



WEEK FIVE RECAP



Panthers Endure Game to Forget – and to Remember -- as They Prepare for Haltom

Conventional wisdom holds that rebuilding teams will lose some close games as they learn how to win. The Panthers' game against Weatherford this season and games against Dallas Molina, South Hills, Granbury and North Crowley last season show this principle in action. The close games show the often razor-thin margin between victory and loss, between success and failure, demonstrate in stark relief how little things can be magnified. One unfortunate block in the back, one missed tackle, one fumble, one dropped pass or one blown assignment can decide a team's fate.

Conventional wisdom appears to be silent, however, about blowout losses. They are, nevertheless, instructive.

What we're really talking about here, of course, is experience. Experience is the coin of the realm in football as in life. Whether you're interviewing for a job as a sheetrock salesman, installing a septic tank, trying to deliver toe-curling kisses or wallpapering your home, experience matters. So too in football. And while the Paschal Panthers football program has experience in many things, winning hasn't been one of them. The Panthers entered the season riding a 26-game losing streak. But in the course of the last 10 losses, the Panthers were learning something about what it takes to win. Putting those lessons to work, the team jumped out to a 2-0 start and entered Friday's game against the Abilene Eagles with a 3-2 record.

Consider the Panthers a work in progress. They're still learning how to win. The team is still getting the experience it needs to become the dominant juggernaut it aspires to be. What better experience, then, than playing one of the state's top teams? As Mark Twain once observed, "A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way."

This is not, of course, to say that these lessons are in all respects pleasant. Just try carrying a cat by the tail. These lessons can be ugly, painful, brutal and ego-stripping. And that, in a nutshell, is the sort of lesson the Panthers learned from their set-to with the Eagles. The Panthers received a hiding of the first order, experienced in four quarters a long night of the soul, a physical and mental battering, and the sensation of shell shock. This is what will happen when you fall behind 21-0 after less than six minutes of play en route to a lot-more-than-that-to-3 shellacking. It's also what will happen when you allow a strong team like Abilene to begin its first four possessions in your own territory, including a muffed kick return that gave the Eagles the ball on the Paschal 22 and an interception that gave them the ball on the Paschal 3.

The score is silent, however, on the true value of the game to the Panthers (3-3, 0-2). Prior to the contest, a small band of Panthers spoke quietly of an upset. But many Panthers were instead focused on how big, how quick, how athletic and how great the Eagles are this season – not the sort of attitude bound to give rise to an upset. Moreover, this mindset showed within the first few minutes of play, and predictably resulted in Abilene jumping out to a quick, and quickly insurmountable, lead. And hence the Panthers learned the difference between showing proper respect to an opponent and conceding defeat before the opening kickoff. It would have been far better, of course, for the Panthers to focus less on the opponent and more on their own game plan, and to enter the contest with a higher sense of their own abilities. As Twain said, "To succeed in life, you need two things: ignorance and confidence." The Panthers learned that they need to go into games thinking they can beat anyone, and to back up that swagger by going out and knocking some heads. That's the recipe for an upset.

A secondary lesson for the Panthers is the importance of developing a killer instinct. Abilene did to Paschal what Paschal should have done to South Hills. That is not to suggest that a team's goal should be to humiliate an opponent, because that's not it at all and certainly is not within the Panthers' character. But when an opponent is down, the dominant team needs to continue pounding away. Otherwise you run the risk of allowing a lesser foe to stay in the game, and once fickle momentum shifts, there's no telling what can happen. After Abilene knocked Paschal to the ground, it pounced and went for the jugular. That's just what a winning team is supposed to do.

None of which is to say in any way that the Panthers didn't do anything right. It took a lot of character and pride for the boys to continue taking the field. A lesser team would have thrown in the towel and headed for the buses at halftime. There's just no place to hide on a football field, but the Panthers continued to get out there and finished the game. The offense drove for a late Chris King field goal. Aaron Stafford averaged 30-plus yards per kick return. Alex Carillo made a fine interception and ran the ball into Abilene territory. Indeed, most every player did something he could look back upon with pride. The team just didn't have enough of those moments to make a difference.

The big fear after a come-to-Jesus session such as that endured by the Panthers is that the team will begin to question itself and its abilities. The entire season, including all the many positive steps the program has taken, could fall victim to snowballing pessimism, fear of failure, fear of success, just out-and-out fear, an avalanche of doubt.

