

WEEK ONE RECAP



Panthers Torpedo Nimitz with Late Heroics

Paschal's Never-Say-Die Spirit Sinks Irving Nimitz Vikings as Time Expires

"And then there was the football arcing through the velvet sky, under those Friday night lights, a bright flickering orb of danger and unimaginable joy."
-- Rick Talander, *Sports Illustrated*

You just had to be there. And even if you were, you weren't sure you saw what you saw.

But here it is in black and white: The Paschal Panthers varsity football team beat the Irving Nimitz Vikings Friday night in amazing fashion on a beautiful pass from QB Brian Gallagher to RB Emmanuel Smith, who made an equally beautiful catch and run as time expired. The 38-37 victory pushed Paschal to 2-0 while Nimitz dropped to 1-1 in the 2008 campaign.

Sports are ripe with miracle metaphors. There are Hail Mary passes and there's the Miracle on Ice. There's the Immaculate Reception and the Immaculate Deflection.

But what, exactly, are we to make of this?

How do we characterize what we saw with our own eyes but somehow secretly doubt?

How can we make sense of the extraordinary, the unreal, the out-of-this-world? When the severely hobbled Kirk Gibson hit a pinch hit, walk-off home run in the 1988 World Series with two outs and a 3-2 count, broadcast legend Vin Scully exclaimed, "In a year that has been so improbable, the impossible has happened!"

And this gets closer to the point, to the truth, of what we're trying to understand here. And yet it's light years away.

The Panthers' 2-0 start is only improbable if you believe the program is forever frozen in 2006, a nightmare time when the term "Paschal faithful" was more rhetoric than reality and players had to find succor and motivation in moral victories and small successes. The Panthers' 2-0 start is only improbable if you heavily discount the value of persistence and poo-hoo the benefits of sometimes painful, scarring experience.

And is that not, in the end, what we saw with our own eyes but secretly doubted? We saw the catch, of course, this Miracle on 6th Street, but the catch is but a moment in time, the culmination of more sweat, dedication and hard-won experience than many of us will truly know or hope to understand. The Miracle on 6th Street is a deliriously concrete embodiment of all the pain, suffering and sacrifice the Panthers have endured -- as well as its catharsis.

There was plenty of football leading up to the miraculous ending, and while it wasn't always pretty, it was, without question, a work of beauty.

The Panthers kicked off to start the game, and Nimitz went to work on its own 47. But the fired up Black Shirt Paschal defenders put a kibosh on any hopes Nimitz had of scoring on its opening drive, instead forcing the Vikings to punt. But the Vikes' D was also strong early, and the Vikings took over on downs at the Paschal 49. And this time, Nimitz was able to score.

Perhaps previous editions of the Panthers would have started entertaining doubts, but not this crew. Nicely mixing run and pass plays, the Panthers drove from the 50 to the Vikings 11 before calling on the field goal squad. K Chris King parted the uprights and at 2:27 of the first quarter Paschal had cut Nimitz' lead to 7-3.

Nimitz threatened to build on that lead in its next possession, but FS Kirby Campbell snared an interception at the goal line to give Paschal the ball, albeit at the Paschal 1. By the time the first quarter ended, Paschal had given itself a wee bit of breathing room by advancing the ball to the 5 yard line. On the first play of the second quarter, Gallagher hit WR Travoy McCarver, who scampered to the Nimitz 18 before being chased down. The Panthers got another first down on the subsequent play on a strong run by RB William Hix. Paschal then found paydirt when Gallagher pitched to Smith, who threw to McCarver for a touchdown.

Misfortune reared its head when, on the PAT attempt, Nimitz intercepted a two-point conversion try and took it downfield for a safety. Instead of holding an 11-7 lead, Paschal found itself in a 9-9 tie.

Such experiences can test the mettle of any team, but the Panthers more than passed the test.

The Black Shirts bowed their backs and repelled the Vikings in a defensive stop that included some fine tackling by LB Matt Blum and a nifty pass break-up by SS Aaron Stafford. After the Nimitz punt, Paschal took over on its own 10 yard line.

Gallagher found Smith through the air for two consecutive first downs, then mixed things up with a fine run by Hix for another first down at the Nimitz 42. On second and five, the Panthers went to a direct snap to Smith, who bludgeoned his way to the 20. With the Vikings now reeling, Gallagher went to McCarver for a first down at the Nimitz 9 and then at 2:28 of the second quarter found WR Rochell Johnson for a touchdown. King drove home the point after and Paschal owned a 16-9 lead.

