

## The Woodlands rolls past Grand Oaks to improve to 3-0 in district

By Rob Tate, Staff Writer  
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SHENANDOAH — The Woodlands dominated ball possession early and scored on four of its first five drives of the night to take care of things early Thursday against Grand Oaks at Woodforest Bank Stadium. The Woodlands won 52-17 to remain unbeaten in District 13-6A and are a step closer to a playoff berth in the six-team league.

While building the lead when they had the ball, the Highlanders (4-2, 3-0) held Grand Oaks (5-2, 1-2) to just 11 plays from scrimmage in the first half and 89 yards, 77 coming on one play.

The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp had a feeling the reverse of that was going to happen coming into the night.

“It’s funny, I kind of thought it would be that way for us,” Rapp said. “Maybe we would have 12-15 plays because they’re a ball control offense. But our defense did a great job in the first half holding them and getting them off the field. We were able to get the ball, move it and control the clock.”

Playing the Highlanders on a big stage was another new experience for the Grizzlies coached by Mike Jackson. The third-year program is taking each new district opponent in stride, but this was a big opportunity against The Woodlands.

“Quite honestly, anybody that watched the first half, that wasn’t us,” Jackson said. “We were kind of awestruck and looking around in the moment. In the second half, we had one touchdown called back and we really started finding our groove. They’ll make plays because they’re a good football team.”

The Woodlands got three touchdown passes by Connor Dechiro in the first half. He marched the Highlanders down the field on 12 plays, capped by a 22-yard reception by Jack Calhoun. Dechiro also had a 10-yard scoring strike to Lane O’Brien early in the second quarter and then a 12-yard pass to an open Ben Ferguson in the corner to go up 21-0 with 5:18 to go in the second quarter.

Grand Oaks senior wide receiver Seth Wright helped break the struggles of the Grizzlies offense on the ensuing drive. On a sweep to the right, Wright raced 77 yards down the right sideline to the end zone to put his team on the board.

The euphoria of that play didn’t last long as The Woodlands went back to marching down the field the other way on the next drive. Having a great second quarter already, junior running back Jobarre Reed capped an 11-play drive with a 6-yard touchdown run and a 28-7 lead with 36 ticks on the clock before halftime.

After the break, Grand Oaks had another explosive play for a touchdown. Senior Micah Cooper, the district’s leading rusher coming into the week, burst down the field for a 71-yard touchdown to make it 28-14 just under a minute into the third quarter. Two plays earlier, the Grizzlies had a long scoring play called back.

The Woodlands then went up 31-14 with 6:21 left in the third quarter as Trey Harrison connected on a 32-yard field goal right down the middle.

With 1:21 left in the third quarter, Calhoun scored his second touchdown of the night. This time on a 3-yard run to eight-play drive.

The Woodlands forced a fumble that was recovered by Matthew Knipfel on the first play of the fourth quarter. On the first play of the ensuing drive, freshman quarterback Mabrey Mattauer threw a perfect ball to Cade Moore down the right sideline for 53 yards and a score.

Mattauer put more points on the board on the ensuing drive. After a long 53-yard pass to Moore, Mattauer danced into the end zone on a 13-yard run to extend the score to 52-14 with 5:56 left in the game.

As time expired, Grant Nickel hit a 24-yard field goal for the Grizzlies, who put together a quality drive down into the red zone to cap the night.

The Woodlands finished well above the 28.4 points per game it was averaging coming into the night. Dechiro ended the night 18 for 21 for 165 yards. O'Brien had 88 yards rushing while Reed had 79. Moore totaled 113 yards receiving just on the three fourth quarter catches while Ferguson had 75. Calhoun had 42 yards receiving and 34 rushing.

"I thought we played well," Rapp said of the season-high 52 points. "We've been improving on both sides of the ball every week. I'm really excited that that's a continuation."

Mattauer gave Highlander fans another glimpse into the future with 124 yards passing and the two scores he was a part of. "Mabrey is going to be really good," Rapp said. "He really is. He's done some really good things for us. He played against Willis and played again this week. He's going to be special."

Cooper had 107 yards rushing for the Grizzlies while Wright had 81. Jackson afterwards talked about The Woodlands being the type of program they want to reach the status of in the future. "First off, congratulations to them," Jackson said. "Tradition doesn't graduate. They have tradition and we're in the early stages of building tradition. We have to take small victories."

Jackson mentioned a small victory from Wednesday when the Grizzlies were the first to beat the Highlanders in sub-varsity play district play. "We know they're the standard for Montgomery County," Jackson said. "We respect everybody, but they are the mountain top we're chasing. Credit to them, but we'll be back next year ready to compete with them."

The Woodlands can clinch a playoff spot by the end of the weekend with help. A Willis loss to Oak Ridge and a Conroe loss to College Park will do the trick.

Rapp hasn't thought too in-depth about the playoffs at this point. "I haven't paid any attention to playoffs or anything like that," Rapp said. "I know we've won three and we have two left. I'll feel comfortable when we've played the last one."

Grand Oaks is still in the hunt as well after a crucial win at Conroe last week.

"We're right in the thick of things and we're here to compete," Jackson said. "And I like our kids...I'm proud because we played until the final whistle. The last play of the game was us driving down and doing good things."