



The Woodlands holds on for win over Oak Ridge



By Jon Poorman
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Just as the clock hit 5:19 p.m., Mark Schmid and Jim Rapp came together at the 42-yard line. First came the handshake — the formality to be expected between opposing coaches during pregame warmups. But then came the embrace — the latest of many between comrades who won an abundance of games together.

Less than two hours later, Schmid was leading Oak Ridge against Rapp and The Woodlands. Schmid spent three decades on the Highlanders' staff, including 14 as the head coach before stepping down from his post in January of 2018. He worked alongside Rapp for most of those years, and the two men have been good friends for a long time. For three hours on Friday evening, however, they were opponents.

“It was great to see everybody, great to be back out here on the field,” Schmid said. “I’ve got so much history over there, but when the whistle blew and it was time to play football, it was all about the game and coaching my guys at Oak Ridge, and giving them everything I had to be successful. That’s what coaching is — we’re great friends, but at the same time, tonight we lined up and wanted to beat each other.”

The Woodlands (2-1, 1-0) held on for a 20-14 victory over the War Eagles (1-2, 0-1) at Buddy Moorhead Stadium in the District 15-6A opener for both teams. The Highlanders, ranked No. 9 in the Houston-area media poll, now have a 16-0 all-time record against Oak Ridge dating back to 2004. The six-point margin was the closest ever in the series between the two programs, however.

“It’s always good to get wins, and that’s something we talk about — we’ve got to get one at a time,” Rapp said. “The object is to try to get to play 11 ballgames, so that’s step No. 1 to get that done. ... (Schmid) is my friend, and he’s doing a great job, and he’s going to do great things at Oak Ridge. I’m really proud of him and the way his kids played tonight. They fought until the end, and I know he’s proud of them.”

The Woodlands opened the scoring in the first quarter with a 1-yard touchdown plunge from sophomore running back Jo’Barre Reed. The Highlanders made the score 10-0 later in the period with a 29-yard field goal from Fabrizio Pinton.

The Woodlands quarterback Peyton Janecek reached paydirt on a 3-yard run early in the second quarter, and Pinton tacked on a 30-yard field goal to cap the first-half scoring. The second touchdown was set up by a 57-yard jaunt from Brandon Wheeler on the previous play.

The Highlanders’ defense was lights out over the first two quarters, holding Oak Ridge to just 23 yards. The Woodlands also recorded its eighth takeaway of the year with an interception by Kennedy Stewart.

“I thought defensively we played really well,” said Rapp, whose team was without star running back Bryeton Gilford due to injury. “Offensively, I thought we left some opportunities on the field in the first half that hurt us in the second half ... I think [the defense] got tired a little bit late, but they did a great job stopping the run, and they’re phenomenal tacklers. I’m proud of the way those guys played.”

Following a scoreless third quarter, the War Eagles started to gain some momentum. Oak Ridge got on the board with a 29-yard touchdown run from quarterback Kavon Townsend with less than eight minutes to play. The defense then stepped up and made a huge play as Dexter Green returned an interception 102 yards to the house to pull the War Eagles within a touchdown with 4:43 remaining. That was as close as they would get, however, as The Woodlands ran out the clock.

“I’m proud of their effort and the fact that they never gave up,” Schmid said. “We talked about what we needed to do at half, offensively especially, to get some momentum and get some things going. We came out with a different plan, but we still hurt ourselves with some costly penalties to put us behind the chains. When we were finally able to stay in front of the chains, we were able to move the ball and go down and score, and that really lifted the defense. The defense played really well all night long.”

The Woodlands returns to action next Friday at Woodforest Bank Stadium against crosstown rival College Park. The Highlanders are 12-1 all-time against the Cavaliers, their only loss coming in 2007. The Woodlands pulled out a 24-17 victory in the matchup last season as Gilford scored with 19 seconds remaining.

Oak Ridge, meanwhile, will travel to play No. 10 Klein Collins. The Tigers emerged with a 37-16 victory last season and are 6-0 against the War Eagles dating back to 2004.