

A Great Season Comes to a Close

Klein Oak Pulls off Area Round Upset of Cedar Park

In one final moment late Saturday afternoon, the sun set on both the Parmer Palace and one of the greatest seasons in Cedar Park football history. The marvelous run by the seniors of 007 and their underclass teammates drew to a close as the Timberwolves, living on last-play magic nearly the entire season, couldn't pull one more rabbit out of their helmets against a determined Klein Oak team, falling 31-28 and ending their storybook year.

"It hurts," said Head Coach Chris Ross Monday night. "It hurts a lot. I've done this for years and it will still always be a very emotional time. Realistically, you have to know that everyone's season but one (the state champion) will end this way. But when it comes it's still always a surprise. I'm sad and disappointed that I'll never get to coach those seniors again. I'm so sorry that we couldn't find some way, somehow, to help them win that game."

Tyler Smith ends his fabulous career as the fourth-leading all-time rusher at Cedar Park, with 2,546 yards, just 35 behind Korey Washington's third-place career total. "The T" finished the season with 21 rushing touchdowns, the second-most ever scored by one player in one season, and the most since district competition began in 2000. His total of 35 career touchdowns is just one behind Rupert Edwards' second-place total. His rushing yardage total of 1,475 yards on 193 carries this year is the fifth-highest single-season total in school history. Not bad, considering injuries caused Smith to miss three and a half games' worth of playing time this fall, and that no back in CP history has ever, ever, faced more difficult defenses.

Every player on the team will point with pride to their role in Smith's tremendous season. They all are well aware that no one goes anywhere with the ball without an amazing amount of preparation, hard work, talent, sacrifice, and execution. Smith's totals are a testament to a fantastic football team.

Quarterback Jamie Knight – without doubt the finest third quarterback in Texas – completed six of seven passes for 89 yards on the day, meaning Knight threw just two incomplete passes in the two playoff games combined, for 199 yards and a touchdown... and one of those two incompletions was a Hail Mary heave at the end of a half.

In the way of defensive superlatives, all-hemisphere middle linebacker Justin Allen – The Wrench – had an impressive 18 tackles in this game, several of them for losses, and defensive end Andrew Baughman logged 13.

The game followed a tried and true format, stamped from a template familiar to Cedar Parkers in 2006; a sort of Ali-esque rope-a-dope strategy that saw the T'wolves utterly dominate the early action while building up a large lead, then lie back and take punches to the face until the opponent can no longer swing his arms, only to rise up at the end and land the knockout blow. For the first time in six such games this season, that final punch missed, and thus Klein Oak pulls off the upset and moves on to Waco this week to take Cedar Park's spot opposite Richardson Berkner in a Region 2 Semifinal.

The T'wolves rang up 413 yards of offense - the third-highest total of the season - and piled up 314 yards on the ground. It was the most rushing yards ever in a Cedar Park loss.

Oak quarterback Josh Cooley came into the game scouted mainly as a running threat, rushing for well over a thousand yards on the season. His throwing prowess was not highly regarded, as the Panther air attack often went unused, at only nine passes per game. But Cooley was held to a pittance on the ground, only 63 yards on 21 carries; although he did score twice. On the other hand, his passing was uncharacteristically off the scale. Cooley completed an impressive 13 of 18 passes for 145 yards to five different receivers. Tellingly, he did not throw an incomplete pass in the entire second half.

The first half was entirely predictable. The T'wolves cruised to 14-0 and 21-7 leads by late in the second quarter' Tyler Smith exploded for a 36-yard touchdown run after taking an option pitch from quarterback Jamie Knight. The second Cedar Park touchdown came on a terrific run by sophomore sensation Detrick McKnight, who would later leave the game with a knee injury.

After Oak drew the game closer at 14-7 on a 67-yard run by halfback DeSean Hales, The T struck again just one play later, on a 71-yard touchdown sprint that was the longest of his career.

