



## WEEK EIGHT RECAP



### Panthers Eager to End 2008 Campaign with a Glorious Bang against Elks

A football season can be a lot like a cross-country road trip. It begins with the hyperventilated excitement of outsized expectations, with a giddy sense of exploring the previously unknown, with a sense of adventure. And then within a few hours, when the Skittles and Cheez-Its are gone, we settle into a prolonged siege with boredom, our in-car DVD players and our i-Pods notwithstanding. Someone grouses that we should have flown, another complains, "His knee keeps touching me!" and we hunker down in our seats, the cornscape and mile markers whizzing past but not nearly fast enough to suit our perceived need to be there already.

One thinks of our nation's hardy pioneer stock and wonders how families could do it, wonders how they could traverse the vast plains and rugged mountain passes in wagons that, on a good day, made about 12 miles, the scenery changing almost exclusively only because of the shifting quality of light as the sun marked the day's progress. Twelve miles a day to the modern mind is like standing still, and our rugged forebears did it all in the name of Manifest Destiny without air conditioning, prepackaged snack foods and personal entertainment centers, without the ubiquitous golden arches to greet the weary traveler, in a country so vast that there is nothing out there but the unrelenting there and miles to go before they slept.

Somehow we've forgotten that the adventure is in the journey, not the destination, that in a very real sense, getting there is not half the fun but rather most of the fun. Because once we get where we're going, we're almost always thinking about having to go back, part of us tethered to where we started and part of us fretting that we don't have enough time to enjoy our stay before we must return to the mundane.

The point here is not so much that we are not our ancestors, though we emphatically are not, as much as it is that the football season is of such duration that we can lose our perspective, our bearing, our sense of wonder and adventure. We get so caught up in what's next that we fail to savor what is, fail to enjoy the richly rewarding journey that each week provides. We look back, we look forward -- and miss what's happening before us right now. Or we see what's happening before us but view it with jaundiced, unappreciative eyes, our gaze confused by the shifting phantasmagoria that is a football game in progress.

The Paschal Panthers football team began the 2008 season with great expectations that only increased with two highly dramatic victories in games one and two. Visions of the playoffs danced in our heads when perhaps we should simply have savored the miracles before us, taken the experience day-by-day and lingered in the present, fully alive to the pulsing reality of witnessing a team on an upward trajectory. Instead, when hardship came, some cursed the bêtes noires of missed tackles, fumbled balls, interceptions and missed assignments, losing sight of the fact that each experience with "failure" is an opportunity for growth and refinement. A soupçon of Paschal followers grumbled about Eden lost when what they were really seeing was Eden reborn. Ask anyone who has ever gone through a remodeling project what it's like, and three hours later you'll come to see that progress in its early stages often resembles destruction. So too with rebuilding football programs.

The vicissitudes and contretemps that inevitably arise during the course of a football season are part and parcel of the maturation process. Slowly but surely, the Panthers are learning how to handle adversity, how to overcome the insurmountable, how to execute under pressure, how to lose with dignity and to win with grace. These are no small lessons and they take time. But think how far these Panthers have come in the past two years. We loved the 2007 Panthers and saw their great promise. We've loved the 2008 Panthers even as some of us grimace at what we believe is promise unfulfilled. It's true the Panthers have lost winnable games against beatable opponents. But that does not in any way diminish the effort, heart, drive and promise these young men have. It simply adds a page to their resume of life, building them into even stronger young men -- and better football players -- than they were at journey's start. As Linus might have it, that's what it's all about, Charlie Brown.

The Paschal Panthers lost Friday night to a beatable North Crowley team. In some respects, it was a game that gave confirmation to the idea that, sometimes, the only team that can beat the Panthers is the Panthers themselves. North Crowley's first two scores came on drives of 26 and 40 yards, all compliments of a catalog of woe that included mishandled kickoff returns, ill-timed penalties, special teams' problems, and lack of execution on both sides of the ball.

Then the team settled down the rest of the way with some hardnosed, heart-filled play. WR/DB Travoy McCarver played his heart out, and by game's end was electrolyte depleted and cramping. RB Ricky Valdez made some nice pass receptions, and RB Emmanuel Smith brought his hard hat and lunch pail to put in his usual hard night's work. OL Alex Deeds gamely played on a game foot, while Robert Dennis stepped in and did some fine work at quarterback while Brian Gallagher did stellar work at receiver. DL Abraham Leal returned from an injury he suffered on the season's first play from scrimmage, and quickly made his impact felt. Morgan Hix, called up from the JV squad, had a nice game for the Panthers on defense. Indeed, the entire defense, after unsuccessfully defending a short field twice in the early going, stepped it up the rest of the way, whether it was DBs Sidney Smith or Aaron Stafford making a tackle to stop a big play or DLs Joel Taft or Alec Baker making tackles at the line or LB Matt Blum sticking it to a North Crowley runner or a phalanx of Panthers joining to tackle North Crowley's version of Javorskis Lane.

Paschal threatened to score toward the end of the first half in a drive marked by competing penalties. Starting on their own 38, the Panthers in fits and starts worked their way to the North Crowley 15 before stalling out.

North Crowley looked to add to its 14-0 lead as the half drew to a close, advancing to the Paschal 42 with time for one more play. DB Kirby Campbell broke up the ensuing Hail Mary attempt, and the Panthers looked to regroup at halftime.

North Crowley got the ball to start the half, but promptly gave it away when LB Luis Garcia snared an interception and ran it back for an apparent touchdown. However, Paschal was called for a clip and instead of cutting the North Crowley lead in half had the ball on its own 22. The Panthers dished out a hearty serving of Emmanuel Smith and advanced to the 49 before suffering some reversals -- the short story of a long night. North Crowley added a score and that was it for the night's scoring.

