

Sports

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Panthers set consecutive wins record with record-setting blowout

Union wins its 10th straight game thanks to largest shutout in program history

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LEXINGTON - As expected, the Panthers nonchalantly took care of business at Oglethorpe County last Friday night, throttling an overmatched Patriots squad 56-0 for a program record 10th straight victory, while clinching home-field advantage during the first round of next month's state tournament.

"This team has all grown up together and we've developed a bond and become really close," said senior running back Chad Buzzard when asked what he'll remember most about the winning streak. "We always have each others back and we're always there for each other."

The victory also sets up the Nov. 2 contest at Rabun County as the de facto Region 8-AA title game, regardless of this week's outcomes.

Pierson Allison was a crisp 14-of-19 through the air for 232 yards and a touchdown while Sawyer Drake caught six passes for season-high 122 yards.

Sophomore running back Jonah Daniel provided another spark off the bench by putting up 109 yards and two scores on just six carries, averaging more than 18 yards each time he touched the ball.

Buzzard turned in another solid outing with 69 yards and two touchdowns on the ground. With a region championship showdown and the state playoffs just around the corner, Panther fans can breathe a sigh of relief with Buzzard returning to form. It was tough sledding for the team's touchdown leader (11) against Putnam County and at Elbert County, averaging just 2.5 yards-per-carry.

Over the last two contests, however, Buzzard is rushing at a clip of 6.1 YPC, while seeing very little action in the fourth quarter due to substantial margins.

"It felt really good (to get back into the end zone at Oglethorpe) and I'm just happy that I could find a groove and help our offense get into an early groove," Buzzard said after the game.

Buzzard's first score of the night put Union County on the board at 7-0, capping off a seven-play, 50-yard drive that saw the offense overcome a holding penalty on the second play of the series.

After a pass to Drake picked up 11, the Panthers were hit with a 10-yard penalty, bringing up 1st-and-20. A short run by Buzzard, a 13-yard hookup to Kyle Morlock and a 15-yard completion to Cayden Rich moved the chains. Two plays later, Pierson Allison took an option-keeper up-the-middle for 20 yards, setting up Buzzard's 1-yard score behind the blocks of left guard Dylan Williams, left tackle Drake Groves, and pulling right guard Aaron Helton.

The second consecutive Patriot three-and-out gave the Panthers excellent field position just 46 yards away from pay-dirt. From there, Union County needed six plays to take a 14-0 advantage with 5:00 left in the first. The drive was highlighted by a pair of bookend runs by Buzzard: A 15-yarder to open the series and a 3-yarder to end it.



Left: During the first half at Oglethorpe Co., linebacker Hunter Kelley (30) jars the ball away from the Patriot quarterback with Noah Underwood (16) in pursuit. Right: Running back Jonah Daniel (34) follows the blocks of linemen Aaron Helton (66) and Dylan Williams (68), who helped spring his 21-yard touchdown run in the second quarter. Photos/Todd Forrest



Following left guard Chase Clayton, Buzzard lowered the boom on a Patriot defender at the goal line, putting him flat on his back for the second rushing touchdown of the quarter.

Oglethorpe's best scoring opportunity came on the ensuing drive when a 14-play, 56-yard drive ended with a 42-yard field goal sailing wide left. The drive, which spanned more than six-and-a-half minutes, saw the Patriots do all of its damage on the ground while converting a 3rd-and-5 and a 3rd-and-9. The final third down saw the Union County defense get off the field with a 3rd-and-10 stop at its own 25.

Taking over at the 20 with 10:29 remaining in the half, Daniel gave Buzzard a breather and picked up 11 yards on first down then 18 more two plays later. Respecting Daniel's big-play capability, an Allison play-fake to the running back forced the defense to bite, allowing the Panther quarterback clear sailing around the left corner for a gain of 17.

On the heels of an 11-yard, play-action pass to Kannon Hemphill, Daniel flashed his homerun ability when the sophomore took the handoff and proceeded to make a house call from 21 yards away.