With just 2:46 left in the half, the T'wolves had again driven to within striking distance, facing a fourth and two at the Oak 33. Sensing the moment ripe for a 28-7 game-clamping lead, Coach Ross went for it. But The T was stopped just short on a jet sprint to the left side and the ball went over on downs.

That was the turning point, in the final analysis. It was a gradual turn, perhaps one we couldn't quite detect at the time, but a decisive one, nonetheless. Look at the drive chart at the bottom of this article and you can graphically see the game turn with that stop by the Panthers. That play was their Battle of Midway, where an outmanned and outgunned combatant, flailing back on their heels and struggling to find something that worked, somehow rose up and stopped a stronger opponent who had every advantage at that point in time. Prior to that play, nearly every snap went Cedar Park's way. After it, almost none of them did.

Oak scored on their next four consecutive possessions, stretching all the way into the fourth quarter. They punted but once after that fourth down stop. Prior to it, they had punted five out of six possessions. Cedar Park scored touchdowns on three of their previous four possessions before that play. After it, they scored on only one of six. None of their other five went farther than 23 yards, and those five averaged but 15 yards per possession. Cedar Park had 262 yards of offense by that fourth down play, and gained only 151 after it, on the same number of possessions.

And yet going for it on fourth down at that point was the only option. A punt would likely have gone into the end zone and netted only 13 yards on the exchange. A field goal attempt would have come from 50 yards out into a tough south wind. Making that fourth down or missing it - although we couldn't have known it at that exact moment - was the difference between winning and losing.

And yet still, Oak could not manage to take the lead until there was 7:56 left in the game, on an eleven yard run by Hales to cap off an eight-play, 82-yard drive that spanned eight minutes of the third and fourth quarters. It was the Panthers' third consecutive touchdown

drive, and a successful two point conversion – to counter a failed one following their second touchdown of the game – provided them a three-point lead.

Despite the four straight scoring drives by Oak, Cedar Park did answer at one point in the middle of that Panther scoring barrage, with a solid 74-yard march in five plays on the second possession of the third quarter, ending in a beautiful 28-yard scoring strike from Knight to wideout Travis Smith to extend the Timberwolf lead at the time to 28-16.

But those would prove to be the last points this fine Timberwolf team would ever score.

Oak answered with a five-play 80-yard drive that took less than three minutes and ended in a 7-yard TD run by Cooley, followed by a CP punt and the 82-yard drive and the 11-yard Panther scoring jaunt by Hales.

With 7:56 left in the game the Timberwolves began to respond to their first deficit of the day. Starting a drive in deep trouble at their own 16 after the kickoff, they moved a few yards, and then disaster struck our field general for the third time this season.

With 2:17 left, Knight went down. Cedar Park had lost its third QB on the year. Knight's ankle was blown, and onto the field, still wounded from a previous battle, came senior Travis Watson. Playing with a broken clavicle, it was Watson who would get this one last chance to make it real. Playing in great pain, he immediately completed a nice pass to Travis Smith for a critical ten yard gain.

The Timberwolves moved out to the 35 in four plays. On the fifth, Tyler Smith took the ball toward the left side, but was met before he could turn the corner. A pair of tacklers couldn't bring him down, but they did knock him backward six yards. Knowing the game was on the line and desperately trying to make some of that lost yardage back, Smith lost the ball in the physical struggle. The Panthers recovered at the Cedar Park 28, and the game looked all but over. If Oak could manage a first down or possibly two, they could run out the clock.

But a stuffed running play by the Gang Green and two offensive penalties later, Oak was backed up with a second a very long near the 45. They lined up in the shotgun and Cooley was forced to chase a bad snap. Cedar Park fell on the ball and the miracle season was still alive. Only thirteen seconds had elapsed since Smith's six-yard loss and fumble at the 28. Now, Cedar Park had a first down at the 48. It was as if the universe's "reset" button had been pressed and Tyler's loss and fumble instead became a 14-yard gain and a first down!

