

The Woodlands ends regular season with win at Willis



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WILLIS — “Six more!” a The Woodlands football player bellowed into the dark, clear night after the Highlanders’ 42-28 win over Willis at Berton A. Yates Stadium on Friday night.

The player was referring to how many wins are now needed for The Woodlands to win state. The Highlanders finished their regular season 8-2 overall, 7-1 in District 13-6A, with Friday’s win.

“We’re just getting started!”

The Woodlands’ sixth straight win did not come easily, however. The Highlanders trailed 28-21 in the third quarter before scoring 21 straight to close the game.

“I think it was really good for us to play a tight ballgame after some of the ones we’ve played the last few weeks,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. “It helps sharpen us.”

Since a 14-7 loss to New Caney in September, the Highlanders had posted wins of 56, 63, 70, 31 and 63 points, respectively. Against Willis, with a hobbled star quarterback DJ Lagway in the second half, The Woodlands got all it could handle.

“Our boys fought their tails off,” Willis coach Trent Miller said. “I’m extremely proud of them. They’re going toe-to-toe with one of the premier programs in the area. Take away a call there early in the fourth quarter—it could’ve been a 35-35 game; I don’t know if it was holding or not ... we fought.

“I think we’re one really good offseason away from being able to compete at that level, just from a physicality standpoint. But I’m proud.”

HIGHLIGHTS

On a chilly night, with rain plaguing the first half, both teams turned to the run. The Woodlands a bit more than Willis.

The Highlanders ran 43 times for 300 yards. All six of their touchdowns came on the ground.

“We knew we had to set the tone with some runs and that’s what we did,” said The Woodlands senior quarterback Mabrey Mettaufer, who rushed 14 times for 100 yards and two touchdowns and attempted just 21 passes. “It worked out really well. We have dogs on the O-line, two great running backs. All that blocking really helped tonight.”

It was Mettaufer’s 6-yard plunge with 1:41 left in the third quarter that broke a 28-28 tie and put The Woodlands up to stay. Jason Williams added a 1-yard TD run with 4:59 left for insurance.

Arkez Gomez paced the Highlanders with 131 yards on 20 carries. Jacoby Mitchell had 43 yards and two touchdowns on five carries. Williams had 10 yards and two touchdowns on three carries.

“It was a little different than maybe what we thought,” Rapp said. “We ran the football probably more than what we intended originally.”

Willis took a 28-21 lead thanks primarily to exceptional playmaking from sophomore Daylion Robinson. He had 11 carries for 96 yards and two touchdowns and three catches for 11 yards and a touchdown.

But the Wildkats’ offense became a struggle in the second half. Lagway went down with 23 seconds left in the second quarter with an apparent lower body injury. He played the entire second half but was clearly hindered. He did little more than throw out of the pocket, even limiting the number of drop steps he took.

Lagway completed 19 of 41 passes for 199 yards and two touchdowns, and rushed for 45 yards on 15 carries.

“He’s good,” Miller said. “He’s had a high ankle sprain he’s been battling for eight weeks now. He could’ve moved but we just decided in the second half (not to move him) and worry about getting him healthy for next week. He’ll be fine.”

WHAT IT MEANS

The Woodlands wraps up its regular season with second place locked up in 13-6A. It is still play for a district title depending how New Caney finishes out the regular season.

Willis finds itself in a battle with Conroe for the fourth and final playoff seed in 13-6A. Both are 4-3 in district.

QUOTABLE

Mettauer, a four-star recruit, said he relishes going up against elite talent like Lagway, a five-star prospect. Both are two of the more premier recruits in the country for the class of 2024.

“I love playing against great competition,” Mettauer said. “It only makes you better going against guys like that.”

GAME BALLS

Robinson was the most dynamic player on the field. He averaged 8.7 yards per rush and produced timely catches.

Terri Lawrence added 95 yards and a touchdown on seven catches for Willis. Imauree Holmes had an interception.

Gomez added 6.6 yards per rush on 20 carries for The Woodlands. Williams had the two rushing touchdowns on three carries and 70 yards on four catches.

UP NEXT

The Woodlands have an open week to finish out the regular season.

Willis closes its regular season next week at Oak Ridge on Nov. 4. Miller will return to his old stomping grounds, where he starred at quarterback.

