

# THE COURIER

OF MONTGOMERY  COUNTY



## The Woodlands rumbles past Klein Forest, claims share of district title

By Jon Poorman  
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KLEIN — The Woodlands clinched a share of the District 15-6A title on Thursday evening, cruising to a 63-7 victory over last-place Klein Forest at Memorial Stadium in the regular-season finale for both teams.

The Highlanders (7-3, 7-1) have now won at least a share of their district title in 10 of 11 seasons and bounced back nicely after having their six-game winning streak snapped last week in a loss to co-champion Klein Collins. It was also the final tuneup for the team before the UIL Class 6A Division I playoffs begin next week.

The Woodlands' opponent for the bi-district round, which will come from District 16-6A, has yet to be determined. The Highlanders will be playing at home at Woodforest Bank Stadium for that game regardless after clinching the top seed from their district in Division I. Klein Oak takes the second seed, while the other two playoff teams -- Klein Collins and Klein -- will be placed into the Division II bracket.

"It's always good to have a chance for a lot of kids to play, and we have a lot of players who work hard and had an opportunity to get in and play," The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. "I'm proud for every one of them to get a chance to do that. We did what we needed to tonight. We worked on some things we needed to get better at, and we were able to do those things in the game tonight. So moving forward, I'm excited. We get a chance to play one more (game), and that's what we've been

talking about. We knew we were going to for quite a while, but we talked about how fleeting it is once you get in the playoffs.”

The Woodlands will be making its 24th consecutive appearance in the postseason this year, but it will be the first under Rapp. The Highlanders struggled out of the gates in non-district play with two consecutive losses, but they found their groove once league play began and have steadily improved over the course of the season. The win over Klein Forest was an important one, not just from a momentum standpoint, but from a pride standpoint as well.

“Being district champions is a great deal, it’s a great honor,” Rapp said. “I’m glad and I’m excited that we were able to do that because it’s a tough district. The kids are excited because they get to carry on that tradition.”

The Woodlands posted its highest point total of the season on Thursday against Klein Forest, and it started early. The Highlanders scored on their first possession of the game as wide receiver Malik Johnson caught a pass in the right flat from Casey Sunseri and raced 35 yards for the touchdown.

The Highlanders extended their lead later in the quarter as running back Bryeton Gilford punched home a 3-yard score on fourth down. The play was set up when Klein Forest was called for a costly offsides penalty on a play where The Woodlands kicker Fabrizio Pinton connected on a 23-yard field goal. The miscue moved the visitors closer to the end zone, and they capitalized.

The Highlanders used another big play — similar to the one they got from Johnson — to make the score 21-0 early in the second quarter. Gilford reeled in a short throw from Sunseri in the left flat and zigzagged 47 yards for the score, making several defenders miss along the way.

With a comfortable lead, The Woodlands turned to backup quarterback Ben Mills later in the period. The junior signal-caller made the most of his opportunity, scrambling for a 12-yard score and running over a defender at the goal line to give his team the 28-0 advantage.

Klein Forest (1-9, 0-8) finally got on the scoreboard with 22 seconds remaining in the half as quarterback Delvin Jones found the end zone from 1 yard out. The Golden Eagles were aided by two pass interference calls against the Highlanders on the drive. Klein Forest was limited to just 92 yards of total offense in the first half, compared to 283 for The Woodlands.

The Woodlands needed just two plays to get back in the end zone on their first drive of the third quarter. Johnson once again caught a short pass from Sunseri and outran the Golden Eagles' defense for a 48-yard touchdown to make the score 35-7. He needed just three catches to lead the team with 87 receiving yards.

"We know we have some players who can do some things," Rapp said. "Malik, he's a talent, and he can really do some good things, and we've known that. Having some opportunities to get him the football was good today."

The Highlanders were much more methodical on their next drive, but the end result was the same as Jacoby Clarke took a handoff up the middle for a 2-yard score. Highlander running back Brandon Wheeler got into the action later in the game, reaching paydirt on a 1-yard run after setting up the score with a 44-yard scamper.

The Woodlands made it 56-7 when Palmer Jacobs found the end zone from 2 yards out on a jet sweep toss from Mills, and Jakob Sewall capped the scoring with a 10-yard touchdown run with about eight minutes left.