



WEEK EIGHT RECAP



Paschal Panthers Chew Up North Crowley in No-Doubt-about-It Victory for the Ages

*If you leave, don't leave now
Please don't take my heart away
Promise me just one more night
Then we'll go our separate ways*

*We've always had time on our side
Now it's fading fast
Every second every moment
We've got to – we've got to make it last
OMD, "If You Leave"*

At 10:05 p.m. Thursday, we stood and clapped.

There was nothing left to say and even if there had been, our throats were shredded by four quarters of shouting as Panther Nation gave voice to inchoate longings, vocalizing soundless emotions and the deepest of desires, minds racing with possibilities and anchored by the moment, the sweet, sweet moment, of Eden regained.

We hugged. We cried. And we didn't want to let go of the night, the night that saw our Panthers grow into manhood and seize what was rightfully theirs, what's been rightfully theirs all along, what they should have enjoyed weeks ago, what was stolen from them Sept. 24 in the hugest swindle since Texas was taken from Mexico.

It was Senior Night, and the seniors delivered. It was their time, and no one – and nothing – would deny them.

The seniors, so much a part of the present, will leave such a huge hole when they're gone. But on this night they roared, leaving nothing to chance, taking destiny by the throat and making their own way. Panther Nation went along for the ride, a deliriously bittersweet ride that saw the team overcome adversity before the game even started and coalesce around the idea that, through its accumulated shared sacrifice, it could find the key to victory.

The result was a total team win that saw major contributions from seniors and juniors alike, a rollicking, convincing, no-room-for-doubt 40-21 victory. In so doing, they kept playoff hopes very much alive. Moreover, the win broke a 30-game streak of district futility that began after the Panthers beat the Granbury Pirates 46-30 – in 2005.

It's difficult to single out any particular play, or player, in what amounted to a one-heartbeat, one-team victory. At the same time, it's hard to ignore RB Emmanuel Smith's 242-yard, five-touchdown performance, the spark provided by the return from injury of QB Brian Gallagher or the pure, gutsy moxie of Doug Parkhurst, who normally plays tight end on offense but moved to tackle when DL Alex Deeds suffered a freak pre-game injury.

The O-line opened up monster truck lanes all night for Smith, and once in the secondary, Smith's second- and third-efforts provided extra yardage. Meantime, the defense's heart grew three times in size, coming up with crucial stop after stop. Maybe it was DB Sydney Smith sticking a receiver in the ribs to break up a pass, or LB Kevin Deal snaring a timely interception, or DB Aaron Stafford putting a North Crowley running back on his back or DE John Weiss and LB Luis Garcia teaming up for a sack or DB Kirby Campbell making a one-armed tackle to prevent a North Crowley fourth-down conversion attempt.

Every Panther was a hero Thursday night. Every Panther made it happen.

Ironically, the game got off to an inauspicious start.

After Stafford returned the opening kick to the 50-yard-line, the offense initially sputtered. The Panthers' first play from scrimmage was an incomplete pass, but a roughing the passer penalty gave Paschal a first down at the North Crowley 40. The team was able to get no closer than the North Crowley 36 before turning the ball over on downs. North Crowley needed no more than five plays to score, and a pall of dread hovered over the Senior Night crowd.

But down on the field, in the hearts of the Panthers, something else entirely was taking place. Showing nothing but determination and a fierce urgency, the Panthers quickly righted the ship. Defending a short field, the defense stood tall, rejecting a North Crowley drive that began on the Paschal 36.

The defensive stop ignited a long Paschal drive. On the first play of the series, Smith ran for a first down to the 50. He followed with a 6-yard gain. Stafford picked up one, and then Smith got another two. Smith then rolled to the North Crowley 37 for a first down. Gallagher hit WR Angel Argueta for a five-yard gain, setting up a Smith run to the North Crowley 6. Three plays later he scored. K Chris Smith's PAT was true, and the Panthers tied the game at 1:12 of the first quarter.

The defense again locked down, forcing a three-and-out punt that gave the Panthers the ball on their own 38 as the second quarter dawned. RB Smith rumbled to the North Crowley 34. QB Robert Dennis picked up another eight yards. Smith made the next seven carries, ultimately hitting pay dirt at the 7:27 mark of the second quarter. K Smith's PAT sailed through the uprights to give the Panthers a 14-7 lead.

Fickle fate then decided to test the Panthers. After the defense forced another punt, the Panthers suffered a series of calamities that short-circuited a short-field scoring opportunity. North Crowley took advantage of the largesse, scoring a touchdown at 1:19 of the second quarter. However, Stafford blocked the PAT attempt, preserving the Panthers' lead.

Rochell Johnson returned the North Crowley kick to the Paschal 24. He then caught a Gallagher pass for a first down at the North Crowley 33. Gallagher subsequently found Argueta for a five-yard gain with just 54.3 seconds remaining in the half. Then, facing fourth and five with 49.4 seconds to go, Gallagher teamed up with Johnson again for a first at the North Crowley 14. A subsequent interception, however, gave North Crowley the ball at its own 6 with 34.6 seconds remaining.

Two plays later, Sydney Smith returned the favor, turning an interception into a Paschal first down at the North Crowley 17. However, just 15 seconds remained in the half. RB Smith would later score with 6.3 seconds left. K Smith's kick was true, and Paschal went into the locker room with a 21-13 lead at intermission.

