

# Sports

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## Panthers survive late scare, pull away 33-14 at Fannin County

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**Blue Ridge** - For the sixth-straight year, Union County took care of business against rival Fannin County, but not before the Rebels stirred up some late-game drama after the 10th ranked Panthers appeared to have things under control.

"I think tonight showed our defensive toughness," Union County head coach Brian Allison said following the win. "I believe (Fannin) thought they'd be able to drive it down our throat, but we did a great job against them for three quarters."

Leading 20-0 with 44 seconds left in the third, the Union defense denied the Rebels on 4th-and-3 and took over at its own 30-yard line. But instead of putting things away with a late-game scoring drive, the Panthers would suffer their first three-and-out of the contest, punting the ball back to Fannin with 11:04 remaining.

From just shy of midfield, the Rebels gained 32 yards on a handoff up the gut, and 14 more on a play-action pass to the sideline -- both coming on second down -- to set up 1st-and-goal from the five. Two plays later, Fannin was on the board, trailing 20-7 with 8:54 to play.

Moments later, after recovering an onside kick attempt, Union County was once again on the verge of closing out the Rebels. Faced with 3rd-and-4 from the Fannin County 47, Pierson Allison's first-down completion was wiped off by an ineligible receiver penalty. Looking at 3rd-and-9, a second-straight Union County first down pass was negated on another (extremely questionable) ineligible receiver flag. Pushed back into a 4th-and-14 from their own 43, the Panthers elected to punt, allowing the Rebels to take over from their own 22-yard line with 6:25 to play.

"Every time the offense would start rolling we'd get another stinking penalty," Coach Allison said after the game. "Some of the flags were our fault. But the others, well, some of them were very, very borderline."

On the fourth play of the ensuing drive, Fannin County junior quarterback Luke Holloway took a shot deep down the middle of the field, resulting in a 44-yard completion to the Union County five. Two plays later, the Rebels were within a touchdown when they punched it in from four yards out - making it a 20-14 game with the point-after.

"The defense was going good through three quarters, but I don't know if we let up or just got tired there in the fourth quarter," Coach Allison



L-R: Senior quarterback Pierson Allison (17) delivers a stiff arm to a Fannin County defender. Wide receiver Sawyer Drake (21) is in disbelief after fellow senior wide out Kyle Morlock (15) trucked a Fannin County defensive back at the goal line on a second quarter touchdown reception that made it 13-0. Photos/Todd Forrest



said. "But overall, I thought we played well. I was a little concerned going in that (Fannin would be) able to run it right at us with their size, but our guys rose to the occasion.

"We didn't back down, we were physical with them and I was very pleased with the defensive outcome."

A kickoff out-of-bounds penalty, followed by the resulting re-kick and return, allowed the Panthers' offense to set up shop at its own 45-yard line with 4:22 to go. On the opening play of the series, Pierson Allison rolled right and hit senior Kyle Morlock, who came down with the pass at the 40 and proceeded to outrun a Rebels' defensive back down the Union County sideline for a 55-yard touchdown.

"I knew that we needed a big play right there and it was just an out-route that (Pierson Allison) gave me a chance to go up and get," Morlock said after the game. "It feels great (to finish my high school career 4-0 against Fannin). There was a lot of smack talk this week so it's just a really great feeling to get the win."

Allison finished 14-for-24 with 268 yards and four touchdowns. He also rushed six times for 53 yards. Morlock's night ended with three grabs for 90 yards and two scores.

Leading 26-14 with 4:22 left, the Panthers allowed Fannin County to drive across the 50-yard line when a holding penalty moved the Rebels back to midfield.

On 1st-and-20, Union County dialed up the pressure as Pierson Allison came off the edge on a corner blitz, arriving just in time to force an under-throw that was picked off by senior linebacker Sloan Sutton and returned to the Rebels' 33. Two plays later, Jonah Daniel followed his pulling-guard,

Aaron Helton, who opened up a hole on the right side of the Fannin defense allowing Daniel to deliver the final dagger on a 33-yard scoring run with 1:23 remaining.

Daniel churned out 166 yards on 19 carries with one game-clinching touchdown.

"Once again, I feel like Jonah (Daniel) ran the ball really well and Sloan (Sutton) came in and did a good job, as well," Coach Allison said.

"I think the offense, as a whole, has been fairly consistent, but if we eliminate those penalties we probably score 50. I believe we would've had at least four touchdowns in the first half. Maybe five without the bad snaps and penalties."

The much-anticipated shootout would finally come to fruition as the two teams combined for 27 points over the final 8:54, despite only putting up 20 during the first 39:06.

Out of the gates, Union County seemed poised for another offensive explosion when they took the opening kickoff and drove 52 yards on six plays for an early 7-0 advantage. Junior Mason McCombs caught two passes on the drive, the first, a 28-yard completion to set up first-and-goal. The second, a 5-yard scoring strike at the 9:38 mark of the opening period.

McCombs would lead all pass catchers with first 100-yard game of his career. His final tally: 101 yards and a touchdown on four catches.

After forcing a punt on the ensuing Rebel possession, the Panthers got the ball back at their own 20-yard line with 6:50 left in the first. Consecutive throws to Cayden Rich went for 16 and 7 yards, followed by a 15-yard tunnel screen to Sawyer Drake. Faced with a 4th-and-4 later in the drive, an RPO completion to

McCombs moved the chains with seven yards.

