

The Woodlands edges Conroe, will play for title

By Jon Poorman, Staff Writer
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SHENANDOAH — Winning the District 13-6A title has been a goal for The Woodlands all season. The Highlanders need just one more victory to accomplish that, but they had to go through a scrappy Conroe team to get to this point. The Woodlands beat the Tigers 38-35 on Saturday at Woodforest Bank Stadium, setting up a winner-takes-all showdown against crosstown rival College Park next week.

The Highlanders (5-2, 4-0), which had already clinched their 26th consecutive playoff berth entering this week, will play the Cavaliers (7-1, 4-0) for the outright district championship at 7 p.m. Friday.

“I just think it adds to what high school football is supposed to be about,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. “You get a chance to pit two teams from the same area against each other, and it’s for all the marbles. Coach (Lonnie) Madison and those guys have done a really good job over there at College Park. They’re on a nice win streak, and they’re doing some things similar to what we are. It’s going to be a good matchup on Friday.”

Conroe (3-5, 0-4) still has a chance to make the playoffs but will need some help. The Tigers would force a three-way tie for fourth place with a victory over Willis and a Grand Oaks loss to Oak Ridge. All three teams would be 1-4 in district play, which would invoke a point differential tiebreaker to decide the final spot. Conroe enters next week with a minus-1 total among the three teams, while Grand Oaks is at minus-15 and Willis leads at plus-15.

“The message doesn’t change,” Conroe coach Cedric Hardeman said. “You re-evaluate and go back to work on the habits that it takes to get better. That’s what we’ve been doing since I got here, and that’s what we’ll continue to do, regardless of who we play and regardless of our record. Every day we go out and try to get better and let the results speak for themselves.”

Trey Harrison gave the Highlanders an early 3-0 lead with a 29-yard field goal, but Conroe went ahead a few minutes later on a 34-yard touchdown pass from Jalen Williams to running back Charles Kibble.

Williams, the leading passer in the district, completed 13 of 23 throws for 234 yards with a touchdown and an interception. Louis Williams III led the Tigers with 113 receiving yards on three catches. The Tigers’ 35 points are the most allowed by the Highlanders this season.

“They come out and work,” Harden said of his offense. “Coach (Rhett) Bomar does a great job of preparation. ... The scheme that he puts in, he does a good job of getting playmakers the ball, and the kids believe in what we do.”

The Woodlands answered with a 6-yard run from Mabrey Mettauer, but the Tigers grabbed the lead back at 14-10 with a 1-yard sneak from Williams. The Conroe defense got into the action with four minutes to play in the second quarter as Brayden Jones recorded a strip sack, scooped the ball up and sprinted 64 yards to the end zone.

The Woodlands cut into the deficit with 1:45 remaining as Connor Dechiro connected with Teddy Knox for a 24-yard touchdown pass, but Conroe walked into the locker room with a 21-17 advantage. The passing game was effective throughout the game for the Highlanders. Dechiro completed 19 of 28 passes for 315 yards. Knox had four catches for 138 yards, and Ben Ferguson collected nine catches for 100.

“We’re fortunate that we have some guys that we can mix it around with,” Rapp said. “We’ve got a couple different ways we can get guys the football, and we’ve got four receivers that have 25-plus catches. When you can spread it around like that and it’s not just one person, it makes the offense a whole lot harder to defend.”

There were two other turnovers in the first half, but neither resulted in points. Roman Hamilton had a fumble recovery in the red zone in the second quarter that thwarted a promising Highlanders drive. The Woodlands’ Blake Hubert intercepted a pass with just five seconds remaining in the first half. The Highlanders went ahead 31-21 with 14 unanswered points in the third quarter. Jobarre Reed found paydirt on a 3-yard run, and Dechiro crossed the goal line on a 1-yard sneak on fourth down.

Conroe pulled within one possession again in the fourth quarter as Charles Kibble scored on a 4-yard run. The Woodlands, however, responded as Mettaufer found a wide open Dresden Meermann for a 14-yard score.

That touchdown gave the Highlanders a 38-28 lead with about seven minutes to play, and that was all they would need. Kibble scored his third touchdown from 3 yards out with 5:21 to play, but The Woodlands ran out the clock on the ensuing possession with Reed, Mettaufer and Lane O’Brien carrying the load.

“I knew going in it was going to be a heck of a football game,” Rapp said. “Conroe has a great team, and Coach Hardeman has done a great job with those kids. I knew we were going to be in for a dogfight. I talked to the kids about (Conroe) playing for their playoff lives, and so we couldn’t let ourselves beat ourselves, and I feel like that’s what we did in the first half. ... When we didn’t make those mistakes in the second half, we were able to control the ball offensively and make plays when we needed to on defense, and that was kind of the turnaround.”