

Sports

See the Sports Section at ngame.com

Allison's five first half TDs lead Panthers in 49-7 rout of Fannin

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Union County improves to 3-0 for the fifth consecutive season thanks to its fifth consecutive victory over the Fannin County Rebels, 49-7 at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Friday.

Junior quarterback Pierson Allison accounted for all five Panther touchdowns during the first half, leading Union to a 35-0 advantage before handing the keys to freshman Logan Helcher in the second half.

Meanwhile, a stingy Panther defense held Fannin County to 157 yards of offense while limiting the Rebels to one mop-up duty touchdown in the fourth quarter. In three games this season, Union has allowed 20 total points - the fewest points allowed over the first three games since the 1985 Panthers, who also gave up 20 points.

"(Fannin) hurt us a couple times with the (halfback) iso but (defensively) I thought we played them pretty well," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "But I thought we played better this week, against a better offense, than we did during the first two weeks.

"(Fannin's offensive formations) are very multiple so it took us some time to adjust and those are some pretty big adjustments for our guys to make. But we were able to hold them to 150 or 160 yards on offense and anytime you can hold a team under 175 yards that's pretty good."

Fannin's first possession of the night resulted in a punt following a quick three-and-out. Which was exactly what the Panthers discussed prior to kickoff.

"Right before the game we talked about stepping on them early and not letting them back up," said senior cornerback Alec Scott. "We had a good week of practice and we wanted to set the tone defensively."

Pierson Allison and the offense took over at their own 41 and needed seven plays to grab the early lead. On the opening offensive series, Union fed the Rebels a steady dose of Chad Buzzard and the senior running back rushed four times for 29 yards before capping off the drive with a 6-yard touchdown reception on 3rd-and-goal.

Allison also carried once for 15 yards and hit Sawyer Drake on a 9-yard bubble screen. Facing 3rd-and-goal from the five, the Rebels forgot about Buzzard coming out of the backfield and Pierson Allison connected with his running back on a wide-open flare pass for 6 points.

Brian Smith -- who was a perfect 6-for-6 on PATs -- made it 7-0 at the 7:29 mark.

Fannin's ensuing drive stalled after one first down and the Panthers set up shop at the Rebel 47-yard line thanks to a 17-yard punt. On the first play, Pierson Allison went up-top to Drake, who had two steps on the defender, for a 47-yard scoring strike, deep down the sideline.

Just like that Union was out front 14-0 midway through the opening quarter.

"(Pierson Allison) has a good group of receivers, the offensive line played really well and he made some good decisions," Coach Allison said when asked about the play of



Pierson Allison scores his first rushing touchdown of the game. He would finish with three passing and two rushing touchdowns in the first half. Photo/Todd Forrest

his junior quarterback. "He completed 10-of-12 and our guys made a couple really good catches but with our short passing game, we expect him to complete a high percentage."

The final score of the first came on the heels of Fannin's third punt in three possessions and the offense began at their own 42 with 2:12 left in the frame.

Pierson Allison immediately went to work, spreading the ball around to four different receivers: Kanon Hemphill, Kyle Morlock, Cayden Rich, and Drake. Buzzard also added 23 yards on two carries while Allison called his own number twice. A 6-yard keeper and a 3-yard scoring run around the left edge on quarter's final play.

Desperate to generate some offense, Fannin was faced with a third-and-short early in the second quarter. That's when a blitzing Sloan Sutton and a Coleson Daniel bull rush allowed the two defenders to meet at quarterback Luke Holloway for a 9-yard loss.

The Rebels' second three-and-out resulted in a punt that was partially blocked by Chayton Schafer and returned inside the 40 by Hemphill.

Allison would sling consecutive incompletions after connecting on his first seven attempts, bringing up a 4th-and-3. Buzzard would move the sticks with 5 yards, Morlock gained seven on a quick screen, Buzzard churned out four more and Pierson Allison took a read-option keeper up-the-middle, bouncing off a pair of Rebels at the goal line for his fourth score of the night.

Fannin County went backward on its next series as Holloway was swallowed up by a Panther blitz on third down. Hemphill returned the punt 13 yards to the Rebel 38 where the offense took over with 6:12 remaining in the half.

A 6-yard hookup with Morlock and a 2-yard carry by Buzzard brought up 3rd-and-2. With Fannin blitzing two linebackers, a tunnel screen to Schafer was the perfect call and the senior went the distance - 31 yards for the score.

"I thought we moved the ball pretty well on offense," Coach Allison said. "We were

a little more consistent this time. We were able to run the ball better than we did in the last game."

Trailing 35-0, the Rebels had one last chance to get on the board before halftime but were eventually denied after driving 69 yards, inside the Union five. A pickup of 11 on 3rd-and-2 was Fannin's longest play of the half and kept the offense on the field. A 6-yard completion on 3rd-and-5, then a 35-yard passing play had the Rebels in the Union County redzone.

On 3rd-and-11 from the 16, Fannin gained nine then a 2-yard handoff on fourth down moved the chains.

On the final play of the half, a third-and-goal pass was picked off by Schafer, who jumped in front of the Rebel tight end at the goal line.

"Our goal coming in was a shutout," Schafer said. "They were deep in our redzone and when the quarterback dropped back, our D-line did a great job of flushing him out. They forced him to make a (tough) throw and I was just in the right place at the right time.

"We're trying to be a first half team and get (the opposition) down from the very beginning and I think we accomplished that," the senior safety continued. "We knew if we were able to step on them early, they wouldn't come back."

Up by 35, the Panthers officially put Fannin to bed with an 85-yard kick return touchdown by Scott on the opening play of the second half.

