

Sports

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Panthers survive 74-57 at Putnam behind 8 TDs from Allison

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Eatonton - With a showdown vs Elbert County on deck, Union County improved to 5-0 following a wild shootout at Putnam County that saw the two offenses combine for 1,266 total yards, 151 plays, 131 points and 61 first downs.

On the heels of a record-breaking, 721-yard performance vs Monticello a week earlier, the Panthers churned out 714 yards at Putnam County as they piled up a program-record, 74 points -- surpassing the previous record (63 at Fannin in 2016) with nearly 12 minutes left to play.

"I was extremely tired on Friday night, I don't think I've ever been that tired after a game," senior linebacker Sloan Sutton said. "Maybe at Elbert County last year? That was a exhausting game but just because it was so physical and intense. (Putnam) was just a long game with both teams running a lot of plays."

The whopping points total came despite three failed extra-point attempts by Union County, which would have netted 77 points if all 11 point-after tries were successful. But as a result, Union found itself trailing for the first time this season at 7-6 and 14-12 in the first quarter.

Some of the Panthers' defensive struggles could be credited to the wrinkles that Putnam installed prior to the game. Most notably, a brand new quarterback in sophomore Cedrion Brundage and an up-tempo offense. But at the end of the day, Union County head coach Brian Allison admits the responsibility falls squarely upon himself to have his team ready to play.

"(Putnam) did some things we weren't ready for and they had us confused," he said. "Coaching-wise, I didn't do a good job of putting our players in a position to be successful."

"We had seen (Brundage) but only in certain situations. The offense we prepared for had a pocket passer (at quarterback) with a power-oriented running game. But they came out in some formations that gave us some problems."

"They came out playing fast in more of a spread-type offense and it had us out of sorts. You have to give their coaches credit, they did a nice job and put their kids in a position to be successful."

After falling behind early on, the Panthers rebounded for a 53-28 halftime lead, thanks in large part to seven first half touchdowns (five passing, two rushing) from senior quarterback Pierson Allison -- equaling Joe Mancuso's school record (Lumpkin 2015).

Pierson Allison would go on to break the record with eight total touchdowns (six passing, two rushing). Additionally, he tied the school record with six passing touchdowns - an accomplishment he now shares with Mancuso (Lumpkin 2015) and Kolt Owenby (Dawson 2009).

Early in the fourth quarter at Putnam, Union County appeared to have things under control following a 13-yard touchdown run by Jonah Daniel that opened up a 67-35 advantage with 11:52 remaining. Putnam County, however, refused to go away, marching back down the field in eight plays, eventually punching it in from five yards out on 4th and 2 with 10:07 remaining.

After a successful two-point conversion trimmed the margin to 67-43, a Panther fumble on the first play of the ensuing drive gave the ball back to the War Eagles near midfield.

Once again, Putnam used an eight-play drive to make it a two-possession game on a 12-yard touchdown pass and a two-point conversion with 8:04 to play.



Nathan Brooks (73) and Jonah Daniel (24) protect Pierson Allison (17) in the pocket. Allison finished with a school record eight total touchdowns while Daniel ran for a career-high 227 yards. Photo/Todd Forrest

"We probably started getting tired at that point but then again, they have some athletes and were really fast," Coach Allison said. "The running back (Marcus Jefferson) was a track state champion in the 100M. They had a few other guys on the relay team that was probably one of the best in the state last year."

Clinging to a 67-51 lead and needing a score to take the pressure off an exhausted defense, Allison and the offense took over at the 39 but were tagged with a holding penalty, bringing up 2nd-and-14. Needing someone to make a play, senior wide receiver Kyle Morlock delivered when he came down with a jump ball on the sideline for a 30-yard gain and a fresh set of downs.

Five plays later and inside the War Eagle red zone, junior Jonah Daniel moved the sticks on 3rd-and-1 as the clock ticked under four minutes. On the very next play, the Panthers continued feeding their workhorse running back, who cashed in from 12 yards out to put the game away at 74-51, following the point-after.

