



WEEK FOUR RECAP



Weatherford Rues the Day it took Panthers Lightly

It felt exactly as though someone had reached into our chests and pulled out our hearts. Or perhaps more accurately, it felt like someone had reached into our throats, because that's where our hearts ended up Friday night.

That's the thing about being in the process of building something great. Moral victories no longer satisfy. Part of building a winning football program is expecting to win and accepting nothing short of victory.

Or so we think. But how can we not accept the Panthers' effort in Friday's heart-wrenching loss to the Weatherford Roos? The Panthers were this close to defeating the Roos – the Roos, who just a few short years ago blistered and embarrassed the Panthers in a woodshed session for the ages.

Let's just say what we're thinking. The better team did not win Friday night. But let's also give credit where it's due. Weatherford took full advantage of all its opportunities down the stretch. One can argue from now till Christmas about whether those opportunities were rightly awarded, but the debate is moot.

But throw out the scoreboard. Was that not one of the best games the Panthers ever played? Was it not thrilling to be there? Was it not yet another example of the strides these young men and this program have taken?

The Panthers opened the game by feeding the Roos a steady dose of RB Emmanuel Smith. After Aaron Stafford returned the opening kickoff to the Paschal 41-yard-line, Smith did most of the rest and scored at the 7:23 mark of the first quarter. K Chris Smith's PAT gave the Panthers a 7-0 lead.

Weatherford looked to answer on the strength of its triple-option offense. But on an apparent first down at the Weatherford 37, the Roos fumbled and Paschal pounced to give the Panthers a first down at the Weatherford 40.

Unfortunately, the Panthers were unable to capitalize and after K Smith's punt went through the end zone, the Roos took over on their own 20. Weatherford got one first down but then the D went into lockdown mode and forced a punt.

The Panthers looked to be on a certain scoring drive, but a high snap ended up giving Weatherford the ball on their own 36. Weatherford would eventually score as time expired in the first quarter, resulting in a 7-7 tie.

As the second quarter dawned, Paschal again appeared to be on the march to payday. But a flurry of penalty calls stifled the drive and Weatherford took over on their own 36. The Roos looked like they'd take a second quarter lead when DB Stafford made an interception and returned the ball to the Paschal 10.

QB Brian Gallagher found WR Rochell Johnson for a first down at the Paschal 25. RB Smith rumbled for five yards, then Gallagher hit WR Chris Smith for a first down at the Paschal 36. Two plays later RB Smith ran to the 45, then took it to the 50 for a first down with just more than two minutes remaining in the half.

Gallagher passed to WR Travoy McCarver for a first down at the Weatherford 38. Two plays later, Gallagher hit WR Angel Argueta for a first down at the Weatherford 17. The Panthers scored on the subsequent play when Gallagher found Johnson for a touchdown. K Smith's PAT was good, giving the Panthers a 14-7 lead with 55.6 seconds remaining in the half.

Weatherford attempted to go into halftime with a tie, trying several incomplete passes before fumbling. The Panthers again recovered, and with 31.6 seconds left, sought to increase their lead. They got help when an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty against the Roos gave Paschal a first and 10 at the Weatherford 17. Three plays later, and with just 7.8 seconds remaining, Emmanuel Smith earned a first and goal at the Weatherford 2-yard-line. On the next play, in a harbinger of things to come, officials ruled Smith was stopped short of the goal line though his torso was clearly in the end zone.

Nevertheless, the Panthers led the Roos at halftime, and it seemed that it might just be Paschal's night. That feeling was only reinforced as the second half began. On second and 12 at the Weatherford 28, the Roos attempted to pass. But DB Kirby Campbell intercepted, returning the ball to the Weatherford 27.

Working a nice reverse pass play to perfection, McCarver found a wide-open Johnson for a Paschal TD at the 10:36 mark of the third quarter. K Smith's point after was good, extending the Panthers' lead to 21-7.

Weatherford responded at the 6:11 mark, and it was clear this was destined to be a game for the ages.

