



WEEK ZERO PREVIEW



Senior Laden Panthers Look To Improve On Last Year's Success

The vision quest is an integral part of growing up in many Native American cultures. When ready, a child fasts and embarks alone into the wilderness on a personal, spiritual quest.

The child focuses on the spirit world, is often visited by a guardian or power animal and is able to discern his or her life direction.

Though most often associated with Native American tribes, the vision quest as rite of initiation is practiced worldwide by many cultures. It is a ritual that seeks to answer age-old questions. Who am I? Why am I here? Practitioners believe vision quests help individuals find their place in the world, discover their meaning and flower into the adults they are to become.

The Paschal Panthers, you might say, have been on a vision quest the past two football seasons. And guided by their power animal, the panther, team members in 2007 learned they could be competitive. In 2008, Paschal players learned they could win.

Today, these Panthers expect to win. They speak of victories. They speak of playoffs -- this from players who just last year helped to break a 26-game losing streak.

And though they know that all this talk is nothing if not backed up by performance on the field, it's clear to see this is a team that knows itself, knows its purpose and is ready to flower into its destiny.

"The seniors are seasoned and experienced," says Head Coach Matt Cook. "They know how to play and they know how to win. There's a lot of work yet to be done, but these young men are willing to do what it is going to take to guide them to a winning season."

This year's team boasts the largest senior contingent in recent memory, with some 30 seniors on the varsity squad. Cook believes that experience will help this year's team improve on last year's 3-7 record.

"We feel like last year we played pretty well," he said. "We were able to stay in games till the fourth quarter to give ourselves a chance. We feel like we're even better this year."

In addition, Cook is proud that the program boasts a tremendous corps of excellent students. The program includes National Merit Semifinalists, students in the Top 10 percent of their class and academic all-district players.

"We don't ever have trouble with grades," Cook said. "It's fun to be at a school where the kids get it," adding that the coaching staff has been able to throw a lot of different offensive and defensive schemes at the players without worrying about confusing them or overloading them.

That having been said, Cook said the coaching staff stresses that players must respect every opponent they face. The Panthers' first opponent is Arlington Sam Houston High, which will be looking to avenge its loss to Paschal in last year's season opener.

"They're going to be ready for us," Cook said. "They're ready for revenge."

The hunger, desire and preparation of opponents puts pressure on Paschal players to be at their best. So too does a different kind of pressure -- heightened expectations in Panther Nation.

Cook said that kind of pressure can be a positive, inspiring the players and letting them know in concrete terms that they have the backing of the Paschal community. Such was not always the case in the lean years of Panther football.

Of course, Paschal players can't be worried so much about pressure of any kind. They've got a full plate just working on fundamentals, like working to eliminate turnovers on offense, to eliminate penalties on both sides of the ball and to swarm to the ball on defense.

The Panthers enter a new phase of their journey when they tangle with the Sam Houston Texans at 7 p.m. Thursday at Handley Field. The time for questing is through. The time for being is at hand. And regardless of what the scoreboard may say at game's end, the Panthers will emerge as winners. It's their vision. It's their essence. It's their destiny.

Optimism and enthusiasm run throughout the program as the JV and freshman teams look to build for the future. Having 30 seniors on varsity is great, but presents a large hole to fill in 2010. But with a dedicated and hard-working JV and freshman corps, the Panthers are looking to get better each and every season.

The JV Panthers kick off their season at 11 a.m. Saturday at Wilemon Field on the Sam Houston High School campus.

The freshman Panthers launch their season with two games at Wilemon Field. The freshman white squad is scheduled to play at 8 a.m., with freshman purple action scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m. Both games are on Saturday.

All the Panther squads are hoping for large and raucous but sportsmanlike supporters. Come show your support by blanketing the stands in a sea of purple.



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.

Be sure and check out the article on the history and tradition of Paschal Panther Football in Thursday's [Star-Telegram](#)