

THE COURIER

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The Woodlands blows past Austin Bowie in regional playoffs

By Jon Poorman
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WACO — Big plays were the name of the game for The Woodlands on Saturday night against Austin Bowie as the Highlanders advanced to the regional finals for the first time since 2011 with a 52-31 victory over the Bulldogs at Baylor's McLane Stadium.

The Woodlands (13-0) now has 13 wins for the second time in school history, joining the 2003 club that advanced all the way to the state championship game and finished 14-1.

"It's huge," The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said of the win. "We were (in the regional finals) in 2011, and got beat by (Dallas) Skyline. The last time we won a regional title was in 2003, so I'm hoping we can go back to those 2003 days and win ourselves a regional championship."

With the triumph, the Highlanders (13-0) advance to the Division I Region II-6A finals against Round Rock (10-3), a team they defeated in the area round back in 2013. The Dragons defeated Coppell 49-45 on Saturday at Waco ISD Stadium to advance.

The two teams are set to square off at 2 p.m. next Saturday at McLane Stadium. The Woodlands won that previous playoff matchup 24-23 three years ago, blocking a last-minute field goal attempt by the Dragons to secure the win.

"It will be right here, so same football stadium," Schmid said. "I think they're a good football team. I haven't had a chance to see them on video yet, but they're playing in the fourth round, so everybody that's still in is still good. We're going to be ready, and we're going to do a great job of preparing this week."

The Highlanders jumped out to a 21-3 lead in the first half against Bowie, thanks to three scoring plays of 30 or more yards. Senior quarterback Eric Schmid threw touchdowns of 75 and 43 yards to Dylan Casey and Kesean Carter, respectively, and added a 30-yard scamper of his own to give his team the commanding early advantage.

"It was awesome to watch the kids come out like they did," Mark Schmid said. "We made some big plays, put the ball in the end zone, and we kind of set the stage for the offense to do that all night long. We were only stopped one time, and that was right before the half. When you can do that, you've got a chance to win a lot of football games."

Eric Schmid finished the game 13-for-19 for 273 yards and three touchdowns passing. He also rushed for 189 yards and three more scores. His interception as the clock ran out in the first half — picked off by Bowie's Josh Smythe-Macauley in the end zone — was just his second of the year in 234 pass attempts.

After trailing 21-10 at the break, Bowie (11-2) did its best to hang around in the second half as quarterback Wade Smith threw three touchdowns in the final two quarters to Elijah Higgins, Caden Donahue and Aizayah Santiago, respectively. But every time the Bulldogs scored, the Highlanders answered.

Eric Schmid countered with a 13-yard touchdown pass to Dylan Casey and later reached pay dirt on touchdown runs of 40 and 17 yards, respectively. Connor Klapesky added a 38-yard jaunt to help keep the Bulldogs at arm's length.

Shane Sirdashney and Ethan Bonner each had an interception for The Woodlands' defense. "This is what our whole goal was from the start — to be 13-0, 14-0, 15-0, 16-0," Eric Schmid. "No words can really describe it because this is what we've worked for since we were in seventh grade."



The Woodlands Highlanders big-play offense put a muzzle on the Austin Bowie Bulldogs

By Jim East, WOL Sports
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WACO, Texas – [The Woodlands Highlanders](#) landed one knockout punch after another on Saturday night, pummeling the Austin Bowie Bulldogs 52-31 at Baylor's McLane Stadium.

The Bulldogs kept scoring touchdowns but the Highlanders always answered with a scoring march. The Woodlands' high-octane, quick-strike offense scorched the Bulldog defense, and now the Highlanders (13-0) are just two wins away from a ticket to the state title game. Next week they move on to the quarterfinals against Round Rock, which narrowly defeated Coppell 49-45.

Statistically, the first quarter would seem to favor the Bulldogs, who dominated time-of-possession and held the ball for more than 10 minutes. But while they succeeded in sidelining The Woodlands offense, the Highlander defense always came up with a big sack or key play in the red zone to prevent Bowie from building a lead.

The Bulldogs took the game's opening drive at the 19 and spent more than six minutes moving methodically down the field before settling for a field goal. Then it was The Woodlands' turn. After two plays and a penalty, they faced a third-and-15 at their own 25 and gambled with a go-big-or-go-home play.

Quarterback Eric Schmid dropped back and launched a pass that sailed 40 yards and landed in the hands of wide receiver Dylan Casey on the right sideline. Casey banged into a defender, steadied himself and accelerated the rest of the way to complete a stunning 75-yard touchdown play. Charles Gingras' point-after made it 7-0.

The Bulldogs embarked on another time-consuming march, taking four minutes to move within sniffing distance of the goal-line. But Highlander defensive lineman Michael Purcell popped Bowie quarterback Wade Smith on a third-down sack to stifle the Bulldogs and force a punt.