The North Crowley coaching staff must have been a Vesuvius of inspiration at halftime, because the team came out loaded for battle to start the second half. The team returned the Paschal kick to the Paschal 40, then scored on a run on the first play from scrimmage. North Crowley's two-point conversion try succeeded, making the score Paschal 21, North Crowley 21 at the 11:36 mark of the third quarter.

The teams briefly settled into a defensive struggle before the Panthers were able to reopen the scoring spigot.

Facing third and 17 deep in their own territory, the Panthers took advantage of a North Crowley pass interference call to seize a first down at their own 30. Gallagher ran for four before RB Smith picked up a first down at the Paschal 44. Two plays later, Smith motored to the North Crowley 26 for another first down.

RB Demarcus Kindles then ran for seven, setting up a Smith touchdown run with 2:44 remaining in the third quarter. The extra point attempt failed, however, giving Paschal just a six-point lead.

Patrick Alland kicked off for Paschal, and it was a beauty. Funky spin on the kick resulted in a North Crowley fumble, which Paschal recovered at the North Crowley 23. The two teams traded penalties until RB Smith punched it in at 1:16 of the third. Paschal's two-point conversion try failed, but the Panthers now held a 33-21 lead.

As the third quarter drew to a close, the defense was applying the screws to the North Crowley offense. The team ultimately stuffed a fake punt attempt, giving the Panthers the ball on the North Crowley 45 at the dawn of the fourth quarter. Smith quickly picked up a first to the North Crowley 21, and two plays later RB Ricky Valdez scored at the 10:34 mark of the fourth. Alland's PAT was good, giving the Panthers a 40-21 lead.

North Crowley threatened on its next possession, but a huge sack by Weis and Lopez on a fourth and five play effectively sealed North Crowley's fate.

As the clock wound down, we weren't quite sure what we should do. We laughed. We cried. We hugged. We clapped. But the Panthers, led by their seniors, knew exactly what to do. As the award-winning Paschal band played the alma mater, the team advanced to the edge of the stands pointing upward to their musical brothers and sisters, a visual shout out to a group that's stood with them through a season often more thick than thin. Panther Nation isn't just the players and their families. It includes the band and the spirit team and the drill team and the cheerleaders and everyone's parents and relatives, anyone who cares about Paschal, a group united by a belief in the redemptive value of hard work and an enlarged sense of the possible. As we stood there not knowing what to say or do, the players reminded us that they don't play these games for themselves, but for all of Panther Nation.

...I won't let go at any price
I need you now like I needed you then
You always said we'd still be friends.

We've watched these seniors for four years now, and we've found they've been teaching us all along. It's only now, though, that we're realizing how near we are to the end of this part of our shared journey. We're sad for the impending loss, but grateful, oh so grateful, for the lessons of hope and redemption and character they've shared and taught along the way.

Now we have at least one more opportunity to learn as the Panthers travel to Burleson Friday for a game scheduled for 7:30 p.m. at Elks (sic) Stadium. The game is heavy with playoff implications for both teams, and the Panthers are hoping to draw a sizeable road contingent to cheer them on to a road win that keeps the playoff dream alive. They've been there for us. Now it's our turn to be there for them.



JV Panthers Draw First Blood but Find Closing the Deal to be Elusive

The JV Panthers scored the first points in their game against North Crowley Friday but were unable to maintain the momentum.

The scoring drive began on the Panther 15 yard line. Hector Mendez was a warrior, amassing nearly 50 yards rushing on the drive. QB Jair Salas also completed two critical passes to WR Rory Ginsburg.

Unfortunately, the Panthers fumbled five times the rest of the game, short-circuiting scoring opportunities.

Matt Keller, Daniel Rieling, Walker Moore, Andres Berlanga and Alex Hulen had monster games on the offensive line. Ben Bradley was once again a huge asset at fullback and wide receiver, where his contributions were matched by WR Reiger Etuk.

Andrew Pillow, Connor Fanning, Ben Hoyt, DJ Liserio, Tyler Arner, Brian Munoz and Eric Rodriguez all played well on defense.

The JV Panthers are scheduled to conclude their season at 5 p.m. Thursday at Paschal High School. The Panthers are slated to take on the Elk of Burleson..

Special thanks to Coach Brandon Lillard for his insights into the JV contest.

Freshmen Panthers Show Fight Against North Crowley

In the freshmen white game, DB/WR Will Blake had a monster game with an interception and several tackles. Blake's stellar performance was an early birthday gift for his mother, who celebrated what we hope was a happy birthday on Wednesday.

Kirby O'Brien provided the majority of the offensive highlights for the white squad, finishing with more than 50 yards rushing. Jesus Parrea, Angel Ramirez, Malcolm Buckshia and Devante Lewis all had their best games of the season.

FB Lenzey Singleton had a good night for the purple team, proving to be a tough tackle on several bruising runs. QB Adrian Rodriguez also contributed on the ground with 40 yards rushing. Alfredo Retana continued to be a sure tackler at his safety position, and Jarronald Tate had his best night as a cornerback, breaking up two passes.

Special thanks to Coach Mike Snapp for his analysis of freshmen team 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.



PLAYERS BEWARE: PANTHER TERRITORY