The Panthers we've come to know, however, won't have such problems. They'll rebound, their pride intact, better and richer for the Abilene experience. Because, after all, that's what the Abilene game represents -- more hard-fought experience for a rebuilding program that still eyes a playoff berth in 2008. The Panthers understand that the past is not prologue, that the Abilene game represents not an end but a beginning. The Panthers understand that setbacks often precede growth and fulfillment.

Consider the case of Henry Fleming, who joined the Union army dreaming of glory. But in his first contact with the enemy, Fleming discovered fear, fleeing from the battlefield. Once Fleming came to understand that fear is universal among soldiers, he conquered his own, harnessed his anger and became a brave and worthy soldier. We know The Red Badge of Courage today not so much because Stephen Crane was a master literary talent but because of the power, truth and universality of his story. It speaks to us as it speaks to the Panthers. The Panthers ran into a buzz saw of an Abilene team Thursday night, and in the process of getting knocked around gained invaluable experience that will put them in good stead going down the season's home stretch.

The rest of the season begins at 7:30 p.m. Friday when the Panthers travel to the Birdville Fine Arts Athletic Complex to square off against the Haltom High School Buffalos. The Buffs are backed by hardcore fans who thoughtfully posted bulletin board material for the Panthers on the team's website. In relevant part, the post states: "Earlier in this season, I thought Paschal would have a shot at this game. Now – I believe Paschal is back to Paschal. This was truly a team, as another observer noted, that would probably fold it up the first adversity that came their way. It has visited, and it's not leaving. Haltom will explode and have a good week and win this game by at least four touchdowns."

Panther Nation will be at the game in full force, eager to see a revitalized and recharged Panthers squad putting a potentially negative experience to positive use.



JV Panthers Count Their Many Blessings after Abilene Contest

"Yesterday I dared to struggle. Today I dare to win."

--Bernadette Devlin

This past Friday the JV Panthers traveled the long road west to visit the Abilene Eagles at Shotwell Stadium in Abilene. Our JV boys took to the field and played with the same class and heart they always do, representing Panther Nation with pride. Despite a lopsided final score, the JV Panthers can take away the several positives that are often gained from competing against a very talented opponent.

The JV offense had a good quality second quarter drive that ate up almost eight minutes of clock and 70 yards of Shotwell turf. QB's Marshall Norment and Robert Dennis threw several nice passes, WR Blake Barrow made a remarkable 20-yard catch with two Abilene defenders trying to twist his head off, the running back rotation kept pounding away and picking up much needed yards, and the offensive line kept fighting for every inch of field they could seize. And at the end of that 70 yards was 6 points and affirmation that when they go hard, when they execute, they can compete.

The JV defense kept hitting, kept chasing, and kept playing hard through the entire game. With seconds left before halftime and Abilene sitting on Paschal's 15 yard line looking to answer the Panthers' touchdown, LB Morgan Hix sacked the Eagles QB to end the threat. Late in the fourth quarter, DB Preston Goodall made a superb one-on-one tackle to save a late touchdown, and a trio of Panther defenders caused a fumble after swarming to an Eagles' running back. A never quit attitude permeated the entire defensive unit.

The JV special teams had nice returns on kickoffs, K Chris Smith continued his streak of perfection on extra points, and Tyler Anderson had several nice punts.

And most of all, our coaches never stopped coaching, never stopped teaching, and never stopped encouraging our sons.

So what do we take away? That we are fortunate to be blessed by a group of coaches who truly believe in the boys they are entrusted with, that our boys play with spirit and character no matter what the odds are, and that on this day they dared to struggle, that today the coaches will coach, the players will prepare, and they will dare to win.

Next up for the JV Panthers is a 7 p.m. Thursday contest against the Haltom Buffalos at Bill Allen Field on the campus of Paschal High School.

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



Freshmen Panthers Play Well against a Stout and Salty Abilene Opponent

The freshmen white and purple squads gamely faced off against very talented Abilene High School teams and in many respects played well enough to win. But the teams lost the turnover battle, and will now have to refocus their attention on the next district contests – games against the Haltom High School Buffalos.

The freshmen white team is slated to play on the road at 5 p.m. Thursday, with freshmen purple action scheduled to follow at 7 p.m.

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.