

WEEK ZERO RECAP



Panthers Stun Sam Houston Texans with Dramatic, Come-from-Behind Victory

Paschal Triumphs 23-20 as Players Continue 'Livin' the Dream'

This is a story of redemption and triumph in a land that above all values winners, and it begins with the people. They are not the 6'5" 240-pounders they grow in Weatherford and Burleson, Master Race clones who appear to have rolled off a football player assembly line. They are mostly "average" young men of above-average intelligence, competitive young men with spirits forged and tempered in the harsh crucible of defeat. They are young men who believe -- who know -- that their sweat, their pain and even their vomit are just as valuable as the sweat, pain and vomit of their colleagues at Trinity or Southlake Carroll high schools. They know that hard work doesn't care whether it is taking place on a hardscrabble parking lot field or on a fancy practice field with all the bells and whistles of a professional program. Hard work is hard work, and these young men live for hard work. These young men live through hard work. These young men, in short, are people of character. These young men are the 2008 Paschal Panthers football team, and they are who we want to talk about here.

The young men who make up the Panthers program are the sorts of young men brought up to believe in the value and power of hard work and persistence, brought up to believe in the importance of showing up on time and doing their jobs even when they're not at their best. They just have that special something, that indescribable spark that makes you take a second look. How else do you explain their verve and enthusiasm through winless campaigns? How else do you explain their fervent belief that, last week notwithstanding, this week they'd prevail? They've held fast to their beliefs through a nightmarish two-and-one-half seasons, kept the faith through a string of 26 consecutive losses. Like Annie, they believed in the power of tomorrow while naysayers resolutely believed only in the reality of yesterday. For 26 straight games, they've iced their aches, strapped on their pads and girded themselves for that better tomorrow that somehow never seemed to arrive. It's been achingly, tantalizingly close. Last year, the Panthers appeared poised finally to, as Jim Morrison put it, "break on through to the other side." But like the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, victory has been maddeningly elusive, the end of the rainbow perpetually over the next hill.

And this is the thing about character, about people with character: They just keep going, just keep on keepin' on, no matter what else is going on. When injuries struck, the Panthers circled the wagons, tended to the wounded, and resumed the trek. They left no one behind and they watched each other's backs. If they pointed fingers, it was at themselves. When they suffered lopsided losses and snickers from outsiders, they redoubled their efforts and kept moving forward. So though school after school scheduled them for Homecoming, put the "W" in the bank before the game was even played, the Panthers kept the faith. They kept showing up. They kept going. They kept believing.

On Friday, Aug. 29, they roared. And Panther Nation roared with them.

The game against the Arlington Sam Houston Texans got off to an inauspicious start. On the first play from scrimmage, Sam Houston broke off a big play on a reverse and got the ball to the Paschal 12. Perhaps even more distressing to the Paschal faithful, however, was an injury to DT Abraham Leal, a bulwark of the D-line who was coming off an impressive performance against Granbury in the previous week's scrimmage. Leal's injury put the Panthers in a bind, and he is considered unlikely to play this week. But like they've done so often before, the Panthers D banded together and stiffened, pushing the Texans back to the 32 yard line, where Paschal took over on downs.

And just like that, the Panthers appeared to be in the catbird seat. QB Brian Gallagher connected with WR Angel Arguetta and suddenly it was 1st and 10 for the Panthers on the Texans' 14 yard line. But the Panthers came up empty and Sam Houston, invigorated by the defensive stop, drove down the field for a score at 1:05 of the first quarter. The Texans added a two-point conversion to go up 8-0.

The Panthers would respond, however, sending a clear signal that Sam Houston was in for the fight of its life. At 5:09 of the second quarter, RB Emmanuel Smith dove over the goal line to put Paschal on the board. On the subsequent PAT, Gallagher hit RB William Hix to knot the score at 8-8.

A stellar kick return on the ensuing kickoff set up another Texan touchdown as Sam Houston again showed its quick-strike, big-play ability. But the PAT failed, and Paschal found itself behind just 14-8.

The two teams then settled into a heavyweight bout, trading blows but drawing no blood for the remaining 4 minutes and 11 seconds of the half. In a last-play bid to increase their lead, the Texans tried a Hail Mary as the half came to a close, but FS Kirby Campbell snared Paschal's first interception of the season.

The two teams continued to see-saw in the second half. Paschal received the kickoff to begin the second half but was forced to punt. The Panthers returned the favor thanks to strong defensive play, including a sack by DT Joel Taft.

Taking over on their own 18, Paschal began a steady march down the field. Gallagher connected with WR Travoy McCarver for a first down, then found TE Doug Parkhurst for a first down. He returned to Parkhurst on the following play for nearly 10 yards. Then the Panthers returned to the ground game, and Smith played like second-team all-district honors in 2007 were not enough, grinding his way up the gut for consecutive first downs behind an O-line that was on fire. Gallagher returned to the air and found WR Rochell Johnson for seven yards. A subsequent fumble on the Sam Houston 17, however, ended the drive.