"I wasn't really expecting (the kick) to come to me but we worked all week on returning it up the middle and that's what I did," Scott said after the game. "When I took it to the middle I just saw a hole and went through it and it was nothing but grass (in front of me)."

With a running clock, Union wouldn't see the ball again until the fourth quarter when the youngsters received some valuable playing time.

The Rebels countered Scott's return with a 19-play, 80-yard scoring drive that ended on the first play of the fourth quarter with a 2-yard dive play up-the-gut.

Sophomore Payton Ivester returned the ensuing kickoff 41 yards to the Fannin

County 36. On the first play, Helcher handed to sophomore Jonah Daniel, who went off tackle for 34-yards before getting pushed out at the two. Two plays later, Daniel punched it in from the two for his first varsity touchdown and the final TD of the night

Sophomore Mason McCombs entered the game and drilled the extra point. One day earlier, McCombs connected on a 27-yard field goal in the junior varsity's 50-7 win over Gilmer. The previous week, McCombs hit from 45 yards in a 38-29 win at Dawson County.

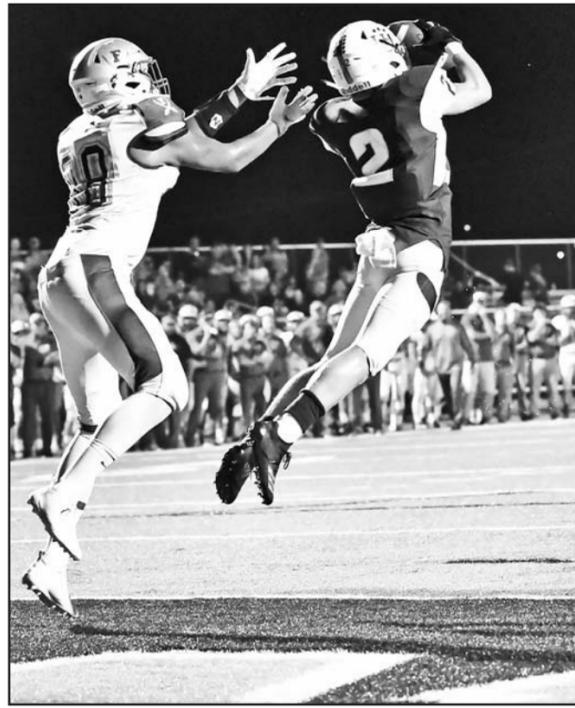
TEAM STATS - TOTAL YARDS: Union County 36 plays, 350 yards; Fannin County 57 plays, 153 yards. **PASSING:** Union County 11-for-14, 171 yards; Fannin County 9-for-16, 73 yards. **RUSHING:** Union County 21 carries, 179 yards; Fannin County 38 car, 80 yards. **FIRST DOWNS:** Union County 17; Fannin County 10. **THIRD DOWN EFF%:** Union County 3-for-4 (75%); Fannin County 5-for-15 (33%). **TURNOVERS:** Union County 1 (interception); Fannin County 1 (interception).

INDIVIDUAL STATS - PASSING (Union County): Allison 10-for-12, 147 yards, 3 TDs; Helcher 1-for-2, 24 yards, 1 int. **RUSHING:** Daniel 7 carries, 64 yards, 1 TD; Buzzard 9 car, 61 yards; Allison 4 car, 53 yards, 2 TDs. **RECEIVING:** Drake 3 receptions, 63 yards, TD; Schafer 1 rec, 31 yards, 1 TD; Morlock 3 rec, 30 yards; McCombs 1 rec, 24 yards; Rich 1 rec, 12 yards; Buzzard 1 rec, 6 yards, TD; Kan. Hemphill 1 rec, 5 yards. **DEFENSE:** Schafer 8 tackles, 3 TFL; Mancuso 6 tack, 1 TFL; Harkins 5 tack; Ivester 3 tack. **KICKING:** Smith 8 kick-offs, 6 touchbacks, 6-for-6 PATs; McCombs 1-for-1 PATs.

Looking ahead - The first long road trip of the year awaits the Panthers on Friday when they open Region 8-AA play at Monticello.

In years past, Union County would make these trips once or twice a year, but this will be a first for most of the guys on this year's squad. Coach Allison doesn't believe the long bus ride will be a factor but they're doing things a little differently just to make sure.

"We're going to get down



Chayton Schafer jumps in front of the Fannin tight end for an interception in the endzone on the final play of the first half. Photo/Todd Forrest

there earlier to allow our guys some time to get loose and run around on the field," he said. "I don't know if there is anything different (to the long bus rides) but I haven't been able to fully figure it out so we'll just see how this team handles it."

"I think they'll be able to handle the long ride. We're going to drive to Winder then stop and eat. From there it's about another hour."

The Hurricanes are currently 1-2 with both losses coming by a combined eight points. Game one resulted in a 16-12 loss at Mount de Sales Academy in Macon. Two weeks ago, Monticello edged Bowdon 13-12 in the home opener. Last week, the Canes fell 27-23 at home to North Cobb Christian and now they await the Panthers for their third consecutive home game.

Monticello is led by senior running back Dylan Jackson and his 142 yards-per-game average.

The Canes use two quarterbacks in Matt Cain and Jaymerious Fleetwood, who also doubles as a wideout. In three games, the duo is a combined 17-for-39 (44%) through the air for 182 yards, 2 touchdowns and one interception.



Senior running back Chad Buzzard's first touchdown reception of the season gave Union County a 7-0 lead. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior wide receiver Sawyer Drake hauls in a 47-yard touchdown pass from Allison to spot Union County an early 14-0 advantage in the first quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Kyle Williams (40) and junior Sloan Sutton (6) lead the Panther surge up the middle on a near-punt block in the first half vs Fannin. Photo/Todd Forrest