Putnam tacked on a late score with 2:07 to play but was unsuccessful on the two-point try. Union recovered the on-side kick and killed the clock with three-straight handoffs to Daniel, who finished with 227 yards on 21 carries -- both career highs. Daniel also matched a career-high with three touchdowns, equaling his tally from the season opener at East Hall.

Meanwhile, Pierson Allison finished with 426 yards and six scores through the air -- marking the first time in program history that a player has thrown for at least four touchdowns in three consecutive games. He also chipped in 67 yards and two touchdowns on the ground.

His first touchdown came on a 19-yard hook-up over the middle to Morlock to get the scoring started at the 10:18 mark of the first.

Putnam answered with a five-play, 72-yard scoring drive to take a 7-6 lead with 8:45 left in the quarter. A roughing the passer penalty aided Union's next drive as Allison and Drake connected for an 11-yard touchdown and a 12-7 advantage.

After a 30-yard touchdown run put the War Eagles back on top at 14-12, Allison was faced with a 3rd-and-22 when he hit Morlock in-stride for a 76-yard touchdown pass - the longest play of the season for Union County.

Leading 19-14, the defense would force its first three-and-out and the offense took over at the Putnam 42, following the punt. On the very first play of the series, Daniel broke free, right up-the-gut and untouched for a 42-yard score.

On the ensuing War Eagle drive, the Union County defense appeared to have Putnam bottled up until they converted a risky 4th-and-4 from their own 36-yard line. After the measurement originally came

up short, a second measurement (somehow) awarded them a first down.

With new life breathed into the offense, Putnam would tear off a 58-yard touchdown run four plays later, pulling within five at 26-21.

"It kind of threw off our game plan when they came out with a different quarterback," Sutton said. "We had prepared for one guy all week but then they did something totally different against us."

The Panthers responded when Sawyer Drake went over the middle and pulled in a 31-yard touchdown reception with 11:09 left in the half.

Moments later, a blitzing Cayden Rich forced the Putnam quarterback into a quick throw that was snagged by junior linebacker Clayton Lester, who jumped in front of the War Eagle tight end for the interception.

"Once we got a comfortable lead I tried not to use some of those offensive guys on defense," Coach Allison said. "But we've got some seniors on the offensive side of the ball that can really help us on defense, so when we need them, we're going to use them."

Three plays removed from Lester's pick, Pierson Allison called his own number and powered his way across the goal line from three yards out -- opening up a 39-21 lead with 9:42 before halftime.

The War Eagles responded by taking advantage of a facemask penalty that awarded them a free first down, allowing them to eventually punch it in on 4th-and-goal from the 5-yard line.

Union answered with consecutive quick strikes to Rich, followed by an 11-yard scamper by Pierson Allison and a 10-yard run by Daniel. With a first down from the 35, Mason McCombs got behind the Putnam defense and Allison hit the junior for a wide-open touchdown with 4:41 left in the second.

The Panthers got one last shot before the break as the defense forced another punt and the offense set up shop at its own 45 with 3:35 on the clock. A 26-yard run by Daniel and a 24-yard reception by Drake gave Union a first-and-goal from the five, where two plays later, Pierson Allison side-stepped a hard-charging safety at the 1-yard line for his seventh touchdown of the half. The second quarter would finally come to a close with the Panthers on top 53-28, thanks to an interception by junior safety Kaston Hemphill, deep in Union territory.

Following a Putnam score on the opening series of the third quarter, Drake took a tunnel screen 31-yards down the middle of the field for his third touchdown of the night -- a career-high for the three-year starter.

He would finish with nine catches for 161 yards -- both career highs, as well.

Morlock had seven grabs for 172 yards -- both career highs -- while matching a career-best with two touchdowns.

