



HIGHLANDERS TAKE CONTROL OF DISTRICT WITH DOMINATING WIN OVER WILLIS

The Highlanders improved to 3-0 in district play with an impressive 54-14 win over Willis. The Woodlands ended a 3-game losing streak to the Wildkats and sit alone atop the district standings as they inch closer to an incredible 32nd consecutive playoff appearance.

The Highlanders wasted no time Friday night getting on the scoreboard. Quarterback Kaden Copelin rolled out after a play-action fake on the The Woodlands' first offensive play and found Bryson Bourn for a 57-yd touchdown. Bourn outjumped Willis defensive back A'majai Friend for the contested catch and raced to the end zone as the Highlanders jumped out to an early 7-0 lead.

The lead didn't last long. Right after giving up the long touchdown, Friend received the ensuing pooch kickoff at the 30 yd-line. Friend started near the left sideline, worked his way all the way across the field, and sprinted down the right sideline for the touchdown. With less than 30 seconds off the clock, the score was already 7-7. Each of the last 4 times these schools met, the teams combined for at least 70 points and this had the early indications of another shootout.

The Highlanders had other ideas. After a quick three-and-out, Bryce Stott's punt bounced off of returner Acai Anderson and was recovered by Highlander Matthew Johnson. From that point on, this game was completely owned by The Woodlands.

Just a few plays later, including a 15-yd reception by Jason Haskins for a first down, the Highlanders found themselves inside the 5 yard line with a 1st and goal. Bo Duke took the direct snap and found a hole on the right side of the offensive line for a 3-yard TD run, making the score 14-7.

The Highlander defense had a couple of highlights on the Wildkats' next possession. Defensive End Magnus Herndon put Willis in a hole with his 7th sack of the season. Herndon now has 23 career quarterback sacks and trails Michael Purcell by just 1 sack for the career record. Two plays later, Linebacker Max Mitchell intercepted a pass from Willis QB Linc Frazier to give the ball back to the Highlander offense.

The Woodlands, however, gave the ball right back to the Wildkats. A 2nd down fumble on the handoff exchange between quarterback Copelin and running back Haskins set Willis up with terrific field position and an opportunity to get back into the game. But the Highlander defense stepped up and forced a three-and-out, as the Wildkats were forced to punt the ball away.

For the second consecutive series, the Highlanders turned the ball over. This time, it was defensive back A'Majai Friend making his second big play of the game as he wrestled the ball away from Carter

Cass on a long pass for an interception. Again, the Highlander defense held their ground as linebacker Cash Mock recorded a quarterback sack and the Wildcats were stopped on a 4th down attempt.

As the second quarter began, the Highlander offense finally got the ball moving. Aided by a big run from Copelin and a couple of Wildkat penalties, The Woodlands moved towards the red zone. On 1st and 10 from the 21-yard line, Bourn was able to beat cornerback Jlynnd Kellow across the middle for his 2nd TD reception of the game.

Willis responded with a 12-play drive that made it all the way to the Highlander 11-yard line. But after three straight incompletions from the 11-yd line, the Wildkats were forced to attempt a field goal. Vincent Lewis broke free on the left side and blocked the field goal attempt, which was then scooped up by Bryce Stott at the 29-yd line and returned all the way back for a touchdown. The potential 10-point swing gave the Highlanders a commanding 28-7 lead.

A few series later, Carter Cass returned a punt for 20 yards to set the Highlanders up with great field position at the Wildkat 34 yard line. The Woodlands moved the ball inside the 10-yd line but settled for a 25-yd field goal from kicker Franco Heinze. The Highlanders would get the ball one more time before halftime. A Willis penalty for a hoarsecollar tackle moved the ball into field goal range. This time, Heinze was perfect from 47 yards out and the Highlanders took a 34-7 lead into the locker room.

Heinze would strike again early in the 3rd quarter. After a Willis punt to start the 2nd half, the Highlanders moved the ball across midfield and into field range. Heinze would hit from 42 yards for his 3rd field goal of the game, giving TWHS a 37-7 lead.

With a comfortable lead, The Woodlands began to work the clock. On their next series, the Highlanders methodically worked their way down the field. The 13-play drive used up the rest of the 3rd quarter and moved the ball into the red zone. On the first play of the 4th quarter, Bourn took a short shovel pass from Copelin and raced 17 yards around the right side and into the endzone for his 3rd TD reception of the night.

Three plays later, the Wildkats were set to punt again. Special Teams standout Vincent Lewis came through cleanly and recorded his second blocked kick of the night, knocking the punt attempt out of bounds on the 3-yd line. Two plays later, Jason Haskins punched it in for the short TD run.

The Highlanders had one more offensive and again advanced the ball into field goal range. Franco Heinze was good from 24 yards, giving him his 4th field goal of the night. The 4 FGs tied a school record for field goals in a game and his 18 points set a new single game record for points by a kicker.

Willis got a late score on a 16-yd TD run from QB Parker Stephenson making the final score 54-14 in the Highlanders' favor.

Max Mitchell led the Highlander defense with 10 total tackles while Nate Beagle added 6. The defense only allowed 27 rushing yards and held the Wildkats to under 200 total yards.