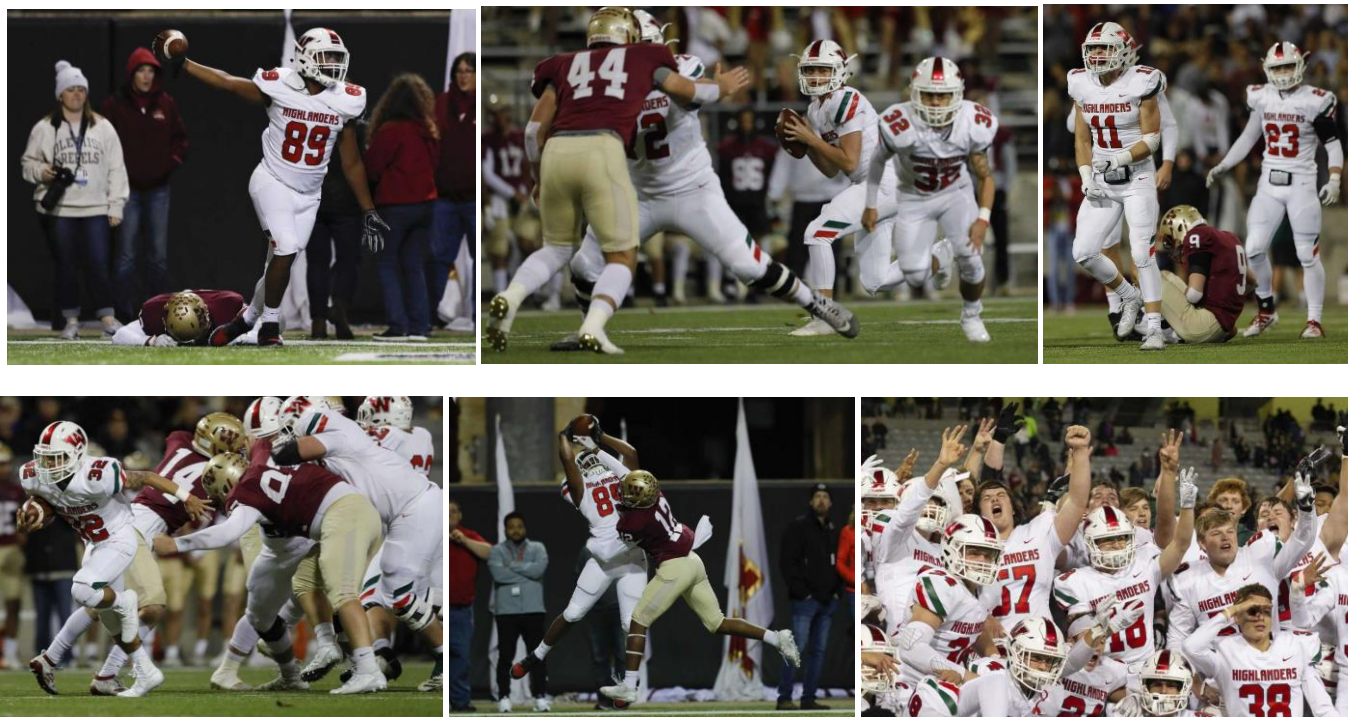


THE COURIER

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The Woodlands edges Cypress Woods in 3OT

By Jon Poorman, Staff Writer
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CYPRESS — The Woodlands simply found a way to get the job done. The Highlanders emerged with a 34-28 triple-overtime victory against Cypress Woods in the Class 6A Division I area playoffs on Friday evening at Cy-Fair FCU Stadium.

The Woodlands went ahead for good on a 12-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Cody Howard to receiver Brenden Lankford-Johnson in the back-right corner of the end zone. The defense then got the stop it needed as cornerback Abb Acuff recovered a Wildcats fumble on the ensuing possession to end the game.

“This football team has so much grit,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. “They’ve overcome so much, and to win a game like this — we were down at halftime, and I told them, ‘All we’re guaranteed is 24 minutes of football, so let’s go get after it.’ I told them right before overtime I lied to them — we’ve got a little more than 24. We had a chance to go win, and we did.”

The Woodlands (8-4) is now headed to the regional semifinals for the fifth time since 2011. The Highlanders (8-4) will face off against Prosper (10-2) next week after the Eagles defeated Mesquite 45-18 on Friday night.

Before the three extra periods, the Highlanders actually had a chance to end the game in regulation. Air Force commit Fabrizio Pinton — who drilled a 55-yard field goal to give The Woodlands a win over Cedar Ridge in the area round last season — lined up for a 45-yard attempt. The kick missed as the clock expired, however, and the contest went to overtime.

Neither team was able to put points on the board in the first round of extra football. Pinton had a 48-yard field goal attempt blocked, and Cypress Woods kicker Michael Fernandez misfired on a potential game-winner from 35 yards away.

The Wildcats (8-4) took a 28-21 lead in the second overtime period as quarterback Jackson Jones reached paydirt on a 2-yard keeper. The Woodlands responded with a 16-yard touchdown pass from Howard to Malik Johnson.