Like any good team, the Texans capitalized on the turnover and eventually scored with 27 seconds remaining in the third quarter. The Panthers blocked the PAT, however, and Sam Houston had to content itself with a 20-8 lead going into the fourth quarter.

Again, Smith proved himself a workhorse and at 9:27 found paydirt. K Chris King added the PAT, and the score was now Texans 20, Panthers 15.

Now it was up to the defense to neutralize the Texans' big play ability. Indeed, the Texans had an apparent 80-yard touchdown pass, but it was nullified by a block in the back penalty. That's when the defense really came through. A huge push by the D-line and the quick, sure hands of LB Matthew Blum left the Texans feeling blue. Blum's interception at the Texans' 30 with 7:42 marked the beginning of the end for Sam Houston's hopes of victory.

The Panthers steadily moved closer to the goal line but found themselves facing fourth and goal from the 7 yard line. Smith had been doing yeoman's work on the drive, and the Texans were clearly playing the run. That's when the Panthers returned to the air, and Gallagher found Arguetta with 3:12 remaining to give Paschal its first lead of the game. Smith ran in for the two-point conversion, and the Panthers found themselves up 23-20.

Thus began the longest, slowest three minutes of many people's lives. And those three minutes may represent the Paschal defense's finest hour. Adopting a bend, don't break posture, the Panthers' secondary was in lockdown mode while the D-line found a reservoir of strength and energy and made a huge push on each play. At the 2:18 mark, Sam Houston faced fourth and 15 from its own 37. Big Alec Baker crashed through the line, sacked the quarterback and forced a fumble.

Now all Paschal needed to do was burn 2:06 and protect the ball. When the game clock finally reached 0:00 at 10:13 p.m., the scoreboard reading Paschal 23, Sam Houston 20, the sound was a mix of a space shuttle liftoff, 30 whining jet engines at takeoff, 100 NASCAR racers hitting the straightaway, and 500 brass instruments playing sforzando.

Players and coaches swarmed the field, and like Jim Valvano following North Carolina State's improbable 1983 NCAA basketball championship victory, looked around for someone to hug. Grown men teared up. Students stormed the field, eager to take part in the celebration. Paschal partisans unfurled a banner in the stands reading, HELLO WIN COLUMN. Cheerleaders cartwheeled. And everyone on the Paschal side stood and cheered while Paschal's celebrated marching band enthusiastically played the school's fight song.

It was a beautiful moment, and it carried over into an impromptu pizza party back at Paschal. Paschal parents, including those who do not even have players, showed up to celebrate the win with happy but exhausted players and an electrified student body.

No question, winning is fun. To people of a certain bent of mind, winning makes them want to showboat so that, as in the commercial for the latest NCAA football video game, "you can get all up in his face with stuff like this and stuff." That's not, however, Paschal's style. They didn't want to be in the Texans' faces. They wanted to be in each other's arms, high-fiving here, shedding a tear there, enjoying the moment with their comrades, their teammates, their brothers.

They are a true team, and appropriately enough, they enjoyed a total team victory. Often-unsung players deserved high accolades usually reserved for higher profile skills-position players. The offensive line, for example, was outstanding, and Fabian Guerrero, Abraham Shim, Matt Parker, Alex Deeds and John Sager were honored for their efforts with Paschal offensive players of the week recognition. Taking a more traditional approach, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram recognized Smith as its offensive player of the week for his 214 yards, 2 TDs and 2- point conversion. Gallagher was 14-21 through the air for 153 yards. Paschal had 20 first downs to Sam Houston's 15, rushing 47 times for 252 yards, including 42 by Hix. The defense forced three turnovers on two interceptions and a fumble, slamming and bolting the door at crunch time. There were so many key moments and a Panther stood up and made a play, whether it was CB Sydney Smith breaking up a pass play or LB Kevin Deal sticking his nose in there to make a tackle.

Now the Panthers must do it all over again, traveling to face an Irving Nimitz Vikings team that beat Haltom High School 20-12 in the first week of play. Kickoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Friday at Irving Schools Stadium, and players and coaches alike are hoping to see a sea of purple in the visitor's stands.

In the end, the Game One victory meant everything. And it meant nothing at all. Because, you see, winning is a place of the mind and a matter of heart and soul. Winning has nothing to do with the scoreboard except in that most tententious habit we Americans have of celebrating mediocrity and rewarding it with riches. It has not always been thus. Paris Hilton and Anna Nicole Smith would have starved in the Colonial period -- unless they were burned at the stake. In our time, their every move is catalogued by paparazzi, celebrated on the web and in what passes for our news organs. Panther Nation hews to the old ways. Panther Nation appreciates hard work, dedication, moxie under fire. Panther Nation values character.

And Panther Nation knows that their Boys of Fall have that thing, that intangible something, that is the very embodiment of character. They know, they celebrate, the very things others have laughed at. They know that the Panthers, scoreboards notwithstanding, have been winners all along.



