

TWHS celebrates with safety dance

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PORT ARTHUR – Chalk up plenty of positives for both defenses on this soggy field, but The Woodlands found ways to score without the ball.

Two second-quarter safeties enabled the No. 6 state-ranked Highlanders to assume total command of the first-half field position. That proved critical in The Woodlands' ability to reject an inspired Port Arthur Memorial effort 24-7 Friday night before 7,000 in Memorial Stadium.

Settling for way below its normal 400 yards a game, coach Mark Schmid's team improved to 5-0 by rolling to an 18-0 halftime lead. Port Arthur Memorial (3-2) placed enough stop signs in the way of The Woodlands' high-powered spread attack, but Memorial managed only one third-quarter touchdown of its own.

Schmid stuck to the ground game most of the night, as tailback Daniel Lasco rushed 27 times for 147 yards and one first-half touchdown.

Quarterback Trent Eckel dealt with a wet ball, a soft field and a Memorial defense that tried hard to confuse the Highlanders. He completed only 8 of 19 passes for 103 yards and an early touchdown.

Port Arthur Memorial first-year head coach Kenny Harrison was quite complimentary of his guests, who are rated No. 12 in the latest national high school rankings conducted by USA Today. "The Woodlands is a very good program and a well-coached team," Harrison said. "They had a great game plan. They did what they have been doing all year long. They pinned us back all night long with their kicking game."

With their dominating defensive front, The Woodlands limited Port Arthur to 46 rushing yards while gaining 166 of their own. They led in total yards, 269-181.

Cody Davis, Brian Nordstrom and Robert Bouthilet guided a Woodlands defense which bottled up Port Arthur's running game for a minus 1 yard in the first half.

Davis caught Memorial quarterback Corwin Keal in the end zone for the first of two second-quarter Highlanders' safeties. Keal lacked enough protection and set-up time before Davis crashed in from Keal's right side for a six-yard loss with 8:08 left in the opening half.

Less than five minutes later, The Woodlands defense produced another safety for an 18-0 lead with 3:52 left in the half. Nordstrom, sophomore Mitchell Meyers and senior linebacker Tanner Olson trapped Titans running back Daleon Sinette in the end zone for a four-yard loss on first down. The safety followed an excellent 43-yard punt by Josh Diaz to the seven. An illegal block by Memorial on the punt forced the Titans to retreat to their 4.

The Highlanders showed their ability to produce a sustained drive, as well as a quick strike, in their two first-half touchdown possessions. Eckel engineered a 69-yard, 10-play series to open the game, completing 3 of 4 passes for 52 yards.

The last of those completions covered eight yards to Jonathan Wilcher on the left flank after Eckel first looked to the opposite side. Wilcher scissored past Memorial defender Dimitri Davis after his sharp fake suckered the other side of the Titans defense. An 18-yard screen to receiver Randy Knust accounted for the drive's biggest play and a first down at the Titans' 24.

Field position helped The Woodlands to move 44 yards in three plays for a touchdown following their first safety. Eckel kept for 22 yards, reducing the distance in half. Lasco broke two tackles for 16 to the Titans 6. Lasco busted straight ahead for the final six yards with 7:11 left in the half.