But that was not it for the night's learning, and it was not it for the night's pleasures. From start to finish, we enjoyed a gift, a rare slowdown in our otherwise hectic days when we could simply be and take in the sights and sounds and be thankful for where we were. Walking up to North Crowley's Panther Stadium, the cool October air invigorated the spirit while inside, the stadium rocked with AC/DC, setting the stage for smash mouth football. The cheerleaders, the bands, the smell of popcorn in the air, the sight of the Panthers assembling in the Panther head, all these beautiful things are part of the rich ritual of perhaps the only secular communion we share -- Friday Night Lights. Intriguingly, an appreciation for these special nights is a hallmark of followers of Paschal's next opponent, the Burlison Elks. Indeed, Friday Night Lights are as much a part of a small Texas town's bucolic aesthetic as 4-H competitions, cruising the strip, Dairy Queens and meth labs. Sometimes, perhaps, we grow jaded, but what a pleasure, and privilege, to be part of this rich union, this Panther Nation, this extended family of faith, hope and love.

Now Panther Nation will gather for one more game night when the Panthers square off against the Elks at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Farrington Field. For the team's worthy seniors, the game marks both an end and a new beginning. For the rest, the game marks the first step toward an even better 2009. And for Panther Nation, the game marks the last time we'll get to see the 2008 Panthers in action.

A football season is very much like an extended road trip. We're in the home stretch now and players and fans alike are weary. Just as a horse can smell its stable from miles off, we can sense the end and, in some respects, we ache for it, longing for the leisure we imagine is in store.

But perhaps what we should do instead is invest ourselves fully in this combination ending-beginning, throw ourselves fully into the now and enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to share in the phenomenon known as the 2008 Paschal Panthers. He's a principal now, pulled and tugged in thousands of different directions. But to lucky Panther players, parents and coaches, he'll always be coach. Coach Carlos Walker stepped away from the demands of his job at O.D. Wyatt Friday to come see the players he did so much to help and touch -- a welcome reminder to us all of the vast gift that is there for us to receive, the gift of seeing and cheering on the Panthers. And now we have just one more such gift in 2008.

The team sendoffs, though appreciated, have grown threadbare. For this last game in 2008, let's send the Panthers off like we mean it, send them off like the champions we hold them to be. Perhaps we can tailgate as we did for Homecoming, enjoying each other's company and swelling with hope and positive feeling as da' boys, our Boys of Fall, strap on their pads one final time, seeking the district victory that has so far proven elusive. We can be loud, we can be raucous, we can fill the stands with purple -- a fitting tribute to these few, these proud, these 2008 Panthers.



### JV Panthers Look to Go Out with a Roar against Burlison Elks

Week 8 of JV Panther football had our boys playing their final home game of the season against the North Crowley Panthers. The JV Panthers offense opened the game with a nice balance of rushing and passing to take an early 7-0 lead on a rushing touchdown by Louis Moreno.

However, North Crowley quickly responded with a score and two-point conversion to take an 8-7 lead. After a short offensive series resulting in a punt, North Crowley got the ball back and drove down to the Panther 1 yard line. North Crowley had 4 downs and 36 inches of Panther real-estate to try and score another touchdown, but the JV defense stood as tall and tough as ever, refusing to give an inch and holding North Crowley to 4 and out! After several back and forth offensive series, North Crowley was able to put up a late score at the end of the second quarter and to take a halftime lead of 14-7.

The second half of the game started with North Crowley scoring two quick touchdowns to give them a 27-7 lead. The Panthers, unwavering in the belief that the game is only over when the clock hits zero, put together another nice drive with Tyler Anderson keeping the offense going with a diving reception for a first down and the RB trio of Moreno, Conner Pitts and Daniel Jackson hammering away at the North Crowley defense. The Panthers effort paid off with another Moreno rushing TD that brought the Panthers within 13. With the clock ticking down, the defense gave the offense another opportunity when Jonathon Weiss recovered a fumble, but North Crowley proved a tough opponent and put one more tally up for a final score of PHS 14 North Crowley 34.

Yet again, our JV coaches showed their trust in the players and a willingness to do whatever it takes to win the game, calling for fake punts, reverses, new pass plays and moving players to new positions to try to provide that extra spark.

The spirited JV squad plays its final game of 2008 at 6 p.m. Thursday at Burlison High School.

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



### Freshmen White Defeats Previously Unbeaten Richland Squad

Sometimes things just fall apart early and the best you can do is work hard, complete the job and regroup full of hope for a better tomorrow.

The freshmen white and purple squads had such an evening last Thursday against North Crowley, but gamely and with pride and conviction played to the end. For the white team, RB Tyler Arner amassed 53 yards rushing and picked up a sack on defense in a losing cause.

In purple action, LB Andrew Pillow and DL Ben Hoyt had rock solid defensive games as the purple team also fell.

In the end, it was just one of those nights. As hard as the boys tried, they simply did not enjoy a very good night. But in football as in life, one performance does not define a reputation any more than the size of one's bank account determines one's character. And as they've done throughout the year, the freshmen footballers have shown they are a special breed.

The freshmen white team will suit up for the final time this season at 5 p.m. Thursday at R.L. Paschal High School's Bill Allen Field when the squad takes on the Burlison Elks. The purple team is scheduled to follow at 7 p.m., also at Bill Allen Field.

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

Visit The Panther Football Website at [www.leaguelineup.com/PaschalFootball](http://www.leaguelineup.com/PaschalFootball)

*Special thanks to Geoff Campbell for his insightful game day analysis.*

Questions or comments? email [PHSFootballBooster@msn.com](mailto:PHSFootballBooster@msn.com).