

From staff reports
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The Woodlands 49, New Caney 42

The Highlanders remain unbeaten in district action after winning a shootout 49-42 over the defending district champion Eagles at Woodforest Bank Stadium Thursday night.

The Woodlands improved to 2-2 overall, 2-0 in district play after starting the season 0-2 with double-digit losses against North Shore and Lamar. New Caney fell to 2-2 overall, 0-2 in district under first-year coach Mike DeWitt. It was unable to avenge last year's 14-7 loss.

The Woodlands scored five touchdowns in five first-half drives with five different scorers to lead 35-21 at the half.

Aden Self started the scoring on a 13-yard rush, Mabrey Mettaufer's quarterback draw from 18 yards out on third-and-long doubled the lead, sophomore Parker Stewart made it 21-7 after returning a kickoff for a 76-yard touchdown, Quanell X Farrakhan Jr. extended the lead back to 14 points with a 1-yard run and Mettaufer and Jackson Bolender connected on a 25-yard touchdown on third-and-long to make it 35-21.

But the Eagles refused to go away as Hunter Taylor connected with Kayden Cooper on a 6-yard touchdown pass off a tipped ball, David Stewart scored on a 33-yard rush and Taylor scored on a quarterback draw from 25 yards out to get them within 28-21.

The Eagles cut the Highlanders' lead to 35-28 to begin the second half after Taylor went untouched on a 9-yard touchdown via the quarterback draw once again for the lone score of the third quarter.

Taylor found Dravon Wilson for a 33-yard score on second-and-long to start the fourth quarter to tie the game at 35. Bolender soon rushed it in from 3 yards out to give the Highlanders a 42-35 lead before Cooper returned the ensuing kickoff 100-plus yards for his second score to tie the game at 42.

Bolender wasn't done yet, however. He scored the game-winning touchdown on a 13-yard run for his third score of the game to make it 49-42 with 10 seconds left. The Highlanders then recovered the ensuing kickoff for the win.

The Woodlands Wins High-Scoring Matchup With New Caney

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The Woodlands Highlanders (2-2) defeated the New Caney Eagles (2-2) in an offensive, tense game to kickstart week two of district play. After last season's 14-7 defeat at the hands of the Eagles, the Woodlands sought to make a statement in the opening moments of Thursday night's game.

New Caney's offense, fresh off their staggering defeat to Willis, came out flat against the Woodlands. The first two offensive drives stalled out before gaining traction, putting the ball into the hands of a well-equipped Highlander squad.

The Highlanders were able to notch scores on both of their opening drives. Striking efficiently through the air and eating up large chunks of yards on the ground pushed the Woodlands up 14-0 at the end of the first quarter.

In need of a response, New Caney opened the floodgates in the second quarter. The first play from scrimmage saw the Eagles reach the endzone for the first time and signaled the beginning of a response-filled second quarter.

Highlander returner Parker Stewart took the kickoff to the house on the ensuing kickoff, bringing this team back up by 14 points. Not to be outdone, New Caney replied with another effective drive for a touchdown. After the dust settled in the second quarter, a total of 42 points had been scored by both teams and the Woodlands led 35-21, with the team set to receive the second-half kick.

Disaster struck for the Highlanders as an unconventional kick caught the returner off guard, which gave New Caney a chance to jump on the loose ball. Eagle quarterback Hunter Taylor used his legs to find the endzone and bring his team within one possession of tying the game.

The Eagles would dominate the third quarter following the opening drive with a defensive shutout opening the door for New Caney to eat the clock by running the ball with ruthless efficiency.

The fourth quarter began with Taylor using his arm to find a receiver for the tying touchdown at 35 points apiece. Both squads would trade points down the stretch and lead to a 42-42 game with time winding down. With a chance to push his team ahead in the clutch, Woodlands kicker Scott Starzyk pushed his field goal wide right, affording New Caney a chance to win the game with a score.

Intense tackles from Woodlands defenders forced a three-and-out on New Caney's drive and put the ball back in the hands of Mabrey Mettaufer and the Highlander offense. With determination, the offense drove into New Caney territory and capped off the drive with a rushing touchdown from Jackson Bolender, his third overall on the night.

With the missed kick likely still on his mind, Starzyk sent a squib kick toward New Caney, only for the ball to be misread. The Highlander coverage team came away with the football and sealed the redemption for Starzyk and the win for the Woodlands. The Highlanders came away with a 49-42 win in a hard-fought contest from both sides.