Johnson, a Kansas commit, missed most of the regular season with an injury. The senior speedster came back last week for the beginning of the playoffs and gave the Highlanders a spark on Friday night. Johnson scored on a 1-yard touchdown run with 1:42 remaining in the fourth quarter to knot the game at 21 and made that huge catch in overtime. He also had a 6-yard rushing touchdown in the third quarter.

“He’s such a skilled athlete, and he can do so many things — wide receiver, playing in the backfield,” Rapp said. “He does so many things for us, so it’s great to have a weapon like him back in our offense.”

After taking the 34-28 lead on the connection from Howard to Lankford-Johnson — a perfectly placed jump ball to the back-right corner of the end zone — the Highlanders needed the defense to deliver. Deliver they did.

With the game on the line, the Wildcats put the ball on the ground on an option pitch. Acuff pounced on it, and the celebration ensued as The Woodlands punched its ticket to the next round.

“I was hoping we were going to get it,” Rapp said. “That’s the kind of thing that we needed — a break that went our way.”

Cypress Woods got a 5-yard touchdown run from Trayse Holmes in the first quarter, and Jackson plowed ahead for a 1-yard score in the second.

The Woodlands had a 29-yard touchdown run from Aaron Shaw in the opening frame, but that was all the Highlanders could muster as they went into the locker room down by seven points.

Johnson tied the game twice with his rushing touchdowns, which were sandwiched around a 7-yard score from Jones late in the fourth quarter. That set the stage for overtime, and the Highlanders found a way to prevail.

“This is a great way to win a game, but it’s also a tough way to lose a game,” Rapp said. “Cy Woods, they did a great job tonight. Our hats are off to them. I’ve been on the other side, lost in overtime, and it’s not fun. But I’m happy for the Highlanders.”



HS Football Playoffs: The Woodlands wins in 3OT to reach round three

By: JD Hurd II
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CYPRESS, TX -- Good players find a way to make plays, good teams find a way to win games. Malik Johnson and The Woodlands Highlanders did just that in the thrilling 34-28 triple-overtime win over Cypress Woods in the Area Round of the UIL 6A-D1 football playoffs.

Cy-Woods opened the ballgame with a seven-play, 75-yard scoring drive finished off by Wildcats RB Trayse Holmes’ five-yard rushing touchdown. Both defenses were able to get stops on the next two series of the game. On the Highlanders’ second possession, the team would get a spark from running back Aaron Shaw. The senior RB who has stepped up greatly for The Woodlands late in the season ripped off a 29-yard TD right through the middle of the Cy-Woods defense to tie the game. The game remained locked at seven until Cy-Woods QB Jackson Jones battled his way into the end zone on a 1-yard sneak to give the Wildcats

a 14-7 lead with seconds remaining in the first half.

The second half of this game was essentially a Malik Johnson highlight reel. The senior is listed as a wide receiver but on Friday night he did just about everything except hold the chains. Johnson repeatedly made plays from multiple positions that kept the Highlanders' season alive. In the postgame interview, Johnson cited his feeling after the playoff loss to the Allen Eagles as his motivation. "I told myself, I wasn't going to let this team lose," said Johnson.

Midway through the third quarter, Johnson came up with a nice 37-yard reception to pick up the first down to keep the game-tying drive alive. Three plays later, Malik Johnson lined up at QB and ran around the right side of the defense for a 6-yard TD to tie the game at 14.

In the 4th quarter, special teams nearly lost the game for both sides. Cy-Woods had a kick blocked by The Woodlands with just over five minutes left to play. On the very next series, a botched punt by The Woodlands gave the Wildcats the ball in the red zone. Jackson Jones picked up his second rushing TD of the game to give Cy-Woods the lead with 3:40 remaining.

The Highlanders needed a playmaker and Malik Johnson answered the call once again. Johnson touched the ball six times on the drive for a total of 48 yards and a TD to tie the game at 21, eventually sending it to overtime.

The first OT ended tied at 21 after a blocked and missed FG attempt from both sides. Cy-Woods took the lead in the second overtime, but Malik Johnson's 17-yard TD reception tied the game at 28 and forced 3OT. The Highlander took the lead in 3OT with Cody Howard's second TD pass of the night. Howard connected with WR Brenden Lankford-Johnson in the corner of the end zone for the 12-yard score. The mandatory 2-point conversion was no good, but it wouldn't matter as Cy-Woods fumbled a pitch on their next possession to give the Highlanders the win.

"I'm proud of this team for how they fought and everything they did to win this game," said The Woodlands Head Coach, Jim Rapp. "It's great to have Malik Johnson back, we're glad he's healthy," said Rapp. "He's really been a boost for us offensively. He can line up in a lot of different spots and it really helps us."

With the win, The Woodlands advances to the 6A-D1 Regional Semifinals to face Prosper HS, Saturday, November 30 at McLane Stadium in Waco.