On the subsequent kickoff, the Panthers worked the pooch kick to perfection, with Stafford recovering the ball for Paschal on the Nimitz 23. But momentum clearly wasn't interested in staying with one club long, and a Nimitz interception gave the Vikings one last chance to score before halftime. The defense again stood tall, however, and the Panthers hit the locker room with a 16-9 lead.

Although the offense wasn't able to get much initial traction in the third quarter, an excellent punt by Kevin Deal pinned the Vikings back at the Nimitz 13. On its first play from scrimmage in the second half, the Vikings fumbled and Paschal's Luis Garcia was there to pounce, giving the Panthers a first and goal-to-go on the Nimitz 8. The Panthers were unable to punch it through, however, and settled for a King field goal and a 19-9 lead with 8:21 left in the third quarter.

Perhaps revived or inspired by the defensive effort, the Nimitz offense came out with renewed energy and showed its quick-strike scoring ability, rumbling to two unanswered touchdowns and a 23-19 lead at the 11:09 mark of the fourth quarter.

Paschal continued to have trouble moving the ball, but another beauty of a punt by Deal put the Vikings on their own 20. When Paschal forced and recovered a fumble on the Nimitz 17, the Panthers' offense rediscovered its mojo. A Smith touchdown and King extra point put the Panthers off on top 26-23 with 8:29 to go in the game.

The Vikings responded, going up 30-26 with just 6:28 remaining. The teams slugged it out through several series before the defense came up with its second big stop when LB Deal deflected a third and 10 pass, forcing a Nimitz punt deep in Vikings territory. A bad snap later, with a hungry defense all over the ball, Paschal had possession on the Nimitz 17 with just more than three minutes remaining in the game. With 2:45 to go, Smith found the end zone and despite a failed PAT, Paschal had a 32-30 lead.

The Vikings then mustered a long, slow drive, and with 1:10 remaining had the ball on the Paschal 25. The defense gave up no big plays, but surrendered just enough yardage for the Vikings to continue their march down the field. And then, with just 14 seconds left, Nimitz scored. The extra point gave them a 37-32 lead.

Paschal Nation went into a kind of forced reverie, cheering wildly but with sunken, hurting hearts. On first and 10 at the Paschal 38 and with but 8 seconds left, Gallagher dropped back and looked for McCarver, but the ball fell harmlessly at McCarver's feet and hearts sunk and hurt some more. With three seconds left, the Panthers had time for just one more play.

The Panthers needed a miracle. Of so it seemed.

Instead, the Panthers drew on hard work and painful experience, then calmly ran a play they've practiced over and over again. They executed it to perfection. Gallagher dropped back and threw a perfect strike to Smith, who split the defenders and finished the 62-yard-play like his hair was on fire. Paschal 38, Nimitz 37 with 0:00 on the clock.

In a very real sense, every Panther made the pass and every Panther made the catch. That play, at that moment in time, represented everything these Panthers have suffered and endured and learned. When Smith crossed the goal line he was swarmed by teammates, lost in the midst of a hopping, jumping, bubbling purple and white blob of pure, unadulterated joy. You might call it one team, indivisible, united by shared struggle and the disappointments and heartbreaks of seasons past.

Contrast that scene with what was happening on the Nimitz side. Nimitz defenders lay prostrate on the turf as Vikings fans sat in stunned disbelief. They couldn't believe the improbable turn of events, the impossibility of a 62-yard-play with just 3 seconds left. And truth be told, neither could many Paschal partisans.

But the Panthers' 2-0 start is hardly improbable unless we believe that hard work, persistence, preparation and character account for nothing. The Miracle on 6th Street was hardly impossible unless we believe that practice and dedication to craft are meaningless.

This is, or at least at one time was, the American ethos. Work hard, make sacrifices and you, too, can one day achieve your dreams of success. It's clearly the Panther Way.

The Panthers now prepare to face the arch-rival Arlington Heights Yellowjackets (2-0) at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Farrington Field. A big crowd is expected and the Panthers hope to see a sea of purple filling the bowl as they continue their 2008 We're Not Gonna' Take it/ Magical Mystery Tour.

You'll just have to be there. And even if you are, you may not believe what you see.



JV Panthers Show Grit and Fight against Nimitz Vikings

Week two of Panther football found the JV boys enjoying another enthusiastic crowd while hosting the Vikings of Irving Nimitz. The night started with promise as the Panthers special teams set the tone, causing a fumble on the opening kickoff.