Dealing with another fourth-and-medium, Pierson Allison kept it himself and scored from 30 yards out, but not before a block-in-the-back moved Union back to the 20. On first down, a bad snap sailed over the quarterback's head but Pierson Allison was able to scoop up the loose ball and scramble towards the sideline where he fired out-of-bounds, over the head of Morlock. Unfortunately, an intentional grounding penalty resulted in a loss of 26 yards, forcing the Panthers to try a 48-yard field goal on fourth down. This time a low snap was the culprit, throwing-off McCombs' timing by a split-second, forcing him to yank his kick wide left.

The Union County defense, however, continued its lights-out performance as sacks by Sutton and Helton resulted in another Fannin County punt.

Starting from its own 33, Union turned to Daniel, who picked up 10 yards and 9 yards on back-to-back carries. Following a Panther penalty, McCombs took a screen pass 34 yards, drawing a late-hit in the process, setting up Union County with 1st-and-goal at the nine.

A holding call erased a touchdown run by Daniel on first down, then a first down run by Pierson Allison was brought back, eventually bringing up a fourth-and-goal from the 39-yard line.

A punt pinned Fannin inside the five where they were tagged with a pair of penalties following a first-down completion. Forced to kick it back to Union County, punt-returner Josh Orr picked up 16 yards, to award the offense excellent field position at the Rebels' 44 with 3:15 left in the half.

Still clinging to a 7-0 advantage, three-straight gives to Daniel had the Panthers on the move with a 1st-and-10 at the 17. On the fourth play of the drive, Morlock came out of the backfield and took a short flare pass and raced down the sideline before lowering the boom on a defensive back just shy of the goal line. Union County's 6-foot-6 inch wide receiver would win that battle to spot his team a 13-0 advantage when another bad snap resulted in an unsuccessful point-after.

"I just got open in the flat and there was only one guy in front of me," Morlock said. "At that point, I was going to do whatever I could to get in the end zone."

Another errant snap almost cost the Panthers three points when a high snap went over Pierson Allison's fingertips on fourth down with 9 seconds left in the half. As a result, Fannin was able to try a 42-yard field goal before the break, but luckily, the kick drifted left at the last second, preserving the 13-point margin.

"It's really frustrating when you start snapping it over people's heads," Coach Allison said. "Those things are drive killers and keep points off the board. We're very lucky there wasn't more time at the end of the half for Fannin to try a closer field goal or even score a touchdown."

"That's something we're

going to have to work on, but to be honest, we haven't had any bad snaps in practice for weeks. Fannin was also putting some big guys (over the center), but really, our technique was just a little off and that's what happens when you start going against your training."

The Rebels' opening drive of the third quarter was kept alive by a targeting penalty following a 3rd-and-13 incompleting. With new life breathed into the offense, Fannin chewed a lot of clock as they advanced deep inside Union territory. With a first down from the 28, Pierson Allison intercepted his counterpart when Holloway threw deep over the middle into double coverage and Allison jumped the route at the 5-yard line.

Runs by Daniel went for 19 and nine, Allison gained six and Sutton tacked on a 15-yarder as Union moved across the 50 on its first drive of the half. From there, a 16-yard run by Daniel plus a facemask penalty on a Sutton carry, set up a first down at the Fannin 13-yard line. Another Union County red zone penalty moved them backwards, resulting in 2nd-and-21 from the 23. On the very next play, Drake got open on a post-route over the middle and Pierson Allison hit him in stride for a 20-0 lead with 1:46 left in the third.

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**Game Capsule: vs Monticello**

**Nickname:** Hurricanes

**Location:** Monticello (Jasper County)

**Head Coach:** Rydell Jackson - 2nd season

**2018 record:** 5-6 (L - 1st Rd AA State)

**Current record:** 0-3 (Mt. de Sales, Bowdon, NCC)

**All-time record vs Monticello:** 1-2

**All-time home record vs MHS:** 0-1

**Coach Allison record vs MHS:** 1-0

**Allison record vs MHS coach:** 1-0

**Last meeting:** 2018 (W 38-22)

**Last loss:** 1995 (35-6)

Team Totals	UC	FC
Total Plays	65	69
Total Yards	515	343
Passing Yards	268	165
Rushing Yards	247	178
First Downs	22	19
Third Down Efficiency	0-7 (0%)	3-10 (30%)
Fourth Down Efficiency	2-3 (67%)	2-3 (67%)
Turnovers	-	2
Fumbles Lost	-	-
Interceptions Thrown	-	2
Penalties	12	5
Yards	93	30

Offense						
Player	Comp/Att	Yds	TD	Int		
#17 P. Allison	14/24	268	4	-		
Rushing						
Player	Att	Yds	TD	Long		
#24 J. Daniel	19	166	1	33		
#17 P. Allison	6	53	-	20		
#6 S. Sutton	4	28	-	16		
Rest of team	1	-	-	-		
Receiving						
Player	Rec	Yds	TD	Long		
#5 M. McCombs	4	101	1	55		
#15 K. Morlock	3	90	2	60		
#21 S. Drake	4	50	1	23		
#11 C. Rich	3	27	-	14		
Defense						
Player	Tk	Asst	Sck	TFL	Stly	Int
#52 C. Lester	7	5	1	-	-	-
#16 N. Underwood	5	6	-	-	-	-
#6 S. Sutton	4	6	1	-	-	1
#15 K. Morlock	2	2	-	-	-	-
#11 C. Rich	-	1	-	-	-	-
Rest of team	2	-	2	2	-	2