

Sports

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The Pierson Allison era begins with a 35-6 win over East Hall

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Junior quarterback Pierson Allison made his first varsity start and led the Panthers to their 15th consecutive season-opening victory, a 35-6 win over East Hall.

Allison connected on his first nine passes to finish 24-for-31 with 271 yards through the air. He also carried six times for 35 yards, along with a late-third quarter touchdown that put the game away at 35-0.

In the first half, it was Chad Buzzard that provided the Panthers with an early cushion, rushing for a career-high three touchdowns to open up a 21-0 advantage at the break.

"It was very important for us to jump on them hard and early," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "East Hall had some tough luck last week and in the scrimmage game so it was important to put them away early."

The third quarter got underway with Chayton Schafer taking the second half kickoff to the house and spotting the Panthers a 28-0 lead, just 16 seconds into the period.

The 84-yard kick return electrified the Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium crowd that was still returning to its seats following the intermission. With the Vikings barely staying afloat, the Panther defense sensed blood in the water and cranked up the intensity.

On its first two plays of the game, however, a pair of East Hall handoffs -- 23 and 13 yards -- combined for a quick 36 yards. However, the next 26 rushing attempts only netted 40 yards as the Vikings punted nine times while only converting 9-percent of their third downs (1-for-11).

"(East Hall) returned five starters on the offensive line and got 23 yards on the first play and 13 on the second play," Coach Allison said. "The first play (wasn't the players' fault) because we called a stunt away from (the direction of the play). After that, I don't think (East Hall) had a first down run until the fourth quarter, so I thought we handled them pretty well."

With a first down in Panther territory, the East Hall opening drive stalled, beginning with senior linebacker Jackson Colwell flying into the backfield for a loss of five. On 3rd-and-13, Schafer came on a safety blitz and the duo of senior defensive end Kyle Williams and Schafer tripped up quarterback Clete Cooper for a 6-yard loss.

Union County's opening drive began at its own 33 with a low snap that resulted in a 17-yard loss but completions to Morlock and Schafer moved the chains.

Allison continued to spread the ball around, hitting Alec Scott twice, Cayden Rich once for 15 yards, then a short completion to Morlock and a pair of shovel passes to Schafer had the Panthers inside the red zone.

After moving the chains with 3 yards on 3rd-and-2, Buzzard took a handoff around the left edge, spun away from a defender and delivered a stiff-arm inside the five as he dragged a Viking defender across the goal line for a 12-yard touchdown run.

The first of Brian Smith's five extra points made it a 7-0 game with 5:36 left in the first.

On the ensuing East Hall possession, senior defensive end William Lueckert swallowed up senior running back Gimel Patta for a loss of three on first



Left: Pierson Allison finds the endzone on a 6-yard scoring run during the third quarter, giving Union County a 35-0 advantage. Right: Prior to kickoff vs East Hall, the Panthers take the field at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium for the 2018 season opener. Photos/Todd Forrest

down, eventually leading to a three-and-out.

Both offenses would swap punts after Williams recorded another third down sack. Union would take over at the 32-yard line thanks to an 18-yard punt return from Hemphill. A 17-yard completion to Hemphill on the first play had the Panthers at the 15 but two plays later, Union found itself in 3rd-and-long.

Needing 11 to keep the drive alive, Schafer used every bit of his 5-foot, 8-inch frame to pull down a high tunnel screen pass from Allison. With linemen Coleson Daniel and Dylan Williams leading the way, Schafer weaved his way to the 1-yard line where Buzzard had reservations for six on the next play.

After blasting his way up-the-gut for his second score of the night, Buzzard and the Panthers held a 14-0 advantage with 10:32 remaining in the half.

A kickoff out-of-bounds allowed the Vikings to set-up shop from the 35 but Nathaniel Ledford blew up a first down run for a loss of three. Two incompletions later, Union was taking over at their own 41 following another East Hall punt.

The Panthers would need nine plays and 122 seconds to travel 59 yards for the score. Buzzard recorded the first half hat-trick by stretching the ball across the goal line, capping off the 10-yard rushing touchdown at the 7:29 mark of the period.

"It was important to jump in front early," Buzzard said after the game. "We lost to (East Hall) by 20 points last year so it was huge to get the early lead and take the pressure off our defense. Overall, it was a really good first half."

Buzzard would finish with 15 carries for 73 yards and three scores. Although, he wasn't needed much in the second half - only carrying the rock five times after the break.

