

THE COURIER

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Villarreal, Highlanders roll past Oak Ridge to start district play

By Rob Tate, Staff Writer
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SHENANDOAH — Dating back to last year, three straight losses were about enough The Woodlands could handle. Despite a pair of losses to start this season (combined with the season-ending game last year), The Woodlands jumped in the win column Friday night and extended its winning streak over Oak Ridge on a 52-0 decision at Woodforest Bank Stadium. It was the District 15-6A opener for both teams.

“We were on a losing streak and lot of these guys at The Woodlands hadn’t lost three games in our whole career,” The Woodlands senior quarterback Casey Sunseri, who had three touchdown passes, said. “It was really tough.”

Oak Ridge (1-2, 0-1) is now 0-15 all-time against The Woodlands (1-2, 1-0).

It was the first win as varsity head coach for The Woodlands’ Jim Rapp. But it was all credit to the kids, he said afterwards. “It’s great,” Rapp said. “I’m excited for the kids. It’s tough when you go through the stretch that we went through the first two games, playing the people that we played. We from the first week to the second week, we’ve improved again this week.

The Woodlands (1-2, 1-0) senior wide receiver PJ Villarreal had a huge night with four touchdown receptions. He caught passes of 43, 34 and 30 yards from Sunseri for scores and a 7-yarder from Ben Mills in the first half.

“I just threw him the ball at the line of scrimmage and he did the rest of the work,” Sunseri said. “All the glory to him. That was awesome.”

Rapp was reasonably happy for Villarreal afterwards. “Four touchdowns - that’s a great night,” he said. “He did a great job. Things worked. We weren’t doing anything different this week than we had the last two weeks. But we executed. To me, that’s the biggest difference. PJ is a heck of a game, really does a great job in games and I was really happy for him.”

Junior rusher Bryeton Gilford also had a big night. He had two touchdowns (for 20 yards in the first quarter and 57 in the fourth) and totaled 176 yards on 16 carries. Junior Jakob Sewall had a long touchdown run of 56 yards midway through the fourth quarter. He was second in rushing with 72. The Highlanders had 559 yards of total offense with 378 coming on the ground. Brandon Wheeler chipped in with 63 yards while Sunseri had 30.

Junior Fabrizio Pinton also contributed by going 7-for-7 on extra points and had a 32-yard field goal in the first quarter.

The Highlanders had two shutouts last year and are halfway there after this one. Ben Langston and Austin Winfield each recovered fumbles.

“I saw the same thing tonight that I’ve seen the last two weeks,” Rapp said. “The difference being they didn’t have to play 90 percent of the game. Offensively we were able to score points and have drives and to keep them off the field so they were fresh for four quarters. They played like that past two games, they just got worn down.”

The War Eagles had 189 yards of total offense. Blane Romero threw for 106 yards while Rowry Bailey had 68 yards receiving.

After losses to quality programs in Cy-Fair and Lamar, Rapp knew his team would enter this rivalry game hungry. “Our kids came and had something to prove,” Rapp said. “I was excited about how intense they were for four quarters.”