

## Prosper pulls away in second half to eliminate The Woodlands



By Jon Poorman  
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WACO — Something had to give.

The Woodlands and Prosper entered Saturday night with plenty of momentum. The Highlanders and Eagles had both won five of six games and three straight, but ultimately, one team was going to be left behind while the other advanced to the fourth round of the playoffs.

Prosper quarterback Jackson Berry continued his pristine postseason play as the Eagles earned a 38-14 victory over the Highlanders in the Region II-6A (Div. I) semifinals at McLane Stadium at Baylor University.

Berry completed 22 of 33 passes for 306 yards and tallied four total touchdowns for the Eagles, who will be making their first regional final appearance since 2009.

“They’re just really confident right now,” Prosper coach Brandon Schmidt said of his players. “Offensively and defensively, we’re playing with a lot of confidence. The kids are just loving being around each other, and they’re doing a great job of playing hard and executing.”

Prosper (11-2) will face Rockwall next Saturday at Eagle Stadium in Allen. The Yellowjackets (11-2) defeated Klein Oak 37-27 earlier in the day at the same venue. Rockwall scored 23 unanswered points spanning the third and fourth quarters against the Panthers (10-3) to earn the victory.

Only eight teams remain alive in the Class 6A Division I bracket after this weekend: Prosper and Rockwall (Region II); Duncanville and Southlake Carroll (Region I); North Shore and Atascocita (Region III); and Lake Travis and Converse Judson (Region IV).

The Woodlands, meanwhile, saw its campaign come to a close in the regional semifinals for a second consecutive season. The Highlanders (8-5) managed to secure the program’s 25th straight playoff berth and advanced to the third round for the fifth time since 2011.

At one point during the season, the team was 2-2 in district play and needed a strong finish to even qualify for the playoffs. The Woodlands found a way to get the job done, however.

“No. 1, the kids believed, and they never stopped fighting,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. “The coaches did a great job of adjusting. We’ve had so many things, so many different lineup changes and reinventing things, one week to the next. You get somebody hurt in a game, and your game plan is out the window. So just the way they fought, the kids did a great job believing.”

Prosper put the first points on the board with a 1-yard quarterback keeper from Berry with less than two minutes to play in the opening quarter.

The Woodlands was able to respond on the ensuing possession as Jobarre Reed also reached paydirt on a 1-yard run early in the second period.

Prosper grabbed the lead back later in the second when Tyler Bailey took a jet sweep handoff around the left edge for a 4-yard touchdown. That put the Eagles ahead 14-7.

The Woodlands came up with a huge play on special teams as Cannon Starcke recovered a muffed punt at the Eagles’ 9-yard line. The Highlanders gave the ball right back, however, as quarterback Cody Howard was intercepted by Prosper linebacker Aidan Siano.

The Eagles then drove down to The Woodlands’ 3-yard line with 11 seconds remaining in the half before ultimately settling for a 20-yard field goal from Brad Larson.

The Highlanders cut the lead to three on its first drive of the third quarter as Malik Johnson took a tap pass from Howard and raced 15 yards to the end zone.

The momentum would be short-lived, however, as Prosper answered with a 13-yard touchdown pass from Berry to Hayden Metcalf on the ensuing possession. Metcalf was the top target for the Eagles, hauling in 10 catches for 142 yards.

“The Woodlands, that’s a first-class program,” Schmidt said. “When they came out in the second half to make it 17-14, I was worried because they’ve been here and done that. I was just proud of the way our kids responded after that.”

Prosper tacked on two more scores — a 46-yard touchdown pass from Berry to Cameron Harpole and another 1-yard keeper from Berry — to go ahead 38-14 early in the fourth quarter.

The Eagles’ point total was the highest allowed by The Woodlands all season.

“Whatever adjustment they made from an offensive standpoint was good for them,” Rapp said. “I told those defensive guys we’re here because of them. They should keep their heads up because they played a helluva game. That’s a good football team that’s over there. They do some things on both sides of the ball really well. But these guys over here, I’ll take them all the time.”