After trading punts, the Vikings took over at the 30 with 4:51 left before the break. On 2nd-and-8, Lueckert chased down junior running back Cambren Harrison from behind for short loss, bringing up a 3rd-and-9, where Coach Allison turned up the heat on the Vikings' freshman quarterback Kyle Williams and Colwell forced Cooper out of the pocket and just as he going out-of-bounds for a 15-yard loss, Cooper tossed the ball forward, drawing an intentional grounding penalty.

A friendly bounce on the Viking punt forced Union to

start from its own 28 with 3:09 on the clock. Unfortunately, the Panthers were flagged five times on the drive, negating big gains by Schafer and Rich. Union still had a shot to try a field goal but a third down sack dropped the Panthers out of Smith's range and they took a 21-0 lead into the locker room.

For the game, Union County was the victim of 12 penalties, costing them 95 yards - keeping East Hall hanging around a little longer than Coach Allison would prefer.

"The game is over much earlier without all the penalties," Coach Allison said following the game Friday night. "I counted 11 but know we had more. We can't do that and that's something we need to fix. Otherwise, the game is over. Over early."

Schafer's second half kickoff return extended the Union County margin to 28-0 -- more than enough for a Panther defense playing lights out. Fielded at the 16, Schafer waited for his blockers to set-up the return before darting out of the pack and outrunning the kicker down the near-sideline for six points.

According to Schafer, his kick return was simply a case of identifying which kicker was currently on the field.

"(East Hall) has two kickers and they had been kicking it short but the coaches realized they (were using) the deep kicker," Schafer said. "He didn't kick it all that deep and I knew I had Kanon Hemphill and Kyle Morlock (blocking) on my right so I hit it up the middle, saw a lane and just took it."

Things would settle down for much of the third quarter as two punts apiece kept the margin at 28-0. At the 4:38 mark of the third, the game took a frightening turn when Cooper scrambled out of the pocket and was sandwiched between a pair of Panther defenders. Unable to stand, the freshman quarterback immediately dropped to the turf and remained motionless for more than 10 minutes. Cooper was eventually taken by stretcher to a nearby ambulance and transported to Union General Hospital.

Around lunchtime Saturday, the North Georgia News learned that Cooper's CT scan was clear and he was diagnosed with a concussion.

When action resumed, the Vikings' backup fired a pair of incompletions sending the ball back to Union on another punt. Starting from the 35, the Panthers put the game away with an 8-play, 65-yard drive - capped off by a 6-yard Pierson Allison touchdown run with 1:15 left in the third.

The scoring drive included a pair of hookups to Cayden Rich, who joined Hemphill the team's leader in receiving yards. The duo each hauled in five grabs with 70 yards apiece -- both career highs for Rich.

Leading 35-0, the fourth quarter brought a running clock and East Hall's only score of the night. A 12-play, 70-yard drive denied Union County its first shutout of a team in a higher classification since Fannin County in 2000.

The score came on an 11-yard touchdown pass to Xavier Ramsey with 6:22 remaining. Union County ended up



Right: Prior to kickoff vs East Hall, the Panthers take the field at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium for the 2018 season opener. Photos/Todd Forrest

with five different receivers that caught at least five passes on the night. Morlock finished as Pierson Allison's favorite target, catching six passes for 50 yards; Schafer also turned in a five-reception game to go with 43 yards and an 84-yard kick return touchdown.

STATS - UNION COUNTY (Passing): Allison 24-for-31, 271 yards; Kanon Hemphill 0-for-1

(Rushing): Buzzard 15 att, 73 yards, 4.9 YPC, 3 TD; Allison 6 att, 35 yards, 5.8 YPC; Sutton 3 att, 12 yards, 4 YPC.

(Receiving): Morlock 6 rec, 50 yards; Hemphill 5 rec, 70 yards, Rich 5 rec, 70 yards; Schafer 5 rec, 43 yards; Scott 2 rec, 18 yards; Buzzard 1 rec, 20 yards.

EAST HALL (Passing) 5-for-17, 40 yards, 1 TD (Rushing) 28 att, 76 yards, 2.7 YPC.

Looking ahead - Union County and Towns County renew a rivalry that began in 1976.

The two teams have met 30 times prior to the Panthers winning 29. Although, it should be mentioned that this month marks the 25-year anniversary of Towns County's 1993 victory over Union County - the Indians' only football victory over the Panthers.

Towns County (1-0) is coming off a 55-24 win at Hayesville, North Carolina on Aug. 17, where head coach John Cornett was ejected, resulting in a suspension for this week's game.

