

Lufkin tops The Woodlands, 30-10

By Keith MacPherson

LUFKIN — The breaks didn't go The Woodlands' way Thursday night. Lufkin took advantage of a sure interception turned touchdown and an odd punt turned turnover to hand the Highlanders their first District 14-5A loss, 30-10, at Abe Martin Stadium.

"You can't make the mistakes that we made today and beat a good team like Lufkin," The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said. "We had four turnovers. ... Those are things you can't do." The loss ends a 26-game regular season win streak for the Highlanders (5-1, 1-1) that dated back to 2008.

Lufkin quarterback Nick Cox averted disaster in the second quarter when a deep pass down the sideline bounced off the hands of Highlander cornerback Lane LeBouef and into the arms of JaBryce Taylor. The Lufkin wideout did the rest, sprinting into the end zone for a 45-yard touchdown. Cox finished 16 of 23 for 191 yards. Taylor had seven catches for 87 yards.

The Panthers (6-1, 3-0) again got a break on a fourth and 1 on their opening drive when punter Luis Garcia booted a ground ball, rugby-style punt that rolled right into a Highlander player. Lufkin recovered the ball for a first down.

"We almost get ahold of the punter with the ball in his hands and we're going to get the ball inside their 30-yard line, then it rolls and hits one of our kids and they get the ball back," Schmid said. "It's just one of those weird plays and it's really nobody's fault." The play ended up costing the Highlanders as Lufkin's break resulted in a touchdown six plays later on a 10-yard run by Voshon Richardson. Richardson also scored on a fingertip catch from the 6.

Lance Miles had a season-high 288 yards on 18 of 34 passing for the Highlanders. Blake Webb had five catches for 93 yards. Christian Jauregui had six catches for 89 yards. Randy Cooper had 14 carries for 91 yards for the Highlanders. Cooper Woodyard put the Highlanders on the board with 8:43 left in the first half, punching it in from 2 yards out from the wildcat formation. Woodyard's score capped a 10-play drive in 3:17 that evened the score 7-7.

Jamarcus Walker scooted in from 22 yards out on the second play of the game to send the Lufkin faithful into a frenzy and give the Panthers a 7-0 lead early on. Walker's touchdown came after Woodyard turned the ball over on a fumble on the first play from scrimmage. Walker — 14-5A's leading rusher — had 24 rushes for 103 yards and the one touchdown.

The winner of the last three meetings between these two teams has gone on to win the district title. "We still have a lot more football to play," Schmid said. "There are four more district ballgames. The goal each week is to get better and to win. That doesn't change if we would have won the ballgame or not. In the end we'll see where the pieces fall and where we shake out and that's just what you have to do."

Highlander kicker Marshall Bainton connected on a 34-yard field goal with 3:36 left in the first half. He later missed a 46-yard attempt wide left with 53 seconds left before halftime. Garcia made one of two field goals, nailing a 35-yarder midway through the fourth quarter.

Lufkin's win was the 300th victory for Panthers coach John Outlaw.

Panthers take big step toward reclaiming district title in 30-10 win over Highlanders

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The last time The Woodlands Highlanders came to Abe Martin Stadium, they took the gold ball for the district championship away from the Lufkin Panthers, taking a 31-21 win. In front of a mostly packed house at Abe Martin Stadium and a national TV audience on Fox Sports Southwest, the Panthers took a big step toward taking that gold ball back, rolling to a 30-10 victory.

With The Woodlands keying on Jamarcus Walker, the Panthers got big nights from Nick Cox, Jabryce Taylor and Voshon Richardson on offense and the defense made big play after big play on their way to avenging a pair of losses to their biggest rival in the district. Barring any major upsets in the last three weeks of the season, it also guaranteed Lufkin will return to the top of the district after two years of runner-up finishes.

"It was an unbelievable performance for us all the way around," Lufkin head coach John Outlaw said. "These kids didn't want to see The Woodlands celebrating after beating them again. And they went out and gave a great performance against a really good team." Lufkin got the win thanks to an outstanding performance from the offense despite The Woodlands focusing on slowing down Walker, who still finished with 88 yards and a touchdown on 22 carries.

But the other offensive threats made the key plays for Lufkin, including Richardson, who ran for 69 yards and a touchdown on 11 carries and also caught two passes for 34 yards and a spectacular seven-yard touchdown catch that gave Lufkin a three-score lead in the third quarter.

Cox also had a big night for Lufkin with 185 yards and a pair of touchdowns on 16-of-24 passing. His favorite target was Taylor, who finished with seven catches for 90 yards and a highlight reel 45-yard touchdown catch. "This is a very unselfish team," Outlaw said. "They don't care who's getting the job done and tonight was a great example of that."

The biggest key in the game was in the turnover battle as The Woodlands turned the ball over four times, twice on fumbles and twice on muffed punts. That helped negate a performance in which The Woodlands gained 413 yards, including a 268-yard performance by QB Lance Miles. Meanwhile, Lufkin didn't turn the ball over once. "They made some key mistakes and we didn't," Outlaw said. "They turned it over four times and we took advantage of it."

The Panthers didn't waste any time to make an impact. On The Woodlands' first play, Lufkin forced a fumble and the Panthers' Demontrai Lewis recovered the fumble. On the next play, Walker found a seam and ran for a 21-yard touchdown to give the Panthers a 7-0 lead just 14 seconds into the game. On The Woodlands' next drive, the Highlanders drove to the Lufkin 7 before coming up short on a fourth-and-three. That proved to be a theme for the half as The Woodlands' next drive ended on a fumble in the red zone.

The Highlanders finally got on the board on their third trip into the red zone as Cooper Woodyard ran in for a two-yard score, knotting the game at 7-7. Lufkin didn't take long to regain the lead as Taylor had a highlight play on a 45-yard touchdown reception. The ball was deflected as Taylor kept his concentration and reeled in the catch before racing to the end zone. However, the extra point was missed, leaving Lufkin's lead at 13-7.

The Woodlands narrowed the margin to 13-10 on a 34-yard field goal by Marshall Blanton. The Woodlands had a chance to tie the game late in the first half but a 45-yard field goal missed wide to the left. Lufkin's Luis Garcia was wide right on a field goal attempt as time expired on the first half, leaving the score at 13-10.

In the first half, the teams were able to move up and down the field as The Woodlands outgained Lufkin, 283-204. But the Panthers' defense was able to stiffen in the red zone, recovering a fumble and stopping a fourth down play. In the second half, the game turned in Lufkin's favor on a bizarre play.

After going three and out, Garcia was tackled while punting the ball. His punt went only three yards down the field before hitting a Highlander player. The Panthers recovered, maintaining possession. Lufkin took advantage eight plays later when Richardson scored on a 10-yard touchdown, finally giving the Panthers breathing room at 20-10.

Another key play in the special teams set up another Lufkin score as a Garcia punt was muffed and the Panthers recovered at The Woodlands 7. Richardson made a nice catch for a seven-yard touchdown that extended the lead to 27-10. The Panthers closed out the scoring on a 35-yard Garcia field goal that made the final 30-10.