



WEEK FOUR RECAP



Paschal Regroups Quickly to Prepare for Tough Abilene Squad

We tell ourselves it's just a game, and in the end, that's exactly what it is. But it's not all that it is, not really, even if we discount much of what we invest in each caught pass or fumbled ball. During this glorious 10-week span of fall, we are privileged to be part of something larger than ourselves, on the periphery perhaps, but nevertheless part of a special band of young men who bravely swam against popular sentiment, believed in the redemptive power of hard work and dedicated themselves to the proposition that one can be proud of playing football at Paschal High School.

There's always been a tension between sports and academics, with some going so far as to question the very value of athletics. It does nothing to further academic success, they hiss, and detracts from the educational mission of the school.

Panther Nation knows better. The roster of academic all-district athletes is heavy with Paschal student-athletes, of course. But beyond that, Panther Nation knows that many players are staying in school and maintaining passing grades for the privilege of sweating, aching, hurting, puking and yes, learning, as the school's gridiron representatives. It's hard to put a value on that. Meantime, the student body has become invigorated by the team's resurgence, and the Panthers' Horatio Alger rise has shown this extraordinary group of young men, and its followers, that hard work and dedication really do matter no matter the context. Got a bad mark in math? Study and practice can fix that. Having trouble understanding "The Nebelungenlied"? Nothing a little re-reading, concentration and diligence can't lick.

The Duke of Wellington may or may not have said that the "Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton," but to quibble about the origins is to miss the larger message. Athletics do matter, and the lessons learned on the field are incalculably valuable to players and fans alike in every facet of life.

Most objective observers would peg two seasons ago as a low-water mark for Panthers football. In the midst of a tough, beat-down season, the Panthers traveled to Weatherford, and in the process of being humiliated 70-something to nothing, the entire program appeared to spit the bit. No question some continued to play with heart and pride, but the overall sense was of a program that, like a dog that's been beat too much, simply gave up. All that changed in 2007. True, the team was 0-10. But the Panthers were improving each week, learning that the past was not a prison but a stepping stone to better things. And in the process, they were rediscovering that nebulous thing we call self-respect. Win, lose or draw, they could look at themselves in the mirror and know they'd given honest and complete effort.

The Panthers traveled to Weatherford Friday ready to give honest and complete effort. At night's end, many in Panther Nation decried officiating that appeared lackluster at best and criminally biased at worst. Panther receivers got hammered while the ball was in the air but no pass interference calls ensued, fans complained, while a Weatherford receiver got breathed upon and out came the hanky. Even such small things as ball spots appeared to depend in large part on who had the ball.

Panthers players politely nodded at such suggestions – they are, to a man, remarkably polite and accommodating for young men in the flush of both youth and testosterone – but said they alone were responsible for the 12-point defeat. That nebulous thing we call self-respect that began to bud in 2007 has come to full flower in 2008. Though they could clutch at a raft of excuses, the Panthers instead stood tall and said the game was theirs to win or lose and that they just didn't execute well enough to win. That's the way of people with self respect.

The Weatherford Kangaroos drew first blood but had to content themselves with a 6-0 lead when the PAT failed. The Panthers came roaring back, paced by an Angel Arguetta kick return to the Paschal 34. On third and eight, QB Brian Gallagher legged out a first down. RB Emmanuel Smith followed with a first down run to the Weatherford 40, and later took it to the Weatherford 11 on a fourth and inches run, setting up a touchdown by RB William Hix. K Chris King added the PAT to give Paschal a 7-6 lead.

Weatherford stormed right back, utilizing its triple option to perfection to score on two plays. The 'roos converted a two-point try to take a 14-7 lead.

The Panthers defense stiffened as the first quarter drew to a close. On third and five, FS Kirby Campbell broke up a pass play, and Weatherford was forced to punt. The offense began to hum with efficiency, picking up a first down on a Gallagher to TE Doug Parkhurst pass and another on a Smith run. At 7:35 of the second quarter, Smith crossed the plane for a touchdown. King added the PAT and the game was tied at 14.

Aided by two interesting penalty calls, Weatherford ate up yardage on its next possession and scored at 5:53 of the second quarter, adding an extra point to take a 21-14 lead. The Panthers showed no quit, however. Aaron Stafford returned the ensuing kick to the Weatherford 49. On third and seven, Gallagher hit WR Travoy McCarver for a first down to the Weatherford 39. Later, Gallagher was on the receiving end of a pass from Smith to gain a first down at the 'roos 16. Smith later scored, and with King's successful PAT, the game was tied at 21.

As time wound down in the first half, the Kangaroos looked to go into the locker room with a lead, abandoning the triple option that had worked to great advantage and instead looking to the air. After two incompletions on well-covered pass attempts, Weatherford went for the home run ball. But Campbell intercepted on the Paschal one, and zigged and zagged 99 yards for an apparent touchdown and a Panthers' lead. The run was called back for a block in the back, however, and the half ended with the two clubs tied.

Paschal received to begin the second half, and appeared unstoppable. Combining nice plays like a Gallagher to Sasha Lovett pass and runs by Smith and Hix, along with penalties against Weatherford, the Panthers were poised to score and take the lead. But an interception in the end zone changed the entire tenor of the second half, and Weatherford capitalized on the momentum shift to take a 28-21 lead.

The Panthers appeared determined to answer, but a fumble on the Paschal 34 snuffed out the chance and appeared to put the Black Shirt defensive unit against the wall. The defense responded like champions, forcing a three-and-out. As they did so often throughout the night, the Panthers D put a world of hurt on Weatherford runners, with thunderous tackles by LB Matthew Blum and DL Alec Baker. McCarver returned the punt to the Paschal 45, and the offense got down to brass tacks. Smith took it to the Weatherford 40 and two plays later to the Weatherford 3. Hix followed with a touchdown, King added an extra point and the game was again tied.