The Indians are coming off their first-ever playoff appearance in 2017 and Frank McClure stadium will be whipped into a frenzy when they host Union County in the 2018 home opener.

This isn't your parents' Towns County Indians' squad. Coach Cornett has Hiwassee buzzing over Indians football for possibly the first time ever. And while Cornett might not be on the sideline Friday, Towns County is still led by a three-year starter at quarterback and last week's *Blitz* Player of the Week, Trent Bradshaw.

In the win over Hayesville, Bradshaw ran for 197 yards and three scores. He also completed 6-of-11 passes for 102 yards and a pair of scores.

A quarterback in a full-back's body, Bradshaw doesn't shy away from contact and looks to punish defenders behind five seniors on the offensive line.

After dealing with a 280-pound running back and a physical O-line last week, Coach Allison admits his team is in for a tougher challenge in game two.

"(Bradshaw) can hurt us if we're not careful," he said. "He's physical and can make plays. We will see much better quarterback play (from Towns County) than what we saw vs East Hall."

"They also have a big receiver, Will Travis and a couple of running backs that can hurt us. They are a very good offensive football team."

According to Allison, one of the keys to slowing the Indians' option attack is limiting their yardage on first and second down.

"We need to keep them out of second-and-short and third-and-short and force them into third-and-long situations."

Defensively, Coach Allison believes Towns County is an experienced, well-coached unit with a physical front-four.

"They are very sound and their defensive linemen are

going to be difficult to block," he said. "In the secondary, Bradshaw, Travis, and (Hayesville-transfer, Alan) Gillis are all seniors that will come in and play both ways."



Senior Chayton Schafer returns the second half kickoff 84 yards for a touchdown. Photo/Todd Forrest

WHAT TO EXPECT: TOWNS COUNTY

- * **CURRENT REGION:** 8-A
- * **2018 RECORD:** 1-0 (won 55-24 at Hayesville, NC)
- * **HEAD COACH:** John Cornett (3rd season, 9-12)
- * **2017 RECORD:** 5-6 (1st Round Class A Public playoffs)
- * **OFFENSIVE STYLE:** Triple option
- * **KEY OFFENSIVE PLAYERS:** QB Trent Bradshaw (Sr), ATH Alan Gillis (Sr), OL Jake Parker (Sr), RB Tyler Swanger (Sr), WR Will Travis (Sr)
- * **DEFENSIVE STYLE:** Multiple, 4-man front
- * **KEY DEFENSIVE PLAYERS:** LB Hunter Frisk (Sr), S Alan Gillis (Sr), CB Garrett Oakes (So), DL Jake Parker (Sr), DL Danny Reagan (Sr), LB Blaine Rogers (Sr), DL Shane Sparks (Jr)
- * **SPECIAL TEAMS:** K Wes Calhoun (Sr)
- * **SERIES RECORD VS UNION:** 1-29 (W-1993)
- * **RECORD VS COACH BRIAN ALLISON:** 0-12
- * **LAST MEETING:** 2015 (Union W 35-7)
- * **SERIES RESULTS:** (Year, winner, score, location)

1976	Union County	50-0	Hiwassee
1977	Union County	40-0	Blairsville
1984	Union County	54-7	Blairsville
1985	Union County	54-0	Hiwassee
1986	Union County	28-0	Blairsville
1987	Union County	6-0	Hiwassee
1988	Union County	54-12	Hiwassee
1989	Union County	34-6	Blairsville
1990	Union County	13-0	Blairsville
1991	Union County	19-0	Hiwassee
1992	Union County	20-8	Hiwassee
1993	Towns County	27-17	Blairsville
1996	Union County	28-19	Blairsville
1997	Union County	19-0	Hiwassee
1998	Union County	38-0	Blairsville
1999	Union County	34-0	Hiwassee
2000	Union County	35-21	Hiwassee
2001	Union County	48-16	Blairsville
2002	Union County	48-12	Hiwassee
2003	Union County	26-8	Hiwassee
2004	Union County	8-0	Hiwassee
2005	Union County	38-0	Blairsville
2006	Union County	48-0	Hiwassee
2007	Union County	31-6	Blairsville
2010	Union County	40-7	Hiwassee
2011	Union County	20-0	Blairsville
2012	Union County	17-14	Hiwassee
2013	Union County	41-14	Blairsville
2014	Union County	57-14	Hiwassee
2015	Union County	35-7	Blairsville



Senior defensive lineman William Lueckert spent a lot of time in the East Hall backfield on Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest