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FOOTBALL: Grand Oaks beats Oak Ridge in first Battle of the Oaks

By Justin Maskulinski, Staff writer Updated 5:55 pm CST, Friday, November 27, 2020



IMAGE 1 OF 65

Grand Oaks linebacker Brayden Bradley (40) gestures toward cheering fans after the team's 32-28 win over Oak Ridge to keep their playoff hopes alive during a high school District 13-6A high school football ... more

SHENANDOAH — Big plays, weather delays and playoff scenarios made for an eventful afternoon at Woodforest Bank Stadium on Friday.

The outcome was a Grand Oaks 32-28 win over Oak Ridge in what has been deemed the Battle of the Oaks.

The win kept the playoff hopes alive for Grand Oaks (6-3, 2-3) in its first season of playoff eligibility, but it meant much more than that to the Grizzlies.

"This was the Battle of the Oaks and from us starting three years ago in that Oak Ridge (9th Grade Campus) weight room, this has been our kids' Super Bowl," coach Mike Jackson said. "We have plenty of time down the line to try to put pelts on the wall with area round, regional semis, regional finals hopefully. Today, in our first year at 6A, this was our Super Bowl and we played to win that game."

While it was the first football meeting between Oak Ridge and Grand Oaks from it a couple years ago, it felt like a game between regular rivals.



"The fans were excited and were into it," Oak Ridge coach Mark Schmid said. "It's a shame the bands had to leave because of the weather, because it would've made for an electric environment. The rivalry is here."

Though it lost, Oak Ridge (5-4, 2-3) clinched a playoff spot because it would earn a spot via tiebreakers in a potential three-way tie with Grand Oaks and Willis, should it win Saturday over Conroe.

"I think the kids are upset, and rightfully so," Schmid said. "It was a big rivalry game and they wanted to win. We came up on the short end and a lot of kids are upset. We'll recover and rebound. We're back in the playoffs and hoping to get a playoff win, something that hasn't happened at Oak Ridge since 2002."

Grand Oaks' only path to the playoffs is a Conroe win over Willis on Saturday. If Willis wins and the three-way tie occurs, Grand Oaks would be the team left out while Willis and Oak Ridge would clinch spots.



"Nobody has picked us to make the playoffs," Jackson said. "For us to be in the hunt in the last district contest of the season tomorrow is testament to the kids and the coaches. We'll live with that scenario either way. ... It doesn't get any better than today, unless it gets better tomorrow. Right now, we're all

Conroe Tiger fans over at Grand Oaks High School. Go Tigers."

Oak Ridge opened the game with a 12-play, 75-yard scoring drive. The War Eagles capped the drive with a 23-yard pass from Steve Smedley to Scott Hickey on fourth down.

Grand Oaks evened the score on its second offensive attempt. On third and nine, James Holmon hit a wide-open Seth Wright, who sprinted home the 41-yard score.

More Information

District 13-6A Playoff Picture*

If Conroe beats Willis on Saturday: Grand Oaks (2-3) and Oak Ridge (2-3) earn final two spots.

If Willis beat Conroe on Saturday: Oak Ridge (2-3) and Willis (2-3) earn final two spots. Grand Oaks (2-3) would be eliminated.

Big plays helped Oak Ridge down the drive for its next touchdown. Smedley scrambled for 26 yards and Alton McCaskill ran for 17 yards before scoring on 21-yard run with 8:34 to go in the half.

McCaskill rush
Jonas added 6

The Grizzlies o
that ended wit
High.



Why Grand Oaks would lose three-way tiebreaker: Head-to-head point differential. Oak Ridge beat Willis 44-34 (+10) and lost to Grand Oaks 32-28 (-4) for a differential of +6 ... Willis beat Grand Oaks 44-28 (+16) and lost to Oak Ridge 44-34 (-10) for a differential of +6 ... Grand Oaks lost to Willis 44-28 (-16) and beat Oak Ridge 32-28 (+4) for a differential of -12.

**After Grand Oaks beat Oak Ridge, and before Willis and Conroe play Saturday. The Woodlands and College Park are the other two playoff teams in 13-6A.*

High led the Grizzlies with 83 yards on 24 carries. Micah Cooper had 61 yards on 10 carries and Wright had 49 yards on five carries.

Late in the first half, heavy rain caused chaos – including three fumbled snaps and a muffed punt return – but no points came as a result. The rivals went into the break tied 14-14, and it was an extended break that lasted 90 minutes due to weather delays.

Grand Oaks scored the first two touchdowns after the break to establish a 29-14 lead. First, Holmon capped a drive with a 13-yard scramble. After that, Adrien Pacheco tipped a pass and Robert Skinner picked it off and returned it 35 yards for a touchdown. Holmon ran in a two-point conversion from his spot as holder.

"It's huge," Schmid said. "We gave them the pick six on a tipped pass, right there that was a big play, a defensive score we couldn't afford to give up. There's places you look and think could've made a difference, but you still have to make those plays."

Oak Ridge answered quickly with a 60-yard touchdown run by McCaskill with 4:15 to play in the third quarter.

Early in the fourth quarter, Grant Nickel kicked a 27-yard field goal to put the Grizzlies ahead by 11. A few minutes later, an 11-yard touchdown run by Jonas cut the lead to 32-28, where it stayed.

Grand Oaks sealed the victory late in the fourth quarter with a tackle for loss on fourth down by Brayden Bradley.

"He's fearless and he's just a sophomore," Jackson said of Bradley. "We're glad to have him back for two more years. We feel like the future is bright and we've got a lot of great things in front of us."

The Grizzlies took over in favorable field position but opted to run the clock out. In order to change playoff tiebreaker scenarios, Grand Oaks would've needed to beat Oak Ridge by 13 points.

"We want to make the playoffs, don't get me wrong," Jackson said. "But I knew how important this game was to our kids. I considered late in the game calling a timeout and trying to cut our point differential down, but at the end of the day, if we throw a pick six in that situation, I'm cheating my kids. We played to win this game just like we play to win every game."

Grand Oaks will play a non-district game next week at Cypress Ridge on Thursday at 6:30 p.m. Oak Ridge is off and awaits its bi-district opponent.

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