

Mettauer Power: QB, defense paves the way for The Woodlands

Rob Tate, Staff Writer

Oct. 7, 2021



SHENANDOAH — District 13-6A started Thursday night with a marquee matchup of two playoff teams from a year ago and both teams with sophomore quarterbacks who are blazing the recruiting trail.

It wasn't a thing of beauty early for The Woodlands, but Highlanders picked it up in the second to take the victory, 43-10, over Willis Thursday night at Woodforest Bank Stadium.

The Highlanders led by 10 after two quarters before scoring 23 points in the third to run away with the win.

“Credit to them,” Willis coach Michael Wall said. “They brought their best and we didn’t tonight.”

The Woodlands (4-2, 1-0) has won two straight games while Willis (3-3, 0-1) saw its winning streak conclude at three games.

The matchup featured The Woodlands sophomore quarter Mabrey Mettaufer manning the Highlanders offense with Willis sophomore DJ Lagway leading the Wildkats. There were plenty of recruiting reporters and analysts on hand as the two have raked in some big Power 5 offers this year and have made some visits to those schools in recent weeks.

Mettauer shined through as he was a part of six touchdowns to lead the Highlanders.

It took the Highlanders some time to get going, but the defense was able to hold their ground all night. They held Willis to 133 total yards and just one very late touchdown.

“I thought the defense played their tails off,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said.

It was a clunky start on offense for both teams, however.

The Highlanders held Willis to 71 yards of total offense in the first half and led 13-3. The Woodlands, meanwhile, turned the ball over once, punted twice and couldn’t convert on a fourth down. They did have two scoring drives, which made the difference.

“I praised the team because in life, not everything works the way you want it to,” Rapp said of what they talked about at halftime after the sluggish start. “Not everything is easy. That wasn’t an easy first half. Defensively, I thought the kids played lights. Offensively, we just couldn’t find our groove.”

Willis got on the board first off an interception by two-way player Devon Lovelady, who returned the pick about 44 yards down to the Highlanders 8-yard line at the 9:19 mark of the first quarter.

Alex Ochoa kicked a 23-yard field goal for the 3-0 Willis lead.

The Woodlands’ first touchdown of the night came off a bad snap on a Willis punt that set the Highlanders up at the Wildkats 13-yard line.

Mettauer capped the drive with a physical run down to the left pylon for the 7-yard score.

Mettauer then added a 4-yard touchdown with 7:18 left in the second quarter.

Willis had its chances late in the second quarter. The Wildkats executed a 16-yard gain by Lovelady on a well-executed fake punt. The Wildkats later punted after the Highlanders stood firm.

Willis then had a drive extended just before halftime on a roughing the kicker on another punt attempt. The Woodlands defense again stood firm against Lagway and the Wildkats by pushing them backwards on three plays before time expired on fourth down.

“We knew offensively we were struggling and that was not settling,” Wall said about the 10-point deficit at halftime. “But I felt our defense was obviously playing really, really well. They were driving, but we got a turnover and that definitely kept us in it.”

The Highlanders added two points on a safety with 8:04 left in the third quarter. Willis had a bad snap for the second time on the night on a punt attempt as the ball sailed and rolled out of the back of the end zone.

Rapp said The Woodlands made some adjustments at halftime offensively and that showed through.

Off the safety, The Woodlands drove down the field with a couple productive runs by JoBarre Reed which took the Highlanders into the red zone. Mettauer then found Camden Cash, who made a spectacular 10-yard touchdown reception as he grabbed the ball around the defender and slid on his back through the back of the end zone.

The Highlanders quickly got the ball back off a punt and Mettauer then found Ben Ferguson two plays into the ensuing drive for a 39-yard touchdown reception.

Mettauer then had another beautiful touchdown throw for his third of the third quarter to three different receivers. Jason Williams caught this one for 46 yards with 54 seconds left before the fourth quarter.

On the first Highlander drive of the fourth quarter, Mettauer found Ferguson again, this time for 37 yards to go up 40 points.

Willis added a late touchdown as Da’Ontae Fleeks punched in a 1-yard score a play after Tanner Hayes gained 39 yards to set it up.

Lagway passed for 98 but was held in check on the ground game. The Woodlands, which came into the night with 16 tackles for loss, stopped the Wildkat quarterback seven times.

“That kid is a phenomenal quarterback,” Rapp said. “Our kids have been able to put a lot of pressure on quarterbacks this year. Just continue to do what we do. That’s what happened defensively. We continued to cover and got him off his mark of where he wants to throw his football. That makes it difficult for a quarterback.”

Mettauer finished with 239 yards passing with Ferguson catching 128 of those. Reed rushed for 95 yards.

“They are very good, physical football team,” Wall said. “Very sound offensively, very sound defensively and special teams. They made us play worse than we are capable of if that makes sense. They got the best of us from play one all the way through.”

Willis didn’t improve much on last year’s 43-15 loss to the Highlanders. But Rapp saw an improving team on the other side of the field.

“Willis is a quality football team,” Rapp said. “Just because they were just a 5A and bumped to 6A -- I had a coach a long time ago say the ‘As’ don’t mean anything -- they have a lot of talent.”

The Woodlands plays Oak Ridge at 7 p.m. at Woodforest Bank Stadium next Friday. Willis plays an away game against College Park at Buddy Moorhead Stadium at the same time.

“We have to rebound, we have to coach better,” Wall said. “We have to play better and we will get that fixed.”