

## Hightower rides interceptions to win over Highlanders



By Rob Tate, Staff Writer  
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SHENANDOAH — Fort Bend Hightower forced three crucial turnovers, played smash mouth run defense and ran the ball hard as it came away with its first win of the season, 28-25, against The Woodlands at Woodforest Bank Stadium Friday night.

Hightower scored twice off turnovers in the second half to secure the win. The Woodlands scored with 1:14 left to play, but was unable to recover the onside kick for another shot to take the win or send it to overtime.

The Hurricanes (1-1) came into the week ranked No. 8 in Class 5A in the Houston Area Media Poll while The Woodlands (1-2) was ranked No. 16 in Class 6A.

Both teams also had a bye and two weeks to prepare for this game, which featured four lead changes. Hightower lost by ten to Westfield on Oct. 4 while the Highlanders rolled past Lamar.

“(The Woodlands coach) Jim Rapp runs a first class program all the way,” Hightower coach Joseph Sam said afterwards. “Games like this are the reason we schedule to play this schedule. Our kids need to be thrown into the first. Did we make mistakes? Absolutely. But our kids fought their tails off and at the end of the day that’s all you can ask for. This is a great program win against a high quality opponent.”

Rapp was pleased with the effort against Hightower, which was a playoff team last year at 6-5 out of a tough district in 5A. “That’s a quality football team,” Rapp said. “Hightower is a really good football team with a lot of great players on both sides of the ball for them.”

The 1-yard touchdown run was the popular choice for both teams in the first half as that’s how all three combined touchdowns were scored. Hightower got on the board first as senior Charles Shelling pushed through at the 4:39 mark of the first quarter.

Shelling, who totaled two touchdowns and 128 yards on 22 carries was a bruiser all night for Hightower. He extended drives and picked up chunks of yards after first contact on numerous attempts.

“He’s one great tailback,” Sam said. “I’m going to you right now...schools better be looking for him because if you’re looking for a guy, he’s it. But at the same time, Charles Shelling isn’t Charles Shelling without his o-line. I thought our o-line blocked their tails off tonight.”

With 50 ticks left in the first quarter, The Woodlands senior kicker Trey Harrison put through a 30-yard field goal to trail 7-3.

The Highlanders then gained the lead in the second quarter after a 13-play drive. Senior quarterback Connor Dechiro dove into the end zone through the line for the 10-7 lead.

The Hurricanes had some marching of their own to do as they went on a 12-play drive and quarterback Jakolby Longino, a UTEP commit, capped the drive with a run around the left corner for a 14-10 lead.

With less than a minute to go before halftime, The Woodlands was pushing up field until Dechiro threw an interception caught by Hightower junior Julian Payne at the 1-yard line kept the score 14-10 at halftime.

The Woodlands went back up on its first drive of the second half. Senior running back Lane O'Brien pushed through for a 4-yard score at the 9:21 mark.

Hightower went back up at the 5:01 mark of the third quarter. After Kyshun Smith intercepted a pass at The Woodlands 33, it took Hightower three plays to score as Caleb Douglass hauled in a 23-yard pass from Longino to regain the lead, 21-17.

Payne stopped another Highlanders drive with another INT midway through the fourth quarter and the Hurricanes converted another touchdown off of it.

Sam described a young and inexperienced defense after the game and Payne, having two interceptions total, playing a new position. "They're competing and they're getting better," Sam said of his defense. "That's all I care about. We had some kids grow up tonight."

On fourth and goal with 2:53 left, Shelling pushed home a 1-yard score to make it a two-possession game in favor of the Hurricanes. With 1:14 to play, The Woodlands senior Jack Calhoun caught a 20-yard strike from Dechiro in the back corner to conclude scoring for the night.

"At the end we didn't quit," Rapp said. "We kept fighting and scored the touchdown and got the two-point conversion and gave ourselves a chance. But there's some things offensively we have to work on to get better."

Longino totaled 124 yards passing and 31 rushing. The Hurricanes lost the total yardage battle as the The Woodlands had 355 to their 285.

"Defensively, I'm proud of the way those guys stepped up," Rapp said. "I felt like they played up to the tradition of playing defense at our school."

O'Brien had 82 yards rushing and now has two touchdowns on the year. Dechiro tossed for 218 yards with Moore leading with three grabs for 82 yards.