"We scored on 11-of-15 possessions," Coach Allison said. "On the flip side, they had 15 possessions and we stopped them seven times. And when you put it into those terms, it's



Kyle Morlock had career-highs of 7 grabs and 172 yards. Photo/Todd Forrest

not as bad as it seems. "On the flip side, we allowed them to convert 4-of-4 on fourth down so we have fix that. When we have a chance to get off the field, we have to be better."

Game notes:

* Daniel's 227 yards makes him the first running back to eclipse 200 yards in more than a decade. The last 200-yard rushing performance by any player was quarterback Cole Wright's 215 at Lumpkin in 2017. Wright also went for 220 at Banks County in 2016.

* Allison became the first player in school history to throw for 400 yards in back-to-back games.

* The 57 points allowed is the most surrendered during a win in program history.

* Union's 269 points through five games are the most-ever by a Panther team at the halfway point of the season. Only three other Union teams have topped 200 through five games: last year's offense had 222; the 2014 team scored 221 and the 2015 squad put up 200. (The 2016 and 2017 teams were on pace to top 200 points but were forced to play Greater Atlanta Christian in the fifth game.)

Record update: Last week's *North Georgia News* credited Pierson Allison with the total yards record of 534 vs Monticello. Later, it was discovered that Cole Wright remains the record holder with 536 yards at North Hall (436 passing, 100 rushing) in

October 2017.

Looking ahead: Union County will host Elbert County in another region showdown between last year's No. 2 and No. 3 seeds from 8-AA.

In last season's win at the Elberton Granite Bowl, the Panthers converted a late 2-point conversion to escape with a 29-28 victory.

This year's Blue Devil squad is under the direction of a new head coach but features a devastating run game and a physical offensive line.

"They're big and fast and they're going to try and run the football," Coach Allison said. "We're going to need to do a much better job than we did (at Putnam) of stopping the run."

"They are solid, they are sound, they have a great tradition and they've been that way for a very long time."

Sutton, Union's leading tackler, is going to be one of the main defenders charged with slowing Elbert County's ground-and-pound rushing attack.

"They have a very strong running game so we're going to have to be physical and shut them down in the box," he said. "If we can just contain them and prevent big runs, I think we'll be good."

"We only beat them by one point last year so they'll be fired up and looking for revenge. We just need to do our jobs and stay focused because a win will help us with our goal of winning a region championship."



Union County senior Cayden Rich (11) and junior Aaron Helton (53) pressure Putnam County quarterback Cedrion Brundage (8). Photo/Todd Forrest

Team Totals	UC	PC
Total Plays	72	79
Total Yards	720	552
Passing Yards	426	231
Rushing Yards	294	321
First Downs	33	28
Third Down Efficiency	6-7 (86%)	8-16 (50%)
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1 (0%)	4-4 (100%)
Turnovers	2	4
Fumbles Lost	2	1
Interceptions Thrown	-	3
Penalties	12	4
Yards	78	37

Offense	Comp/Att	Yds	TD	Int	Long
Passing					
#17 P. Allison	23/34	426	6	-	76
Rushing					
#24 J. Daniel	21	227	3	42	1
#17 P. Allison	9	67	2	26	-
#6 S. Sutton	1	-	-	-	-
Rest of team	1	-	-	-	1
Receiving					
#15 K. Morlock	7	172	2	76	-
#21 S. Drake	9	161	3	32	-
#5 M. McCombs	1	35	1	35	-
#7 Z. Ross	1	28	-	28	-
#11 C. Rich	3	27	-	12	-
#24 J. Daniel	2	3	-	3	-

Game Capsule: at Elbert County

Nickname: Blue Devils

Location: Elberton

Head Coach: Brad Waggoner - 1st season

2018 record: 7-4 (L 1st Rd State)

Current record: 3-2, 2-0

All-time record vs Elbert: 1-0

All-time home record vs EC: First home meeting

Coach Allison record vs EC: 1-0

Allison record vs EC coach: First meeting

Last meeting: 2018 (W 29-28)