

The Woodlands remains unbeaten against Oak Ridge

By Jon Poorman, Staff Writer
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SHENANDOAH — The year 2020 has produced some unprecedented happenings. That theme did not translate to the football field at Woodforest Bank Stadium on Friday evening, however, as The Woodlands remained unbeaten all-time against Oak Ridge. The Highlanders took control early and never looked back on their way to a 31-21 victory in District 13-6A action. The Woodlands now leads the series 17-0.

“We have to constantly work on being better,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. “Every week, we talk about being better than we were the week before. We’re the team that beats us more than anything else, so we have to do everything we can to make sure that doesn’t happen. We don’t talk a ton about streaks or anything like that.”

The contest was the second meeting between Oak Ridge coach Mark Schmid and the program he guided for 14 seasons. Schmid won 125 games and nine district championships during his tenure at The Woodlands. Oak Ridge (4-2, 1-1) posted its closest margin of defeat in the series last year under Schmid, losing 20-14.

“The Woodlands is a good football team, and they played great,” said Schmid, who coached the Highlanders to a state championship game appearance in 2016. “We just came up short.”

The Highlanders (3-2, 2-0) started the game on a rocky note as a muffed kickoff handed the ball to the War Eagles with good field position. The Woodlands' defense stood tall, however, and blocked a field goal attempt.

The Highlanders then broke the stalemate with a 34-yard touchdown pass from Connor Dechiro to Teddy Knox. Lane O'Brien handed the team a 14-0 lead early in the second quarter with an 8-yard run up the middle. O'Brien finished the game with a team-high 101 yards on 18 carries. The Woodlands finished with 166 on the ground.

Cade Moore led the Highlanders with 80 receiving yards on five catches, and Jack Calhoun had 62 total yards.

"We have a pretty good skill group and offensive line," Rapp said. "I'm an offensive line guy by nature, so I really think those guys do a great job. Coach (Brian) Anderson and Coach (Matt) Barrickman do a great job with them, and they've done some good things. "As soon as I say something good about them, they'll come back and play bad next week," Rapp continued, jokingly. "But I'm fired up about them. They're really good."

Knox found the end zone for a second time just a couple minutes later. The Mississippi State commit nimbly navigated a crowded right sideline and broke free across the middle of the field for a 72-yard punt return.

"I was telling one of the coaches in pregame, he's getting faster," Rapp said. "He got injured last year, and I think he's getting almost back to full speed, so I'm excited about that. Teddy's a heck of a talent, and he does some really good things. The return game was great, the long pass, it was good. Really proud of him, too."

Oak Ridge running back Alton McCaskill finally ended the shutout with six minutes to play as he reached paydirt on a 15-yard run. The Woodlands' Trey Harrison tacked on a 29-yard field goal to cap the first-half scoring.

The Highlanders walked into the locker room with a 24-8 advantage, but Oak Ridge cut into the deficit on the opening possession of the third quarter as McCaskill scored on a 5-yard run. McCaskill, one of the top running back recruits in the Greater Houston area, finished the game with 81 rushing yards on 16 carries.

"It's tough," Schmid said of the early deficit. "You wonder how it's going to affect the morale of the team. Can they fight back? Can they claw back against such a quality football team? I was proud of the way we came out at halftime. Scoring before the end of the first half was big for us, and then scoring on the first possession we had (in the third quarter) gave our kids a lift and made them want to keep fighting."

The Woodlands answered right back, however, with a long drive of its own. The Highlanders went ahead 31-15 following a 15-yard pass from Dechiro to a leaping Calhoun in the back-right corner of the end zone.

McCaskill reached the end zone for a third time on a 2-yard run with two minutes remaining in the game. That was as close as the War Eagles would get as The Woodlands ran out the clock on the ensuing possession.

"We talked at halftime about coming out and finishing," Rapp said. "I didn't want to repeat the thing we did last year because those guys do a great job coaching. We came out, start of the second half, gave up a touchdown, and then it was back on again. We've just got to be better at finishing. In the long run, the kids played really well, really proud of them, and we got our second win in district, so that's a good start."