Still, there was but 1:23 left and the Timberwolves were 52 yards away. With the brisk wind, they'd have to get almost to the goal line before a field goal would be thinkable. But a field goal and the resultant overtime – for the second straight playoff game – were definitely their backup choice. Cedar Park wanted the end zone, and a win.

Deftly using the sideline and their cache of timeouts, the T'wolves scooted downfield all the way to the Panther 17, led by the ailing Watson. There they were thrown back to the 23, and on third down, our prayers were offered upon the wings of an arcing pass toward the right side to a streaking Hunter Dixon, who'd gotten himself free of two defenders at the five. The ball floated past the beaten DBs toward Dixon, who would have just two strides after the catch before scoring the winning touchdown.

But the answer to that prayer was "no".

The ball flew just past the outstretched hands of the sprinting Dixon and fell, spent, into the end zone, our chance at victory here winding down with the ball as it spun to a stop alone on the turf.

But the thing was not yet done. Caesar would take one more dagger before going down.

On fourth down, a quick glance at the ribbons on the goal post showed there was still a chance to avoid defeat- the wind had stopped. On rushed the field goal team, and from forty-two yards out, Jordan Greer launched a strong kick that had plenty of leg... but sailed to the right.

As the Oak Panthers exploded in triumph, most of our gallant Timberwolves sank to the turf in dismay, unbelieving of their season's sudden death. For our seniors, the years of running plays with dad in the backyard, of touch football in the park, of LCP and Pop Warner and their first pads, of middle school ball yearning for the big time, of freshman and JV games itching to get under the Friday night lights, of four years of hard, satisfying, and productive work in this program toward the chance at excelling in games and in moments just like these.... were done.

For the underclassmen, there's next season- one that promises to be just as exciting, just as fulfilling, provided their work ethic and their desire and sense of sacrifice matches that of their senior leaders of 2006. For most of the seniors, this was the last significant football they will play in their lives. And we love every one of them for giving themselves to their team, their home town, and the National Sport of Texas. They will remember this for the rest of their lives, and we will remember them for the rest of ours.

The Timberwolves end the year with an outstanding 9-3 record in a season not many outside their immediate family of friends, teammates, coaches, and fans believed possible.

"Before the season started, there was an article in the paper about all the 'best teams' in Williamson County," said Ross Monday night. "They must have listed about two dozen schools." He added with a knowing smile, "We weren't on the list."

We are now.

Cedar Park outlasted all but four of those that were, and beat many of them. Along the way, by week seven, apparently to the great surprise of the Austin area media, Cedar Park became the last unbeaten 5A team within a geographical diamond whose points lie a hundred miles to the south, 170 to the east, 200 to the north, and 500 to the west. They held the longest unbeaten streak of any team in Texas that was not named Southlake Carroll, at nine straight. The Timberwolves steadily rose to a state ranking of 13, the second-highest ranking ever achieved by a Cedar Park football team. As of this writing, no 5A team in the Austin area has more wins in the last three years than our own Timberwolves. And since starting 2004 0-2, no 5A team in central Texas has fewer losses, nor more playoff victories.

All these accomplishments are sometimes lost in the mist of the moistened eyes that naturally accompanied Saturday's unexpected defeat. But they are the defining statements of this team's accomplishments. Their greatest fans could not be more proud of the sons of Cedar Park for their impressive growth as a program, as a team, as athletes, and most importantly, as young men.

Cedar
Park

Klein
Oak

<i>First Downs</i>	16	20
<i>Rushes</i>	39	45
<i>Rush Yards</i>	314	211
<i>Yards/Rush</i>	8.05	4.69
<i>Pass Att.</i>	9	18
<i>Pass Comp.</i>	7	13
<i>Pass Int.</i>	0	0
<i>Pass Pct. Comp.</i>	78%	72%
<i>Pass Yards</i>	99	145
<i>Avg Yds/Att.</i>	11.00	8.06
Total Yards	413	356
<i>Penalties</i>	7	6
<i>Pen Yards</i>	45	60
<i>Fumbles</i>	5	1
<i>Fumbles Lost</i>	2	1
<i>Punts</i>	4	6
<i>Return Yards</i>	52	44

