



woodlands villager - sports

New No. 1 in boys power rankings

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Before I get to the third team to top this year's District 14-5A boys power rankings, let's check out tomorrow's game of the week, Conroe at College Park.

The Tigers handed the eventual regional semifinalist Cavaliers their only district setback of the season last year. College Park survived an overtime thriller at Oak Ridge on Tuesday, avoiding its first league loss of this season and improving to 4-0.

Conroe is showing similar improvement to what it did last year when Jason Van Robays was in his first year as coach. The Tigers look like they're establishing themselves as a team that will be in the top two or three in the league year in and year out.

Meanwhile, under Clifton McNeely, College Park has quickly become the class of the district and is talked about as one of the best programs in the state.

No matter the team you root for, I bet you'll get your money's worth tomorrow.

1. The Woodlands (16-9, 3-1). Last week: No. 3

Last week: 72-58 win at Oak Ridge on Tuesday; 76-65 win vs. Conroe on Friday. **This week:** 70-53 win vs. Lufkin on Tuesday; at New Caney, Friday at 7 p.m. **Next week:** vs. College Park, Tuesday at 7 p.m.; vs. Oak Ridge, Friday at 7 p.m.

The Highlanders' three-game winning streak is impressive if only for how they've played in the second half of each of those contests. Outscoring opponents by an average of 10.3 points in the second and third quarters combined will get you a lot of wins no matter who you're playing.

Against solid teams, it shows that The Woodlands is getting better as the game goes on and that its press may be wearing opponents out by the third quarter.

2. College Park (21-10, 4-0). LW: No. 1

Last week: 68-32 win vs. New Caney on Tuesday; 63-35 win at Lufkin on Friday. **This week:** 90-85 (OT) win at Oak Ridge on Tuesday; vs. Conroe, Friday at 7 p.m. **Next week:** at The Woodlands, Tuesday at 7 p.m.; at New Caney, Friday at 7 p.m.

With the way the Highlanders are playing, the Cavaliers' near-loss at Oak Ridge on Tuesday is enough to drop them out of the top spot. Yes, I know the Cavs won the head-to-head contest Jan. 16.

Before all you College Park fans get too up in arms, however, your team has a chance to take back the top spot by force with impressive showings tomorrow against Conroe and next Tuesday at The Woodlands.

I'll be watching.

3. Conroe (12-13, 3-1). LW: No. 2

Last week: 69-61 win vs. Lufkin on Tuesday; 76-65 loss at The Woodlands on Friday. **This week:** 65-53 win vs. New Caney on Tuesday; at College Park, Friday at 7 p.m. **Next week:** at Oak Ridge, Tuesday at 7 p.m.; at Lufkin, Friday at 7 p.m.

If not for the Highlanders' ability to shut down Tigers' leading scoring Roderick Lovelady, Conroe could be looking at a matchup of 4-0 teams tomorrow night.

The Tigers will have to bring their defense tomorrow night because College Park is likely to shut down either

Lovelady or Oktivous Williams, who has been a monster of late.

A Conroe win would be great for entertainment purposes, with the top three teams in the district all 4-1 going into the second half of league play.

4. Oak Ridge (16-9, 1-3). LW: No. 5

Last week: 72-58 loss vs. The Woodlands on Tuesday; 67-47 win at New Caney on Friday. **This week:** 90-85 (OT) loss vs. College Park on Tuesday; at Lufkin, Friday at 7 p.m. **Next week:** vs. Conroe, Tuesday at 7 p.m.; at The Woodlands, Friday at 7 p.m.

The overtime loss to College Park on Tuesday wasn't just damaging because the War Eagles had the game in their hands. They also had a chance to drop the Cavaliers to 3-1 and at the same time improve to 2-2.

Now they're looking at an important game at Lufkin tomorrow, with the winner taking sole possession of fourth place — the district's final playoff spot.

5. Lufkin (6-17, 1-3). LW: No. 4

Last week: 69-61 loss at Conroe on Tuesday; 63-35 loss vs. College Park on Friday. **This week:** 70-53 loss at The Woodlands on Tuesday; vs. Oak Ridge, Friday at 7 p.m. **Next week:** at New Caney, Tuesday at 7 p.m.; vs. Conroe, Friday at 7 p.m.

Lufkin fell apart late in what were close games on the road against Conroe and The Woodlands. For the Panthers to contend they're going to have to learn how to close out away games — or at least finish strong.

A win tomorrow with Oak Ridge coming to town would be huge. That's because the Panthers will have to make the trip down U.S. 59 to Oak Ridge North on Feb. 17 for the last regular season contest of the year — potentially for the district's final playoff spot.

6. New Caney (5-19, 0-4). LW: No. 6

Last week: 68-32 loss at College Park on Tuesday; 67-47 loss vs. Oak Ridge on Friday. **This week:** 65-53 loss at Conroe on Tuesday; vs. The Woodlands, Friday at 7 p.m. **Next week:** vs. Lufkin, Tuesday at 7 p.m.; vs. College Park, Friday at 7 p.m.

A solid game played by the Eagles in a loss at Conroe on Tuesday perhaps shows they're improving as the season winds down.

With its next three games at home, New Caney might be looking at its last chances to steal a win in district. Next Tuesday's contest against Lufkin could be that 'W.'

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