Striking again on an aggressive third-down call, Schmid hit Kesean Carter on a 42-yard touchdown pass to make it 14-3. Schmid, the Player of the Game, threw for three touchdowns and rushed for three more.

The next two possessions dropped the Bulldogs into a deep hole from which they would never recover. Woodlands defensive back Ethan Bonner made a touchdown-saving tackle on a long pass play by Bowie, and then linebacker Grant Milton lowered the boom on Smith with another red-zone sack. On the very next play, Bonner made an interception in the end zone, a play that was especially remarkable since he was playing with a cast on one of his hands.

Taking over after the interception, the Highlanders marched confidently down the field and Schmid capped off the drive with a 30-yard touchdown run down the right sideline. Bowie closed the gap to 21-10 at halftime when Wilson hooked up with Aizayaha Santiago on a 47-yard touchdown bomb.

The Woodlands couldn't get into the end zone on their first drive of the second half, but Lockhart West booted a clutch 37-yard field goal to make it 24-10. About four minutes later, Casey scored on a 12-yard touchdown catch and it was 31-10.

That play seemed to light the fuse on a remarkable offensive fireworks display as the teams raced up and down the field the rest of the night. The Bulldogs kept scoring touchdowns to keep their comeback hopes alive, but the Highlanders always answered with a scoring march to maintain plenty of breathing room.

Over a 12-minute stretch from the third quarter to the fourth, the two teams combined for seven touchdowns.

For The Woodlands, they kept dialing up the right rushing plays to take advantage of a Bulldog team that was blitzing on almost every play. Connor Klapesky ran for a 35-yard touchdown, Schmid scored from 45 yards out, and he added a 25-yard rushing touchdown with 4:18 left in the game.

Bowie's historic season ends with loss to The Woodlands

Thomas Jones
American-Statesman Staff
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WACO - Bowie's historic football season couldn't hold up against an unbeaten The Woodlands squad that's determined to create its own postseason legacy.

The Highlanders, who have hopes of winning the school's first state title in football, rolled to a 52-31 victory Saturday night in a Class 6A, Division I regional semifinal at McLane Stadium. Behind a career night from quarterback Wade Smith, Bowie showed the fight that allowed the Bulldogs to win 11 games for the first time in school history, but the Bulldogs simply couldn't keep pace with The Woodlands (13-0).

"They're unbeaten for a reason," Smith said. "They have an electric offense and a really good defense. We knew it wasn't going to be a cakewalk. This is round three of the playoffs; we had to play really well to beat them.

"Credit them. They're a classy team, and I wish them the best."

A senior, Smith threw for a school-record 413 yards and four touchdowns on 22-of-37 passing. Until Highlanders quarterback Eric Schmid sprinted to the end zone on a 17-yard run with 4 minutes, 30 seconds to play, scoring the game's final touchdown, Bowie's offense kept fans of The Woodlands nervous.

Three Bulldogs topped 100 yards receiving, including Paul Saucedo (nine catches, 104 yards), Elijah Higgins (6-177) and Aizayah Santiago (3-106).

The Highlanders, who have now topped 40 points in 10 consecutive games, didn't run as many plays as Bowie, nor did they match the Bulldogs (11-2) in time of possession. However, they boasted plenty of big plays; five of their seven touchdowns covered at least 30 yards.

“We didn’t get enough stops,” said Bowie coach Jeff Ables. “We didn’t come up here to lose, and we’re disappointed, but it was a great season. I’m proud of our kids and our community.”

Schmid, a senior who’s the son of Highlanders head coach Mark Schmid, ran for 195 yards and three touchdowns and threw for another 202 yards and three scores. His 30-yard touchdown run in the second quarter gave the Highlanders a 21-3 lead, and it appeared then that they would cruise to a victory.

However, the Bulldogs answered when Smith lofted a beautiful pass into the hands of Santiago for a 47-yard touchdown just before halftime, trimming Bowie’s deficit to 21-10, but that was as close as the Bulldogs came.

The loss didn’t tarnish the best season in Bowie’s nearly three decades of varsity football. The Bulldogs reached the third round of the playoffs for the first time since 2010, and Ables picked up his 100th career victory in September.

While The Woodlands will go on to face Round Rock in a state quarterfinal at 2 p.m. Saturday at McLane Stadium, a senior-laden Bowie squad headed back to Austin with plenty of memories from a special season.

“This year has been one of the greatest years of my life,” said Smith, a stellar student who plans to study engineering in college with the goal of traveling to the moon or developing prosthetic limbs for injured veterans. “Being able to be a part of the history of Bowie is something special. We made history with one of the best group of guys I’ve ever been around, and that’s what makes it special.”