

## FOOTBALL: Oak Ridge earns first playoff win since 2002

By Jon Poorman, Staff Writer Updated 10:33 pm CST, Thursday, December 10, 2020



IMAGE 1 OF 39

Oak Ridge defensive tackle Jacob Harris (93) celebrates after the team's 30-20 win over Aldine Eisenhower during a Region II-6A bi-district high school playoff game at Woodforest Bank Stadium, Dec. 10, 2020, ... more

**SHENANDOAH** — Mark Schmid collected 15 playoff victories during his 14-year tenure at the helm of The Woodlands. The veteran head coach started a new tally Thursday night.

Schmid, now leading the program at Oak Ridge, guided his team to a 30-20 victory over Aldine Eisenhower in the Region II-6A (Div. II) bi-district round at Woodforest Bank Stadium. It marked the first playoff victory for the War Eagles since 2002.

"For us to come out and win and break that 18-year spell, that was huge," said Schmid, who took over the program about a month before practices started last year. "The kids

were excited, and we talked about it all week, and they were motivated to do it. To see them actually come out and pull it off is rewarding as a coach."

Oak Ridge (6-4), making its first postseason appearance in three years, will face District 15-6A champion Tomball Memorial (10-0) in the area round next week. The Wildcats defeated Cypress Park 57-52 in a shootout Thursday night at home. Tomball Memorial is ranked No. 22 in the state and averaging more than 54 points per game.



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Getting to the second round was no easy task for Oak Ridge.

Eisenhower (3-4) jumped out to 14-0 lead by the end of the opening period, thanks to a couple of touchdown runs from quarterback Ryan Nesbitt. The sophomore signal-caller reached paydirt from 17 yards out on the Eagles' first possession and crossed the plane on a 1-yard sneak with 37 seconds remaining in the quarter.

Oak Ridge, which turned the ball over twice in the opening frame, got things turned around with some big plays in the second. Quarterback Steve Smedley connected with Jahron Jonas for a 31-yard score and ran in the two-point conversion to get the War Eagles on the board after a dismal start offensively.

Oak Ridge then drove 70 yards down the field for the go-ahead score with less than a minute remaining. The culmination was a 5-yard touchdown pass from Smedley to Alton McCaskill with six seconds to play.



That final score was a critical one for the War Eagles, who took a 15-14 lead into halftime.

"I'm proud of the way they hung in there, especially after the rough start," Schmid said. "We had some solid senior leadership that kept the kids' heads above water, and we were able to climb back in the game. We took the lead right before the half, and then we settled down. The quarterback settled down, and then we played."

Eisenhower regained the lead with two minutes remaining in the third quarter as Waymon Finley found the end zone on a 9-yard run up the middle. Finley led the Eagles with 69 rushing yards on 12 carries.

Oak Ridge answered right back on the ensuing possession, however, as McCaskill punched in a 1-yard touchdown on the third play of the fourth quarter. Smedley then connected with the senior running back for the two-point conversion to hand the War Eagles a 23-20 advantage.

Oak Ridge came up with a huge fourth-down stop at midfield on the next Eisenhower possession. The War Eagles capitalized a short time later as Jonas took a handoff around the left end for a 7-yard score. That put the home team ahead 30-20 with just over six minutes remaining.

Eisenhower missed on a 39-yard field goal attempt with 4:13 to play, and that would be their last opportunity for points. Oak Ridge took possession and ran out the clock with McCaskill leading the charge.

Jonas finished the game with 149 total yards on nine carries and four catches. McCaskill, one of the top running back recruits in the area, collected 126 on the ground with 28 carries and added two catches for another 30. He surpassed 1,200 rushing yards this season Thursday.

"We knew their team was limited, and soon enough, they were going to get tired," McCaskill said. "We had to take advantage of that. As soon as they got tired, we made sure that we put our foot on the gas pedal and kept it going."

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