Paschal launched a nifty drive that suddenly appeared imperiled when a fumble resulted in a loss of six. Facing second down and 16 at the Weatherford 46, the Panthers remained calm. Gallagher dropped back and combined with McCarver on a nifty 46-yard catch and run for another Panther touchdown. K Smith again nailed the PAT, and the Panthers swelled their lead to 28-14 with 17 seconds remaining in the third quarter.

Weatherford narrowed the gap at 7:41 in the fourth quarter, and everyone in Farrington Field could feel fickle momentum shift. And then momentum got a shove.

McCarver returned the Roo kickoff to the Paschal 25, but a head-scratching unsportsmanlike conduct penalty against the Panthers meant Paschal would be starting its drive at its own 6.

Undaunted, the Panthers appeared to advance the ball into Weatherford territory with 4:44 remaining in the game. Yet another unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, however, pushed the Panthers back. Instead of facing a third and three situation at the Weatherford 48, the Panthers were shoved back into their own territory facing third and 18.

It was as though Adam Smith's invisible hand got bored with the economy and decided instead to manipulate a football game. And once the field was tilted, the outcome was a foregone conclusion.

The result was sad and undeserved, but not wasted on these Panthers. They learned another lesson in what it takes to win at the 5-A level, and that obstacles to success sometimes include having to face down or neutralize a 12th man – whether that be the opposing crowd, a perceived slight by officials or simply bad luck. They learned that when they get an opponent down, they have to finish the job.

In any event, the Panthers had no time to feel sorry for themselves. They are scheduled to meet the big, bad Abilene Eagles at 7:30 p.m. Friday at fabled Shotwell Stadium, the Mecca of Texas high school football. Many in Panther Nation have written off Friday's contest, but not so fast. It's true the Eagles are ranked among the top five teams in the state. But the Panthers have been hard at work this week. They aren't game-planning to avoid embarrassment. They're game-planning to win. Who are we to say otherwise?

Besides, the Panthers have plenty of motivation. After the Eagles shellacked the Panthers last year, the Abilene coach told a local newspaper that the Eagles had "outclassed" the Panthers, an interesting turn of phrase for a coach who ran up the score in what we gather passes for a sportsmanlike, classy manner in west Texas. Moreover, the Eagles scheduled the Panthers for homecoming, which feels like a bit of a dig.

Regardless of the outcome of Friday's game, Panther Nation can be assured that these Panthers are eager to compete and show the Eagles that last year is history -- and that history is not always prologue.



JV Panthers Show Moxie and Resolve Against Weatherford

A 35-yard field goal by K Jair Salas was among the highlights of the JV Panthers' contest with the Weatherford Roos Wednesday night.

Salas' monster kick came with just two seconds to go in the first half and helped to keep the Panthers in the game.

The JV Panthers' offense moved the ball well against a physical Weatherford squad, but was unable to convert on a number of opportunities. The defense likewise played well, but was faced with defending a short field too often in the second half.

The team played hard and tough; it was just one of those nights when the bounces just wouldn't go their way. Every player got a chance to contribute and grow, which is crucial for future success.

The entire Panther program is slowly but surely turning the corner, and the JV squad is on the cusp of truly understanding what it takes to win on a consistent basis. In other words, not a bad night in Panther Nation.

Standout players include the entire offensive and defensive lines, along with Salas. *Special thanks to Coach Brandon Lillard for his insights into the JV contest.*

Freshmen Panthers Experience Night of Growth v. Weatherford

The freshmen white and purple squads were held scoreless Wednesday, but both played hard and well. As the games progressed both teams began to move the ball on the strength of big runs and a never-say-die attitude.

The defense in both games was strong, though it seemed that Weatherford's offense was on the field most of the night. Penalties hurt, too.

Nevertheless, the teams got a taste of district competition and a firm idea of what it will take for them to win going forward.

Special thanks to Coaches Rick Babcock and Darrell Preston for their game day analysis of 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.