The Panther faithful welcomed back RB Connor Curtis, who was playing his first game this year and who scored a touchdown on his first touch of the ball. With the extra point added by Tyler Anderson, the JV team was up 7-0 a mere 33 seconds into the game.

A determined Viking offense took to the field and quickly answered the score, but a missed extra point had the Panthers up 7-6. A back and forth first half was highlighted by the tough running of Curtis and several nice pass completions by QB Marshall Norment to receivers Tyler Anderson and Blake Barrow.

The Panther defense once again stood tall for the remainder of the first half, led by Johnathon Weiss, John Menefee and Alex Hansen, all of whom contributed with big tackles and gritty play. But the Vikings' big, physical offense eventually penetrated the Panther defense and the first half ended with a score of 14-7.

Second half play opened and excitement turned to concern when first half star Curtis went down in an injury. Panther Nation showed its concern and fellow football players waited anxiously while their brother was taken care of by "Doc" Beck and the Panther coaches.

When the game re-started, a focused Viking team scored twice and the game went to the fourth quarter with the Panthers down 27-7.

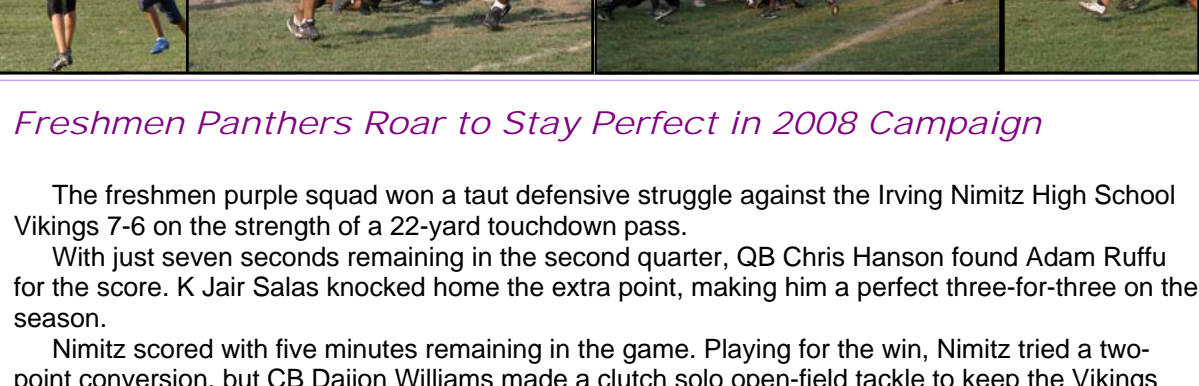
Showing true Panther spirit, da' boys were unwavering in their desire to show the Vikings that conceding the game was not an option. Norment found Anderson running free in the end zone and hit him with a pass, bringing the score to 27-13.

With the last few ticks of the game clock the Vikings were able to put one more tally on the board and the game ended with a final score of Vikings 34 - Panthers 13. Though the team aspired to victory, the Panthers JV showed skill and resolve in playing a talented and tough opponent that lost only one game last year.

Panther Nation can also breathe a sigh of relief as Curtis returned to school on Friday and vowed to return to the field as soon as possible.

The Panther JV will suit up for another home crowd to take on the Arlington Heights Yellowjackets at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at Bill Allen Field.

Special thanks to Winky Hix for his game day reporting on JV action.



Freshmen Panthers Roar to Stay Perfect in 2008 Campaign

The freshmen purple squad won a taut defensive struggle against the Irving Nimitz High School Vikings 7-6 on the strength of a 22-yard touchdown pass.

With just seven seconds remaining in the second quarter, QB Chris Hanson found Adam Ruffu for the score. K Jair Salas knocked home the extra point, making him a perfect three-for-three on the season.

Nimitz scored with five minutes remaining in the game. Playing for the win, Nimitz tried a two-point conversion, but CB Daijon Williams made a clutch solo open-field tackle to keep the Vikings out of the end zone and preserve Paschal's lead.

Player of the game was LB John Galland, who was lighting people up all night and had seven tackles, forced a fumble and made a fumble recovery. Matt Young had another solid game, rushing for more than 80 yards.

The freshmen white team did not fare quite as well, falling 20-0. However, of greater concern to Paschal faithful was an injury to Hector Mendez in the third quarter. Mendez was taken to the hospital and was released and at home resting by Friday.

Special thanks to Coach Michael Snapp for his game day reporting on freshmen action.

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

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