In a game of wild and sudden momentum swings, Weatherford was able to again seize the upper hand, converting on a third and five at the Paschal 35 for a touchdown. The PAT was no good, but a roughing the kicker call provided the 'roos with a second chance, which they utilized to convert a two-point play to take a 36-28 lead.

The Panthers found themselves in a hole on the ensuing kickoff, taking over at their own 4. The team looked to buy some breathing room with a quick pass, but a fumble on the 11 spelled disaster. Weatherford quickly capitalized and though it missed the extra point, enjoyed a commanding 42-28 lead deep in the fourth quarter.

The Panthers gamely clawed back. The defense forced the 'roos to punt, and Paschal marched down the field on Gallagher passes to McCarver, TE Michael Schroeder and Lovett. The team was unable to penetrate the end zone, however, and as time wound down Weatherford ate up as much clock as it could before taking a safety on a punt.

It was just a game, but the 42-30 loss hurt. No disrespect intended, but Paschal lost to a beatable opponent in a game it could have won. Officiating notwithstanding, the Panthers had ample opportunities to win. The team dropped too many passes, allowed too many third down conversions – and still had its own destiny in its hands. Take away the Weatherford interception in the end zone and make it a reception, add the Paschal interception run back for a touchdown, and it's a tie game. Figure that King is good for at least one of the two PATs, and Paschal wins.

But wishes aren't horses and no amount of will power can change what's already done. That's where self-respect comes into play. Some will always wonder whether some of the officiating crew has it, will wonder whether the officials in question can sleep in good conscience, but the Panthers resolutely say that the only thing that matters is that they could have won if they'd done a few more things right. They're stand-up guys applying lessons they learned on the football field to lead better lives. It's hard not to go to a place like Weatherford and wonder what will become of some of the opposing athletes, to wonder whether these beautiful Friday night contests are the apex of their lives. One just doesn't worry as much about the Panthers. Though most ultimately will go pro in something other than sports, we know they'll succeed because of the lessons they've learned through athletics. They have character. They have self-respect.

The Panthers will display both when they bring the "We're Not Gonna' Take It Anymore" tour back to Fort Worth's Farrington Field Thursday for a 7 p.m. tilt against the Abilene High School Eagles, who sit at No. 5 in the state AP poll. Whatever the outcome, Panther Nation knows its boys of fall will give honest and complete effort. That's the only way they know how to play, and it's the reason they can look at themselves in the mirror. They're proud to be Panthers, and Panther Nation is proud of them.



JV Panthers Look to Regroup against Abilene Eagles

Hard work and togetherness, they go hand in hand. You need the hard work because it's such a tough atmosphere ... to win week in and week out. You need togetherness because you don't always win, and you gotta hang tough together.

-- Tony Dungy

The JV Panthers, motivated by the previous week's big win, took to the field looking to "take the next step" in their first district game of the season against the visiting Weatherford Kangaroos.

Weatherford needed to steal some of the home team's energy, and did so when it blocked a punt and scored early in the first quarter to take an 8-0 lead.

The always tough JV defense took to the field and quickly shifted momentum back to the Panthers when LB Miguel Ruiz and DE Jonathon Weiss crashed through the Kangaroo line, causing a fumble that was recovered by LB Morgan Hix at the Weatherford 25 yard line.

The offense was quick to respond with QB Robert Dennis hitting RB Connor Pitts with a touchdown pass, bringing the score to 8 to 7. The JV defense continued to keep the pressure on Weatherford when DB Alex Hansen recovered another fumble, giving the offense another shot at the Kangaroo defense.

The rest of the first half was a back and forth affair with both teams trading blows until the Kangaroos were able to score with a minute left in the half to take a 16-7 lead.

The momentum of the late first half score seemed to carry the Kangaroos into the second half, and they put another 6 on the board early in the third quarter to extend their lead to 22-7. The Panther offense, unable to find its rhythm, could not penetrate the Kangaroo defense and the third quarter ended with the score still 22-7.

With the game's momentum clearly in the Kangaroos' favor, they scored two more times in the fourth quarter to seal the win.

In a season where expectations are high for the JV program, moral victories no longer seem satisfactory. The team to get the loss behind it, and went back to the week of hard work, the JV squad will hit the road this Friday for a 5:00 p.m. kickoff at legendary Shotwell Field in Abilene. And whatever the outcome, Panther Nation can take pride in knowing that the JV squad will work hard and hang together to the final tick of the clock.

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



Freshmen Panthers Do Themselves Proud against Weatherford

The freshmen white squad rolled to a 6-0 victory over Weatherford on the back of a second-quarter Tyler Arner five-yard touchdown run in the second quarter, and the defensive heroics of Robert Villeda.

Villeda had an enormous day, recovering two fumbles and making an interception in the first half. But his biggest feat may have been his game-saving tackle on the Paschal one-yard line as time expired.

The victory provides welcome momentum to the white team (1-3, 1-0) going into this week's game against the Abilene Eagles.

The purple squad came achingly close to victory in its contest with Weatherford. Matt Young scampered for a 17-yard touchdown run in the second quarter, and QB Chris Hanson found FB Ben Bradley for a 30-yard catch and run touchdown in the third. In the end, however, the purple team came up just short, falling 20-14.

Nevertheless, the purple squad (3-2, 0-1) experienced a number of positives that it will take into this week's game against Abilene, including a defensive effort that forced five turnovers.

The freshmen white team will host the Eagles at 5 p.m. Friday at Bill Allen Field on the campus of Paschal High School. The purple team game the Eagles at 7 p.m. Friday at Bill Allen Field.

Special thanks to Coach Michael Snapp and Coach Robert Harper for their game day reporting on freshmen action.