

Offensive Flurry Sees The Woodlands Take the Dub in the War of the Woods

By: Jake Wilson | Published 10/17/2024



THE WOODLANDS, TX -- The 2024 edition of the War of the Woods saw the offenses explode in a 66-20 Woodlands Highlander (6-1) victory over their rivals, the College Park Cavaliers (4-4).

Emotions were high for both sides before the opening toss. The two teams argued over the size of the inflatable tunnels, as College Park's recent upgrade slightly outsized The Woodlands and their tunnel.

In retaliation to the recent loss in their tunnel supremacy, the Highlanders added a flag to the top of their inflatable to win the tunnel war. All of this was just a taste of the contentious game to follow as the teams took to the field.

College Park started the game on offense with a drive that orchestrated a balanced flow of runs and passes to keep the Highlander defenders guessing. A penalty put the Cavalier offense behind the chains and nearly jeopardized the drive if not for a long-distance throw over the defensive secondary.

With all of his might, Jordan Styles leaped into the air to overcome the Highlander defender through contact to haul in the touchdown throw. A missed extra point soured the score, but a quick 6-0 College Park lead was something for the players to be proud of.

Just as quick as they were down, the Highlanders looked to get back up. A sizable return on the College Park kickoff put the offense in decent field position, but a burst of speed and blocks at the line gave Jack Daulton all the room he needed to score a 60+ yard touchdown in one play.

In an exclusive interview with The Woodlands Online Sports, Highlander Head Coach Jim Rapp spoke on his team's early offensive production and how it surprised himself and the coaching staff.

“We didn’t really have the ball all too long offensively,” said Rapp. “I thought we had a good scheme and a good plan for [College Park] and we did when it was all said and done. I honestly didn’t know when I started to feel comfortable in this one.”

Scott Starzyk tacked on the extra point, and The Woodlands’ immediate response catapulted the team ahead 7-6.

After surrendering a score on their opening drive, the Highlander defense looked to rebound in a big way with the Cavalier offense returning to the field.

Explosive plays from the deep College Park receiving core appeared to take advantage of the flat-footed Woodlands secondary again. But, a sly read on a screen pass saw Mikey Harrison undercut his assignment for an interception and lengthy return for a pick-six.

The sudden change in momentum left many stunned expressions on the College Park side of Woodforest Bank Stadium.

Luckily for the Cavalier fans, the multitude of scoring options remained hot, with their play-making abilities remaining a difference-maker.

More deep throws from Camden Hughes to his receivers pierced the Highlander defense for chunk plays. The offense moved into Woodlands territory, but another loss and a fourth down signaled a potential ender to the drive.

Rather than playing it safe, the Cavaliers trusted their offense to get the conversion under pressure. Hughes wanted the endzone instead of the conversion and fired to 13-6A’s leading receiver in the endzone. Clint Rachal was available and secured his 12th receiving touchdown of the season to put College Park down 13-14 at the end of an offense-heavy first quarter.

The scoring did not slow down as the teams headed into the second quarter with The Woodlands on the drive.

A couple of plays from the Highlander offense worked the team into opposing territory before another Daulton highlight would add another score to the board. Blocking from his receivers and a tightrope act down the sideline led Daulton to a 45-yard rushing score, but the momentum would not last.

Continued focus on the deep throw from the College Park offense overwhelmed the Highlander secondary. Hughes found another receiver for a long play into the red zone and then a clever play call from the Cav coaching staff fooled the opposing defenders away from Styles for a rushing score and a 21-20 scoreline favoring The Woodlands.

Unrelenting trust in the Highlander offense kept the team constantly ahead of the Cavs, with another scoring drive pushing the team ahead just a bit further.

Jack Daulton continued to lord over the College Park defenders with his blistering speed while leading the Highlanders on their third straight scoring drive. A massive gap in the defense was created by the Highlander offensive lineman, allowing Daulton to reach the endzone for the third time on another 50+ yard scramble.

Unfortunately for the Cavaliers, their trust in the deep ball came with a significant price. The large plays were rewards for well-placed throws and speedy receivers, but miscues in the passing game typically led to turnovers.

A lofted ball on College Park’s second drive of the second quarter carried in the air away from the Cavalier receivers and into harm’s way. The inaccurate throw led to another interception for Harrison to set up a drive for The Woodlands to extend their lead to its highest.

“I didn’t lose faith in our guys when the big plays happened. We were putting pressure on their quarterback and we were almost there on nearly all of those plays defensively,” said Rapp. “The boys and I didn’t lose heart because those things happen. We adjusted and started to take control and I can’t be happier for them for sticking it out.”

Highlander rushing plays continued to work the ball through the Cavalier defenders for efficient yardage. Multiple ball carriers took responsibility for moving the ball for The Woodlands, but Daulton was responsible for the score. His fourth rushing score of the half extended the lead, and the Highlanders hit the mid-point of the second with a 35-20 lead.

An empty drive from College Park's ensuing drive presented the Highlanders with a golden opportunity to go up by three scores before receiving the second-half kickoff.

More steady rushing from the Highlander offense ruptured the Cavalier defense for chunk yards similar to how they had all first half. Effort from players like Jackson Bolender kept would-be losses alive for huge gains before setting up the fifth rushing score of the half for Daulton.

College Park's offense had been solved by The Woodlands, and the Highlanders were starting to feast on the lingering prey in front of them while up 42-20.

The Woodlands flexed their offensive muscles before the end of the half, with another scoring drive to extend the already impressive lead. The charge was led by the Highlander rushing attack again, setting up a fifth Daulton rushing score in the quarter for a 49-20 lead going into the locker rooms.

"It really was a special half," said Rapp praising his quarterback. "We have guys that we have to have week in and week out to make plays for us, and Jack is one of them. I'm very proud of him and the way he ran and made plays for us."

Adjustments during the halftime break led to both offenses taking a drastic step back from the unrelenting production that defined the first half.

The first punt of the game for the Highlanders ended their first third-quarter drive, but another interception forced by the defense gave the team the ball back with little time expired.

The Highlander offense meandered down the field into the red zone for another drive that looked poised for another touchdown. Unfortunately, multiple negative plays forced by the Cavalier defense pushed the Highlanders farther from the goal line.

Luckily for the Highlanders, the ever-reliable kicker Starzyk entered the field to attempt a 55-yard field goal. The best leg in 13-6A split the uprights for the first and only score of the third quarter.

College Park's silent offense failed to gain any traction throughout the rest of the second half. Changes from Hughes to Rodrigo Bravo Jr. did not catch the Highlanders off-guard and the lead continued to grow for The Woodlands.

Parker Stephenson came in to relieve Daulton at quarterback, but he kept up a similar pace in terms of production.

The Highlander locomotive continued to churn in the fourth quarter with Stephenson at the helm, including another touchdown drive.

Bolender's second rushing score of the night, and a long-distance rushing score from Stephenson, inflicted the final blows to the down Cavaliers. The overwhelming control from the Highlanders rewarded the team with a 66-20 victory to kickstart rivalry week in 13-6A.

"We can't afford to overlook anybody. We haven't punched our ticket yet," said Rapp ahead of next week. "I know [New Caney] has the capability of being a good football team regardless of what their record is. It's homecoming for us too, so we have to make sure we look past the extra things and understand that winning the football game is the most important thing."

Lessons will be applied for the Highlanders ahead of their matchup with the winless New Caney Eagles on the 25th, while the Cavaliers look to rebound against the equally winless Cleveland Indians.