	<u>1st</u>	<u>2nd</u>	<u>3rd</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>Final</u>
Cedar Park	7	14	7	0	28
Klein Oak	0	10	13	8	31

Scoring Summary

Q	T	CP	KO	How
1	3:58	7		Tyler Simth 31 run (Greer kick)
2	8:44	14		Tyler Smith 71 run (Greer kick)
2	8:31		7	Hales 67 run (Beymann kick)
2	7:59	21		Detrick McKnight 35 run (Greer kick)
2	0:00.2		10	Beymann 36 FG
3	9:04		16	Cooley 4 run (pass failed)
3	7:47	28		Knight 28 pass to Travis Smith (Greer kick)

3	5:04		23	Cooley 7 run (Beymann kick)
4	7:56		31	Hales 11 run (Cooley run)

Individual Stats

Rushing

Cedar Park - Smith 24-225, 2 TD (36,71); McKnight 2-48, 1 TD (35); Dixon 3-(20); Itz 4-12; Knight 6-9
Klein Oak – Hales 15-118, 2 TD (67, 11); Cooley 21-63; Coburn 7-16; Mayweather 2-14

Passing

Cedar Park - Knight 6-7-0 89, 1 TD (28); Watson 1-2-0 10
Klein Oak - Cooley 13-18-0 145

Receiving

Cedar Park – Travis Smith 2-38; Dixon 2-37; Itz 3-24
Klein Oak – Lim 4-46; Hales 5-45; Black 2-43; Unknown 1-9; Rayburn 1-5

Kickoff Returns

Cedar Park – Tyler Smith 1-21; McKnight 1-16; Itz 1-13; Dixon 1-2
Klein Oak – Arthur 1-18; Hales 1-13

Interception Returns

None

Punt Returns

Cedar Park – No returns
Klein Oak – Hales 1-13

A new feature with this article, tracked each week for the coaches but purposely withheld from publication here for strategic reasons, is the following chart of each possession of the game...

	Qtr.	Origin	Plays	End	Yards	Result		
Klein Oak	1	o22	3	o28	6	Punt	> Punt	6
Cedar Park	1	49	3	49	0	Punt	Punt <	0
Klein Oak	1	o8	7	o33	25	Punt	> Punt	31
Cedar Park	1	48	3	G	48	TD	TD <	48
Klein Oak	1	o23	3	o32	9	Punt	> Punt	40
Cedar Park	1-2	o37	3	o44	7	Punt	Punt <	55
Klein Oak	2	o35	5	o48	13	Punt	> Punt	53
Cedar Park	2	o20	2	G	80	TD	TD <	135
Klein Oak	2	o33	1	G	67	TD	> TD	120
Cedar Park	2	o15	4	G	85	TD	TD <	220
Klein Oak	2	o17	3	o18	1	Punt	> Punt	121
Cedar Park	2	o27	7	33	40	Downs	Downs <	260
Klein Oak	2	o33	10	19	48	FG	> >>>>>FG	169
Cedar Park	3	o30	2	o35	5	Fumble	Fumble <	265
Klein Oak	3	35	5	G	35	TD	> TD	204
Cedar Park	3	o26	5	G	74	TD	TD <	339
Klein Oak	3	o20	5	G	80	TD	> TD	284
Cedar Park	3	o45	6	43	12	Punt	Punt <	351
Klein Oak	3-4	o18	8	G	82	TD	> TD	366
Cedar Park	4	o16	6	o38	22	Punt	Punt <	373
Klein Oak	4	o32	3	o37	5	Punt	> Punt	371
Cedar Park	4	o16	4	o28	12	Fumble	Fumble <	385
Klein Oak	4	28	2	o48	-24	Fumble	> Fumble	347
Cedar Park	4	48	6	25	23	Missed FG	Missed FG <	408
Klein Oak	4	o23				Knees		347