



## Just Short

Saturday, November 24, 2012

By Matt Stephens

WACO — The Woodlands' bid at a miraculous comeback attempt in the Class 5A Division I football playoffs fell just short. Highlanders quarterback Blaine Gillespie was sacked on fourth down with less than a minute left Saturday afternoon and The Woodlands fell to Round Rock Westwood 34-26 at Baylor's Floyd Casey Stadium.

Down 27-7 after the first half, The Woodlands (8-4) fought back and outscored the Warriors 19-7 in the second half. Westwood (9-3) will face Allen/Mesquite in regional semifinal play on Saturday.

After a Woodlands field goal and a 14-yard, 66-yard drive by Westwood gave the Warriors a 34-10 lead with only 2:26 left in the third quarter, it seemed like it was over for the Highlanders.

But The Woodlands struck back with a 49-yard catch and run by Bayley Novack, which set up a Sean McCanna 22-yard score on Gillespie's perfectly thrown fade pass, giving the Highlanders life. They trailed 34-18.

After Kolbi Brown's second interception of the night on the following Westwood drive and a Woodlands three-and-out, Cole Little intercepted quarterback Bear Fenimore again, keeping the Highlanders afloat. The Woodlands drove 15 plays, but turned it over on downs.

With less than three minutes left, the Highlanders had one last chance and capitalized, using a 69-yard catch and run by McCanna to set up a Jayme Taylor touchdown run two plays later. After Gillespie ran for the two-point conversion, the Highlanders miraculously recovered an onside kick giving the Highlanders a chance to tie.

However, two incomplete passes and two sacks of Gillespie later and the Highlanders' hopes of a third-round playoff game were dashed.

"We talked about what we had to do at halftime to give ourselves a chance, and we did exactly what we needed to do to have a chance to win it," TWHS coach Mark Schmid said. "That's the testament to the senior leadership we have and to the fortitude that these kids have. They believed until the last seconds ticked off that the chance was there."

Gillespie threw for 270 yards and one touchdown, while Fenimore threw for 240 and two scores, but also three picks. McCanna lead The Woodlands with 122 yards receiving, but also had two fumbles in the first quarter, while sophomore Patrick Carr ran for 101 yards on 19 carries.

Schmid praised the play of his explosive offense in the second half of the season and in Saturday's loss as the Highlanders outgained the Warriors 399-348.

"They've been on a great roll and they've played with a lot of confidence. A shaky start in the second half, but what you saw in the second half is what you've seen out of the last five weeks of these guys," Schmid said.

The Woodlands didn't do themselves any favors in the first half and found themselves down 27-7 after the first two periods thanks to three turnovers and some big offensive plays by Westwood.

A long 62-yard catch and run by Warriors receiver Travis Dale set up a 10-yard touchdown pass from Fenimore to Ty Marshall four plays later. The Highlanders fumbled the ensuing kickoff return, setting up a 19-yard field goal and giving Westwood a quick 10-0 lead early in the first quarter.

The Highlanders fumbled the following possession as well, but Kolbi Brown saved The Woodlands with an interception. After both teams punted, the Highlanders found themselves with their best field position of the game at the Westwood 38-yard line.

The Woodlands scored 10 plays later on Taylor's 1-yard run, pulling within three at 10-7 late in the first quarter. But the Warriors dominated the second quarter, outscoring the Highlanders 17-0.

Westwood scored 10 points on drives of 67 and 69 yards to go up 20-7 with less than two minutes left in the half. The Woodlands tried to score before the half, but a tipped pass was picked off by Daniel Fry, who returned it deep into Highlander territory, setting up yet another score.

Dale had 125 receiving yards on six catches while Fenimore had 197 passing yards and two scores in the first half. The Warriors doubled up the Highlanders 230-115 in first-half yardage.

"If a couple of things could have been different today, if we could have had a couple of plays back from the first half, I think we come away with a win. But that's not what happened," Schmid said.



## Football playoffs: Highlanders late rally falls short

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WACO, Texas – The Woodlands High School football team saw its 2012 season come to an end on Saturday afternoon at Floyd Casey Stadium on the campus of Baylor University.

In a place where the college football world was shocked a week before by Baylor's victory over No. 1 Kansas State, it was the Highlanders who were shell-shocked on the same field by Round Rock Westwood. The Warriors scored 27 first-half points en route to a 34-26 victory in an area round playoff game.

The Highlanders (8-4) rallied from a 27-7 halftime deficit. They scored a late touchdown and recovered an onside kick near midfield in the final minute of the game but were not able to convert one more time.

The Highlanders dug themselves in an early hole, trailing 10-0 before the offense could take a snap. Westwood scored on the opening possession and then recovered the ensuing kickoff at the Highlanders' 5-yard line. But The Woodlands defense held and the Warriors settled for a short field goal.

It could have been worse. The Highlanders coughed it up again, giving Westwood excellent field position. But senior defensive back Kolbi Brown came up with his first of two interceptions to prevent further damage. Cole Little also came up with a big fourth-quarter pick to keep Westwood out of the end zone.

The Woodlands answered late in the first quarter with the help of some over exuberant Warriors activity. They were flagged with a personal foul on what would have been fourth down, giving The Woodlands new life.

Jayme Taylor capped the Highlanders' initial scoring drive with a 1-yard touchdown run, slicing the deficit to 10-7.

Westwood moved the ball through the air and scored on the first play of the second quarter with a short run to extend its lead to 17-7. Warriors' quarterback Bear Fennimore threw for 200 yards (13-24-1) in the first half.

He got negative yardage on a key pass late in the first half, however, thanks to Highlanders senior linebacker Cole Little, who came up with a big tackle late in the first half. It effectively put an end to the Warriors' drive and they had to settle for a field goal and a 20-7 lead.

The Warriors took advantage of a late interception and pass interference penalty to tack on a late touchdown and a 27-7 lead at the break.

The Highlanders suffered three turnovers in the first half.

They came out with a purpose in the second half, driving for nearly half of the third quarter to the Warriors' red zone on the first possession of the second half. But the drive stalled and Alex Garcia drilled a 22-yard field goal.

Westwood answered on its first possession of the second half with a long touchdown drive of its own to put the game seemingly out of reach.

But the Highlanders certainly didn't travel all the way to Waco just to roll over. They drove the length of the field in just over a minute off the clock and Blaine Gillespie fired a 22-yard touchdown pass to Sean McCanna. Taylor rushed for the 2-point conversion, cutting the Warriors' lead to 34-18 late in the third quarter.

The Highlanders made it a one-score game with 1:29 left to play when Gillespie threw 69 yards to McCanna, setting up a 1-yard touchdown run by Taylor. Gillespie added the 2-point conversion run and the Highlanders recovered the subsequent onside kick but couldn't gain a first down in the final minute.

Westwood (9-3) advances past the area round for the first time ever. The Warriors take on Allen in a regional playoff game next week.