

The Woodlands knocks off previously unbeaten West Brook

By Jon Poorman
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SHENANDOAH - As The Woodlands took the field against Beaumont West Brook on Thursday night at Woodforest Bank Stadium, highly-touted wide receiver Kesean Carter sat in a chair behind the south end zone, dressed only in his red No. 6 jersey, basketball shorts, long red socks and tennis shoes.

The No. 9 state-ranked Highlanders were without their most lethal weapon due to a groin injury, and they were facing an undefeated opponent in the Bruins who were determined to avenge the worst loss in the history of their program - a 72-7 drubbing at the hands of The Woodlands last year. But despite the challenges in front of them, the Highlanders found a way to prevail.

The Woodlands got a pair of huge defensive stops and scored a pair of rushing touchdowns in the fourth quarter to pull away from West Brook, earning a 35-21 victory in 12-6A action.

The Highlanders have now won 26 consecutive district games and have captured 31 straight victories when playing at Woodforest.

"It took a total team effort," The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said. "A great defensive effort of keeping them out of the end zone with their explosive players that they have on offense. ... And then offensively, kind of the same formula as last week - offensive line starts to gel, we start to establish a running game, and at the end we popped two big plays to go up by two scores."

With the game tied at 21 late in the third quarter, West Brook looked poised to take the lead. But the Highlanders caused a fumble by running back James Jones as he was plowing toward the end zone, and Carson Reich was there for the recovery at The Woodlands' 1.

The Woodlands (3-1, 2-0) came up with another stop later in the period, forcing a turnover on downs when West Brook (5-1, 2-1) went for it on fourth down from the Highlanders' 21.

The Woodlands carried that momentum into the fourth quarter, and with 9:57 remaining in the game, quarterback Quinton Johnson sprinted 17 yards for a score.

Bryeton Gilford then ripped off a 41-yard touchdown run with 5:09 to play to essentially seal the victory. The sophomore running back finished with a team-high 120 yards on 14 carries.

"It's awesome to see him - he's a sophomore, growing up, getting more and more confidence," Schmid said. "Tough runner, tough to bring down and has that explosive speed that can run away from people. So it's exciting to see him start to gel in our offense."

The Woodlands jumped on the scoreboard quickly in the opening quarter, reaching the end zone on a 2-yard run by Lucas Summers. The score was set up when linebacker Jackson Shearer pounced on a West Brook fumble at the Bruins' 6-yard line.

West Brook responded later in the quarter when L'Ravien Elia connected with Bralin Simon for an 11-yard touchdown pass, but the the extra point failed and the Bruins still trailed.

West Brook took its first lead of the game early in the second period when Elia hit Damon Ward Jr. for a 9-yard score. But The Woodlands went up 14-13 with just 1:06 to play before halftime when Gildford found paydirt on a 3-yard run up the middle.

The Woodlands was limited to just 94 yards of total offense in the first half. West Brook matched that just on the ground and walked into the locker room with 197 total yards.

The Highlanders came out blazing in the second half, finding paydirt on a 1-yard touchdown run by Summers on their opening drive. The score was set up by a 56-yard pass from Johnson to Connor Klapesky.

The excitement would be short-lived as Thaddeaus Johnson returned the ensuing kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown. Elia broke several tackles and finally found a wide-open Deonte Simpson in the corner of the end zone for the two-point conversion to knot the game at 21.

"It was a great spark, and we tried to capitalize off it, but you get a few penalties and get the fumble at the 1, and it's hard to do that," West Brook coach Eric Peevey said. "I thought it put us in a great situation to take that momentum and keep going. And then after those couple series back-to-back, it kind of put us in a bad situation."

The Highlanders' defense played lights out from that point on, and the offense began to find a rhythm with the ground game before breaking off the scoring runs that would ultimately put the game out of reach.

"There's just some little mistakes that we've got to correct," Peevey said. "We've got to cut all those little mistakes out, and we'll be right where we need to be."