

Sports

See the Sports Section at ngame.com

Panthers cruise past Towns, visit Fannin in battle of unbeatens Friday

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Union County took care of business in the home opener, setting up a Friday night clash with undefeated Fannin County in Blue Ridge.

Things went as expected in the Panthers' 60-7 victory over Towns County as Union scored nine touchdowns before the Indians found the end zone in the final minutes to prevent the shutout.

The 60-point outburst marks the highest scoring performance a rivalry that has seen the Panthers prevail in 31 of 32 meetings.

Union County Head Football Coach Brian Allison was impressed with the Indians' never-say-die attitude, despite entering Friday night's contest with barely 20 players.

"Those guys played their hearts out and never quit," Coach Allison said. "My hat's off to them. They showed a lot of heart and toughness and played hard the entire game."

As for his own squad, the Panthers scored on its first five possessions to open up a 35-0 lead with 8:18 left in the second quarter.

Over the same time-span, the Union County defense allowed just one first down, which came via a pass interference penalty on the game's third play.

After the defense forced a punt, junior running back Jonah Daniel broke free for a 31-yard touchdown run on the Panthers' second play.

Later, Pierson Allison would hit a wide-open Sawyer Drake on a deep post route over the middle for a 26-yard touchdown pass.

On the next offensive possession, Union County made it 21-0 when Kyle Morlock took a screen-pass 27 yards for the score that was sprung by the downfield blocking of sophomore wide out Dalton Allen.

Early in the second quarter, junior Mason McCombs took a tunnel screen at the 15-yard line and went untouched into the end zone for a 28-0 advantage.

The varsity's final score of the evening came on a 22-yard keeper by Pierson Allison, who weaved his way through traffic before splitting a pair of Indians at the 5-yard line.

The Panthers were aided by a pair of short fields on its final two scores as Towns County was twice denied on fourth down, deep in its own territory.

Pierson Allison's evening



Union County freshman running back Caleb Rogers (25) is off to the races vs Towns County. He finished with a game-high 95 yards and two touchdowns despite having another touchdown run called back in the fourth quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

ended with 90 yards and three scores on 5-of-7 passing. He also added one rushing score and 31 yards on two carries.

"We did what we needed to do to," Coach Allison said regarding the win. "I thought we made some improvements in a few areas. Our offensive line had some quality reps, and the same thing with the defensive line, I thought we did some good things."

Sophomore quarterback Logan Helcher took over midway through the second quarter and led a three-play, 42-yard scoring drive, capped off by a 39-yard catch-and-run by Allen, who hauled in a corner route at the 20 and stiff-armed a defender at the 10 before finally dragging him across the goal line.

On its final scoring drive of the half, a 16-yard punt return by Josh Orr set up Helcher and the offense just 27 yards away from pay dirt.

A pair of carries by freshman Caleb Rogers moved Union County inside the 10-yard line, where freshman Stein Harkins finished off the drive with back-to-back hand offs up the gut -- the second one finding the end zone from four yards out.

Rogers would finish with a game-high and career-high 95 yards rushing and two touchdowns on 17 carries.

Most of his damage came in the second half, however, as he stretched the Union lead to 54-0 on a 6-yard scoring run on the opening drive of the third quarter.

Rogers' score came on the heels of a 38-yard scramble by Helcher that moved the

Panthers inside the Indians' red zone. From there, a first down give to Rogers picked up 13 before the freshman running back powered his way across the goal line from six yards out on the very next play.

Rogers' score came on one of the most impressive runs of the night, as he spun off a defender at the line of scrimmage before getting stood up at the three. From there, he kept his legs churning, and with a little nudge from his buddies on the offensive line, the rugby scrum advanced its way across the goal line for six points.

Leading 54-0 after three quarters, Rogers and the Panthers would find the end zone one more time.

On the final play of the third, Rogers tore-off a 22-yard carry to move Union County to the Indians' 19. Faced with a 4th-and-9, Helcher rolled left and fired a strike to sophomore Eli Peugh, who was eventually wrestled out at the eight.

A first-and-goal handoff to Rogers went for six before an incomplete play-action pass brought up a third down.

Looking at 3rd-and-goal from the two, Rogers waltzed through a gaping hole created by right guard Tyler McBride and right tackle Josh Ledford for a 60-0 Union County advantage.

"I thought the young guys did well," Coach Allison said. "We outscored them 12-7 in the second half and that was the challenge I issued to them at halftime. I told them the second half would be their game and I'm pleased with how it turned out."

The Indians would get on the board when a fourth down conversion went for 52 yards, setting up a 1st-and-goal at the nine. Three plays later, Towns

County was on the board, bringing the final score to 60-7.

The Panthers were without senior receiver Cayden Rich (sore foot) but he is expected to return for Fannin County.

Up next - Union County will face 2-0 Fannin County on Friday in a battle of the unbeatens in a rivalry that dates back to the 1950s.

Since East and West Fannin were consolidated into Fannin County High School in the late 1970s, the Panthers are 14-13 against their next-door neighbors.

On seven occasions since 2000, Union County has entered the Fannin game undefeated.

On six occasions they left undefeated with the lone exception coming in 2013 -- the Rebels' last victory in the series.

Only twice have both teams entered without a blemish and the two meetings came in back-to-back seasons (2000-2001) when they were both 1-0. Union County would win both games easily, including a 36-0 shutout at Fannin in 2000.

