

SPORTS

# FOOTBALL: Tomball remains unbeaten, tops Oak Ridge 38-13

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Tomball defensive linemen Travis Bates (34) pressures Oak Ridge quarterback Ethan Rodriguez (3) during the second quarter of a non-district high school football game at Woodforest Bank Stadium, Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021, in Shenandoah.

SHENANDOAH — Tomball is off to a 4-0 start for the first time in five years with the biggest stretch of the season coming up.

Ahead of District 15-6A play starting next week, the Cougars topped Oak Ridge 38-13 at Woodforest Bank Stadium Thursday night.

“(Being) 4-0 feels great,” Tomball associate head coach Dave Handal said. “These guys deserve it. We don’t talk about records and wins each week. We just talk about getting better. Obviously our first season is over. After this one, we move into district play. We’ve got a big one next week.”

Oak Ridge (1-3) falls for the third straight week. The loss to the Cougars was the steepest, however, after being within earshot of previous losses to Houston Stratford and Pearland last week. The first three Oak Ridge games were decided by four-or-less points.

“Tomball is a really good football team,” Oak Ridge coach Mark Schmid said. “They really are. There’s a reason why they’re 4-0 and we’ve got to get better next week.”

The Cougars scored three unanswered touchdowns from the arm of quarterback Cale Hellums to lead 21-0 at halftime. Oak Ridge battled to a 24-13 game after the break before the Cougars scored two more times in the fourth quarter.

“I was proud of the way the kids came back,” Schmid said. “That’s what I told them is if we started the game the way we started the second half, we might have a different outcome here.”

Hellums connected with Derrick Taylor for the first two scores. Taylor’s first was a 45-yard reception in the first quarter and his second was a 55-yarder in the second quarter.

With 13 seconds left before halftime, Hellums escaped a rush by the War Eagles defensive front before floating a 17-yard touchdown off his back foot to a wide-open Hayden Oren.

“There’s not enough words to describe what Cale means to us as a team,” Handal said. “He bails us out. He’s our leader, he’s our dude. We’re lucky to have him for sure.”

Oak Ridge was without starting quarterback Steve Smedley for the second straight game. Also out was wide receiver Jahron Jones.

Despite that, senior quarterback Ethan Rodriguez and the War Eagles offense had their chances early.

The second drive of the night went down to the Tomball 6-yard line. After the Cougars defense held firm, they then blocked a 23-yard field goal attempt by Oak Ridge.

Oak Ridge also moved the ball effectively on its first drive of the second quarter before Matt Gainey intercepted the ball away from a War Eagles receiver and one of his own teammates. That set up Taylor's second touchdown reception.

Oak Ridge broke up the shutout in its first possession of the third quarter. Rodriguez connected with a diving Jaquale Harrison on a 27-yard score in the end zone. Harrison has three touchdowns on the year.

Tomball then burned plenty of time off the clock on the ensuing drive. Carlos Alvarado capped a 10-play drive by drilling a 44-yard field goal down the middle for the 24-7 lead.

Oak Ridge gained a little ground on the ensuing. Set up by a 63-yard catch and run by Camden Morgan, Frankie Arthur scored on 4th-and-goal from the 2-yard line to make it a 24-13 game.

Tomball got a 17-yard rushing touchdown by Evan Alaniz and a 15-yard rushing score by Christian Womack in the fourth quarter.

"I thought we were just flat in the first half," Schmid said. "We talked to them at halftime about (how) you don't come back from a 21-point deficit with one play. You have to go drive-by-drive. That's what we challenged our kids to do."

Oak Ridge played with seven sophomores plus were still covering for the injuries that have mounted up early.

Rodriguez threw for 217 yards on the night with Harrison accounting for 85 of those on four catches and Morgan had 97 on three receptions.

"He's done a good job," Schmid said of Rodriguez, who averaged 21.7 yards per reception. "He did a good job last week at Pearland and he's really stepped in nicely for Steve since we lost him against Stratford. He's getting more comfortable and he made some big throws and big plays tonight."

Hellums threw for 163 yards and ran for 91. Womack had 79 yards rushing while Alaniz had 71. Taylor was the leading receiver with 111 yards.

“Anytime you get a win on the road against a well-coached team like that, it feels good,” Handal said.

Tomball plays rival Tomball Memorial for the first time at the brand-new Tomball ISD Stadium next Friday.

Handal said it will likely be a distracting week as the team gets prepared and excited for the whole town to come see the first meeting at the field off the Grand Parkway.

“It’s a big one for sure,” Handal said. “And we have to play better than we did tonight.”

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