

Highlanders Eliminated by Duncanville for the Second Straight Year

By: Jake Wilson | Published 11/25/2023



HUTTO, TX -- The Woodlands Highlanders fell to the reigning Division I 6A State Champion Duncanville Panthers in a rematch of last season's playoff game from last season.

Last year's matchup saw the Panthers walk away with a commanding 35-3 win on their way to a state championship, but the fight would be more difficult in this year's regional round.

The difficulties came in the battle for field position in a first quarter that opened up tight. Both teams traded punts back and forth for the first four drives of the game, with neither squad creating the traction needed to score points.

Duncanville was the first team to get on the board after the Panthers strung together an 85-yard drive that lasted one minute and thirty seconds.

The Highlanders continued to struggle offensively to close the first quarter and begin the second quarter. The Woodlands posted less than 90 yards of total offense in the first half, relying on their defense to keep the Panthers in reach.

Another punt set up a Duncanville drive into Highlander territory, with the Panthers primed to go up by multiple possessions before hitting the half. The drive stalled at The Woodlands' 18-yard line, and a field goal attempt had Duncanville situated to extend their lead against the struggling Highlanders.

However, a block from The Woodlands' special teams unit and a return from Aden Self put the Highlanders deep inside Duncanville territory.

A pass interference from the Panther's defense and a 9-yard pass from Highlander quarterback Mabrey Mettauer tied the two teams at seven points midway through the second quarter.

Following the Highlander touchdown, Duncanville kicked their production up a notch before the first half came to an end.

Two rapid-fire touchdowns from the Panthers in the face of limited production from The Woodlands allowed them to carry a 21-7 lead going into the locker rooms for halftime.

Despite the teams being close to the end of the first half, it became clear that the Panthers were playing at a higher level as the second got underway.

Another 14-point quarter from the Panthers in the third kept the lead increasing steadily in their favor. The Duncanville defense also held up its side by keeping the Highlanders out of scoring range throughout the quarter, which ended 35-7.

With the season's end around the corner, The Woodlands continued to fight for a semblance of positive momentum in the fourth quarter.

Additional scores from Duncanville compounded the situation against the Highlanders, who found themselves down 49-7 with the ball in their possession.

Big catches and runs from the previously stagnant Highlander offense propelled the team into Panther territory with a chance to get a positive note before the game ended.

That note came with the second units in the game to finish the stretch for both teams. Highlander backup quarterback Patrick Miller capped off a lengthy drive with a passing score to Quaneil X Farrakhan Jr. to make it 49-14 in favor of Duncanville.

Some late-game runs and another passing score from Miller saw the final seven minutes of the game tick away.

After the kickoff and kneels from the Panthers, the rematch ended in the same fashion as last year, with Duncanville coming away with a 49-21 victory over the Highlanders to advance to the Quarterfinals.

Duncanville 49, The Woodlands 21

The Woodlands didn't have an answer for Duncanville quarterback Keelon Russell in a Region II-6A Division I semifinal game at Hutto Memorial Stadium.

No. 5 Duncanville (11-1), the defending state champions, also eliminated The Woodlands (9-4) last year at the same juncture.

Russell ran for two scores and passed for another in the decisive second and third quarters as the Panthers pulled away to the victory. Duncanville will next meet Westfield (11-2) in the region championship game next week.

The Panthers grabbed an early 7-0 lead on a 20-yard run by Ayson Theus before The Woodlands tied the game on a 9-yard touchdown pass from Mabrey Mettaufer to Jackson Bolender in the second quarter.

The Panthers, though, would be in charge thereafter. Duncanville's ground attack was powered by running back Caden Durham, who rushed 26 times for 297 yards and a second-half touchdown.

Duncanville moved ahead for good at 13-7 on a 28-yard run by Russell midway through the second quarter. Russell then connected with Dakorien Moore for an 8-yard touchdown pass with 3:11 left in the half, and a two-point conversion produced a 21-7 lead at intermission.

The talented Russell scrambled 30 yards for a touchdown and a 28-7 lead at 4:15 of the third quarter before the Panthers opened a 35-7 advantage on a 2-yard run by Durham just three seconds before the period's end.

JaQualon Armstrong scored two fourth-quarter touchdowns for Duncanville as the lead swelled to 49-7.

Patrick Miller threw two fourth-quarter touchdown passes for The Woodlands.

The first of those was a 6-yard pass to Quanell X Farrakhan Jr. and the second went for 14 yards to Shane Walker.

Mettauer finished the game with 12 completions in 27 attempts for 49 yards.