



Highlanders season ends with 23-7 loss to Rockwall

By Justin Maskulinski
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SHENANDOAH – The Woodlands came into the postseason hoping to replicate last season's run to the state championship.

On a windy Saturday evening at Woodforest Bank Stadium, Rockwall had different plans. The Yellowjackets (6-5) entered the home field of the seventh-ranked Highlanders (7-2) and came away with a 23-7 win.

The Woodlands knew it would face a tough test in the Rockwall offense – which totaled 343 yards – but it was the defense that was a surprise.

"It's exactly what we expected from their offense," coach Mark Schmid said. "They did a great job of executing their defense. They tackled well, which is really something we hadn't seen. They made tackles and put us into tough situations."

The Woodlands offense, which entered the game averaging 46 points per game, was held to just one touchdown and 164 yards of offense.

Rockwall moves into the area round with the win, where they'll take on No. 4 Sachse (11-0), a 49-28 winner over Lake Highlands on Friday night.

On the first drive of the afternoon, Rockwall marched down the field and capped off a 75-yard, 5-minute, 10-second drive with an 18-yard pass from Jacob Clark to Cameron Crayton on fourth down. With all the momentum, the Yellowjackets recovered an onside kick to keep The Woodlands' offense off the field.

"[Rockwall] did a great job of keeping us off the field," Schmid said. "They ran the clock down and went for it fourth down many times in the first half to keep our offense off the field. We stood on the sideline an awful bunch in that first half."

The ensuing drive got into the red zone, but stalled when a 22-yard field goal into a strong wind went wide right. Sustained winds were around 17 miles per hour for the whole game. Gusts approached 26 miles per hour. The direction of the wind, north-northwest, meant one team was always going into the gusts.

The first offensive drive for The Woodlands didn't start until there was 3:02 left in the first quarter. The drive was kept alive twice thanks to third-down penalties on Rockwall.

A 20-yard pass from Quinton Johnson to Kesean Carter got The Woodlands inside the 10 before Bryeton Gilford's 3-yard touchdown run got the Highlanders on the board on the second quarter's first play.

There were three punts and two interceptions in the rest of the second quarter. The Woodlands' Austin Winfield picked off Clark to end the drive that followed Gilford's touchdown run. Rockwall's Drew Gladney picked off Johnson's heave to the end zone as time expired in the second quarter. Rockwall came out strong again in the third quarter. After a Highlander 3-and-out, the Yellowjackets got to The Woodlands' 30-yard line. A tackle-for-loss by Jackson Shearer ended the drive on fourth down.

After the Highlanders stalled on offense, Rockwall found the end zone in just two plays. Clark found Cole Talley open up the middle for 49 yards before the quarterback rushed in the score from eight yards out. Clark was 13-for-24 for 183 yards through the air in the win.

Rockwall started its next drive as the fourth quarter began. Five minutes and three seconds later, the Yellowjackets took a 17-7 lead thanks to Landry Poppen's 26-yard field goal.

Rockwall's long drives were often sustained thanks to running back Zach Henry, who had 128 yards on 34 carries.

The Woodlands started its next drive at midfield after a kick-catch interference call came on the Rockwall pop-up kick into the win. The first play of the drive resulted in an interception by Abbas Bell. The ensuing Rockwall drive, which ended in a 3-yard touchdown run from Henry, erased any sliver of hope for a comeback.

Sixty-nine seniors played their final game for The Woodlands on Saturday.

"Great leadership from the start," Schmid said of the seniors. "Outstanding young men that do exactly what you ask them to do as a coach. They represent the school and program in the finest manner. No one can take away your character, your integrity or how you conduct yourself. They didn't lose that tonight."

Carter, who will run track this spring before heading to Texas Tech as a two-sport athlete, is one member of the large senior class.

"It ended pretty bad for us," Carter bluntly said. "We lost in the first round at home, but we came out and fought and gave it our all. The result didn't go as we wanted it to, so we've just got to move on."

Woodlands Highlanders upset in Bi-District round to Rockwall

By: J.C. Cartagena

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THE WOODLANDS, Texas—As the regular season transitions into the playoffs, The Woodlands hosted their first-round playoff game at Woodforest Bank Stadium against the Rockwall Yellowjackets. The Woodlands season would come to an end with a 23-7 loss to Rockwall who will move on to the second round where they will face-off against Sachse.

Rockwall opened up the game with a long drive in which they ended up converting a 4th and 5 from in the red zone that resulted in a touchdown pass from Jacob Clarke to Cameron Crayton to give the Yellowjackets an early 7-0 lead against the Highlanders. On the following kickoff, Rockwall recovered a surprise onside kick but were held to no points as Kesean Carter blocked the Yellowjackets field goal attempt.

The only scoring in the first for the Highlanders came from sophomore running back Bryeton Gilford early in the second quarter. The trick plays and stubborn defense kept the 5-5 Yellowjackets in the game with the #3 ranked team in the state The Woodlands.

As the game worn on The Woodlands struggled to get past the Yellowjackets defense. Being held to their lowest scoring output of the season, the Highlanders failed to score in the second half to end their night with a single score. While Rockwall did have a couple lucky bounces fall their way with two offensive fumble recoveries, they were able to score on the tough Highlander defense multiple times in the second half.

The Woodlands season ends as they get ready for the offseason. Many key players graduating this year with Kesean Carter, Jackson Shearer, Carson Reich, Quinton Johnson and Quinn Binney to name a few, the Highlanders have a lot of talent returning on both sides of the ball with names such as Bryeton Gilford, Malik Johnson, and Austin Winfield.

The Highlanders ended their season 7-2 with an undefeated district record and a District 12-6A championship. The Woodlands will look to their returning talent to attempt to make another playoff run similar to 2016.