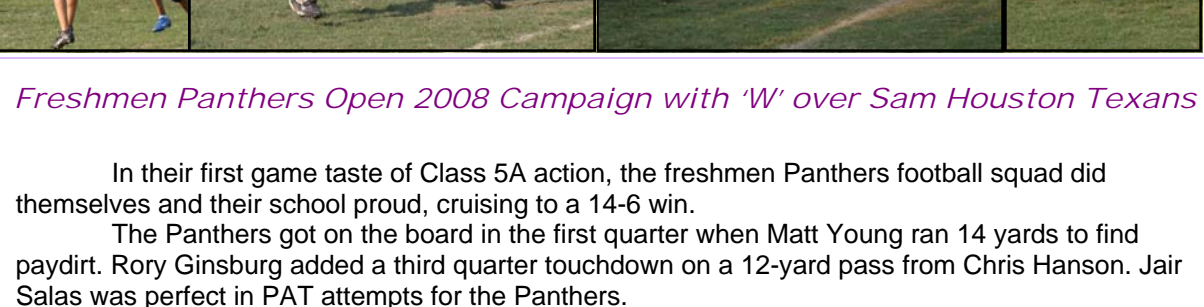
Tight-Knit JV Panthers Prevail in Taut Defensive Struggle

The 2008 Panther JV football season kicked off Thursday night at Bill Allen field against an athletic and energetic Sam Houston Texans JV squad. The Texans took the opening kickoff and rolled out their offense only to find that the Panther defense was up to the challenge with every Panther defender contributing to force the Texans to punt.

The Panther offense took the field, led by QB Marshall Norment and a RB tandem of Baylen Thompson, Connor Pitts and Erik Garza. The Texans were quick to combat the Panthers were more than willing to play some smash mouth football with the backfield trio combining for some tough rushing yards right in the heart of the Texans defense. Passing yards did not come easy for either team, but some nice receptions by Tyler Anderson kept the Panther offense moving down the field and in position for a score. Defense, defense, and more defense looked to be the name of the game with both teams trading shots and the first half ending in a 0-0 tie.

The second half opened with Morgan Hix giving the offense good field position with a 30-yard kickoff return. The Panther offense continued its rushing attack with Thompson carrying the early load with several long runs to put the Panthers in scoring position. With the Panthers knocking on the door, the Texans held tough and kept the game scoreless late into the third quarter. With defense dictating the game, the Panthers once again proved up to the challenge and backed the Texans' offense to their own 2 yard line. The Texans QB was chased into the end zone by Hix only to be met by Jonathon Weiss and Rafael Sandoval, who combined on the tackle for a safety. With the Panthers now on the board and a score of 2-0, it was time for some ball control and ground and pound by the Panther offense. The pits carried the load in the final quarter of the game with some nice runs going straight up the middle of the Texans' defense until the final seconds of the game. A last gasp effort by the Texans' offense proved futile as the Panther defense held tough, preserving a hard fought 2 -0 victory.

With a well-deserved win setting the tone for the Panther JV season, fans can look forward to another home game at 5:30 p.m. Thursday against the Vikings of Irving, Nimitz at Bill Allen Field. Special thanks to Winky Hix for his game day reporting on JV action.



Freshmen Panthers Open 2008 Campaign with 'W' over Sam Houston Texans

In their first game taste of Class 5A action, the freshmen Panthers football squad did themselves and their school proud, cruising to a 14-6 win.

The Panthers got on the board in the first quarter when Matt Young ran 14 yards to find paydirt. Rory Gingsburg added a third quarter touchdown on a 12-yard pass from Chris Hanson. Jair Salas was perfect in PAT attempts for the Panthers.

The Panthers also proved mighty on the defensive side of the ball. Richard Gonzalez recorded two sacks, while Nicholas Alonso added three tackles for losses and a sack.

It was an impressive showing for the frosh squad, who now go on the road to face the Irving Nimitz Vikings. A Freshman White squad game is scheduled for 5 p.m. Thursday, while Freshman Purple squad action is slated to kick off at 7 p.m.

Coach Preston Celebrates Big Weekend

He's been like a father to many a Paschal football and baseball player since joining the coaching staff last year. And now Coach Darrel Preston is a father.

Coach Preston and his wife, April, welcomed Dallas Edward Prestner into the world at 9:08 p.m. Saturday, capping an emotional weekend that began when the Panthers took down Sam Houston Friday night. Coach Preston, who said his eyes began to tear up when there was less than a minute to go, returned to the school with horns blaring.

Summing up his weekend of triumph, Coach Preston said, "These have been the two greatest days of my life."

A hearty Panther roar of congratulations to April and Coach Preston!

Visit The Panther Football Website at www.leaguelineup.com/paschalfootball

Special thanks to Geoff Campbell for his insightful Questions or comments? email PHSFootballBooster@msn.com. game day analysis.