In 1991, Fannin entered 7-0 and throttled a 2-4 Panthers squad 36-6. In each contest between 2006-2008, Fannin came in sporting a 4-1 mark and won all three match-ups.

The only competitive meeting during that stretch came in 2008, when Union was also 4-1, and Fannin held on 42-35 in Blue Ridge.

More recently, the 2-1 Rebels hosted a pair of 3-0 Panther teams in 2014 and 2015. Following a Union rout in 2014, Fannin took the Panthers down to the wire a year later in Blue Ridge, a game that saw Union rally late for a

37-31 victory.

Despite a 63-39 victory in their last visit to Fannin County in 2016, Coach Allison expects a nail-biter when his Panthers invade Blue Ridge on Friday night.

"I think it's going to be a barn-burner," he said. "Both teams will be fired-up so I think we need to make sure we do a great job and execute in practice this week."

What worries Coach Allison is an extremely versatile Rebels offense that throws multiple sets at the opposition to keep its defense guessing and off-balance.

"The reason [Fannin] is so tough is because they can go from a Pro-I (formation) to a spread while using the same personnel. That makes them very tough to prepare for."

He feels a little better

about his offense's capability to put up points.

"I think we match up pretty well [with Fannin's defense], but once again, it comes down to execution and how well we're able to do what we're supposed to do."

News and notes:

* Union County's 60-point performance marks the second time they've reached the 60-point barrier at home (Hayesville 2016) and fourth overall.

* The Panthers are 2-0 for the sixth straight year. Their last 1-1 start came in 2013 when they lost at Fannin County in game two.

* Pierson Allison's 26-yard connection with Drake marked the Panthers' 29th consecutive home game with a touchdown pass. Union's last home contest without a score through the air came in the 2013 regular season finale -- a 49-3 loss to defending state champ Jefferson.

* Since that loss to Jefferson, the Panthers have won 22 of 25 regular season home games with one loss coming to Rabun County (2014) and the other two vs GAC and Dawson County as members of Region 7-AAA in 2017.

* Pierson Allison's 22-yard TD scamper was the 40th rushing/passing score of his career. He currently has 29 passing and 11 rushing touchdowns. He is also 85 passing yards away from 3,500 for his career.

* Morlock's 27-yard touchdown catch put him over 1,000 receiving yards for his career. He currently sits at 65 catches, 1,019 yards and 12 TDs.

* With 19 tackles through two games, senior linebacker Sloan Sutton is at 140 career stops - the most among current Panther players.

Offense

Passing	Comp/Att	Yds	TD	Int	Long
#17 P. Allison	5/7	90	3	-	27
#8 L. Helcher	4/8	78	1	-	39
Rushing	Att	Yds	TD	Long	Fum
#25 C. Rogers	17	95	2	22	-
#24 J. Daniel	3	62	1	31	-
#8 L. Helcher	2	56	-	38	-
#17 P. Allison	2	31	1	22	-
#6 S. Sutton	1	11	-	11	-
#45 S. HARKINS	2	11	1	7	-
Rest of team	1	-3	-	-	-
Receiving	Rec	Yds	TD	Long	Fum
#28 D. Allen	2	54	1	39	-
#10 E. Peugh	3	39	-	20	-
#15 K. Morlock	1	27	1	27	-
#21 S. Drake	1	26	1	26	-
#5 M. McCombs	2	22	1	15	-

Defense

	Tk	Ast	Sk	TFL	Sfty	Int	Fum
#74 N. Ledford	5	1	-	-	-	-	-
#56 J. Engle	3	1	-	-	-	-	-
#9 J. Mancuso	3	2	-	1	-	-	-
#3 K. Hemphill	3	-	-	1	-	-	-
#2 T. Wright	3	1	-	-	-	-	-
#6 S. Sutton	2	5	-	-	-	-	-
#52 C. Lester	2	4	-	-	-	-	-
#7 Z. Ross	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
#16 N. Underwood	1	3	-	-	-	-	-
#55 R. Baumeister	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
#26 J. Little	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
#14 S. Page	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
#82 W. Walker	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
#78 J. Rockenbaugh	-	3	-	-	-	-	-

GAME CAPSULE: AT FANNIN CO.

Nickname: Rebels
Location: Blue Ridge
Head Coach: Chad Cheatham - 2nd season
2018 record: 4-7 (L - 1st Rd State AAA)
Current record: 2-0 (Gilmer, LaFayette)
All-time record vs Fannin: 28-23*
All-time road record vs FC: 13-11*
UC record over last five meetings: 5-0
Coach Allison overall record vs FC: 10-3
Coach Allison road record vs FC: 3-3
Allison record vs FC coach: 1-0
Last meeting: 2018 (W 49-7)
Last loss: 2013 (43-35)

* Includes East/West Fannin; UC is 14-13 all-time vs FCHS

Team Totals	UC	TC
Total Plays	52	42
Total Yards	431	94
Passing Yards	168	65
Rushing Yards	263	29
First Downs	21	3
Third Down Efficiency	6-7 (86%)	2-11 (18%)
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-1 (100%)	1-3 (33%)
Turnovers	-	-
Fumbles Lost	-	-
Interceptions Thrown	-	-
Penalties	10	4
Yards	75	30