



Lamar scores late touchdown to edge The Woodlands

By Jon Poorman

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SHENANDOAH — In the first-ever meeting between two powerhouse programs from the Greater Houston area, The Woodlands and Lamar put on a show Thursday evening at Woodforest Bank Stadium. It was the visiting Texans (1-1) who emerged victorious in a game that featured seven touchdowns and six turnovers, finding the end zone with less than five minutes to play to secure a 31-24 triumph.

Senior running back Cameron Keener, who rushed for 108 yards and four touchdowns, found paydirt on a 1-yard run with 4:47 on the clock, capping the final 78-yard drive that put Lamar in front for good.

“I was very impressed,” Lamar coach Michael Lindsey said. “The kids followed the game plan, it was a back-and-forth game, the sideline was good all night, and the coaches stayed true to what they wanted to do, offensively and defensively. So I’m really proud of the poise, and the game-winning drive was one of the best I’ve seen from the team in the fourth quarter, so that was really good.”

The Woodlands, meanwhile, starts its season 0-2 for just the fifth time since the program’s inception in 1978. The last time the Highlanders began a season with two consecutive losses was 2007. The Woodlands was able to find its groove on defense as the game progressed, but the offense had a hard time sustaining drive and finished with just 26 yards passing.

“In all reality, we didn’t execute well enough offensively to win the football game,” The Woodlands coach Jim Rapp said. ‘I thought we played, for the majority of four quarters, well enough defensively that we should win the football game. We’ve got to execute better on offense. We’ve got to catch the ball better, we’ve got to stay on blocks better, and ultimately, we’ve just got to execute better to be successful.”

Lamar got the scoring started early in the opening quarter as Keener plunged into the end zone on a 1-yard run to put the Texans on top. The touchdown was set up by a fumble recovery by Reggie Spivey, who pounced on the ball after a muffed punt by the Highlanders.

The Woodlands answered back, however, and tied the game on a 43-yard touchdown run by Malik Johnson. The home team then took its first lead of the contest on the first play of the second quarter as Bryeton Gilford charged up the middle for a 6-yard score.

Gilford was the bright spot for the Highlanders' offense, finishing the game with 129 yards on 17 carries. "Our run game is important to what we do," Rapp said. "I think it sets up a lot of things we do in the passing game, and it was good for him to bust loose. He was close a few times last week, and I thought the line did a good job of opening up holes, and he did a good job getting through."

Following the touchdown from Gilford, it only took 20 seconds for the Texans to fire back with a huge play as Keener ripped off a 52-yard touchdown. The first two quarters featured five turnovers between the two teams — three for The Woodlands and two for Lamar. Orrin Bizer and Austin Winfield secured interceptions for the Highlanders. Spivey and George Cavazos each had a fumble recovery for the Texans, and Alex Hogan added an interception.

The Texans grabbed a 17-14 lead just before the break on a 45-yard field goal from Oscar Gongora. The sixth turnover of the game handed the Highlanders the lead once again midway through the third quarter. Jacob Kutchback intercepted a tipped pass and returned it 26 yards to paydirt to give his team the 21-17 advantage. Lamar took the lead back on the first play of the fourth quarter as Keener scored on a 2-yard run, his third rushing touchdown of the evening.

The Woodlands' Fabrizio Pinton connected on a 27-yard field goal later in the quarter to knot the contest at 24. The Texans answered on the ensuing drive, however, and took a 31-24 lead on the 1-yard touchdown run by Keener, his fourth of the game. That would end up being the decisive score. Lamar rushed for 181 yards as a team, averaging nearly five yards per carry.

"I think the offensive line came back from last week and had a lot of purpose in their blocks tonight, so the credit goes to them," Lindsey said. "Jason Sanders, our offensive line coach, did a great job.

Certainly our running backs made some good cuts with Cameron Keener and Jaquon Marion, but it started up front. Those guys came back and didn't get discouraged after Week 1 when we had some problems, so hats off to them."