Union failed to take advantage of an incredible scoring opportunity moments later when Lance Patton scooped up an Oglethorpe fumble and returned it inside the 2-yard line. On first-and-goal, Buzzard appeared to pull off the first hat-trick as he stretched the ball across the goal line and into the arms of a Patriot linebacker, who yanked the ball away but was standing in the end zone when Buzzard stuck the ball into his gut.

Starting from its own two, Oglethorpe advanced the ball beyond the 10 before punting back to the Panthers. From the Patriot 41, a dropped pass followed by a holding call put Union in a 2nd-and-16 when a tunnel screen to Chayton Schafer went for 15. A third-and-short give to Buzzard was good for 8 yards and a fresh set of downs. The Panthers went back to the well once again and Buzzard picked up 16 more for 1st-and-goal at the six.

Facing 2nd-and-goal from the 11 following an ineligible receiver downfield penalty, Pierson Allison rolled right and fired a strike to Morlock in the front corner of the end zone for a 28-0 lead.

Oglethorpe County

would muffle the Brian Smith kickoff on the ensuing possession, forcing the Patriot offense to begin at its own 11. Facing a 3rd-and-11 from the 10, Union was flagged for roughing the passer, wiping out an over-the-shoulder interception by Ean Harkins near midfield.

A bad snap on second down resulted in a 15-yard loss and eventually forced Oglethorpe to punt on 3rd-and-20. The high wobbly spiral took a Patriot bounce at midfield and rolled dead inside the Union County 40-yard line for a boot of 47 yards.

Needing 62 yards for another score, Pierson Allison and the offense had 1:52 on the clock. But when you have a running back tearing off runs at 18 YPC, 112 seconds is an eternity.

After one play, Daniel had the Panthers in Brian Smith field goal range on a 29-yard handoff right up-the-gut. At the 33, Pierson Allison hit Drake on a 5-yard comeback route that the junior receiver turned into an 11-yard gain.

A screen to Morlock went for 14 yards to the Oglethorpe County 8-yard line then an 8-yard run by Schafer on a receiver end-around spotted Union a 35-0 halftime advantage.

The third quarter got underway with an 88-yard kickoff return by Kannon Hemphill for the score, opening up a 42-0 lead with a running second-half clock.

"Special teams-wise I thought we were very good and we won that phase of the game," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "Defensively, I thought we tackled better and were in better positions."

The Patriots took over and were forced into a quick three-and-out but their defense responded with a rare stop when they denied the Panthers on fourth-and-short at midfield.

"The (offensive line) played well at times and other times they didn't," Coach Allison said. "I wasn't happy about missing that 4th-and-2 in the third quarter but at the same time, we rushed for 300 yards."

Oglethorpe gave the ball back to Union at its own 27 with an incomplete pass on 4th-and-7 early in the fourth. On 2nd-and-9 at the 28, Drake took a short slant 72 yards for the score to open up a 49-0 lead with 9:26 to play.

Freshman Logan Helcher

replaced Allison following another Patriot punt to led the final scoring drive of the evening. The series began with an 18-yard dash by Daniel plus a 15-yard personal foul. Freshman Dalton Allen spelled Daniel, who was shaken up on the late hit, and broke free for 22 yards. On 2nd-and-10 from the Patriot 14, sophomore Payton Ivester picked up 9 yards then blasted his way up the middle, untouched for a 5-yard touchdown run -- his first of the season.

"We were able to run the ball and were able to do some good things," Coach Allison said. "When we got up on them we were able to work on some things that I think we need to improve on. Coming off of fall break week you're always a little concerned but I think everything worked out for us."

With 10 straight victories, Union County surpasses the 2001 squad for the most consecutive victories, although Coach Allison showed some love for his '01 squad.

"I think it's much harder to (win ten straight) during one season," he said. "Just the way the schedule shakes out, it's probably easier to do it over two years. But this team still has a chance to do it in one season. If we beat Social Circle and Rabun that's 10-in-a-row during one year. And that's something we couldn't accomplish in 2001."

Up next - The Panthers host Social Circle (4-4, 1-4) for Senior Night on Friday.

The Redskins are coming off a 63-7 loss to Rabun where things got out of control very early and very often and they found themselves in a 56-0 hole at the break.

"Their quarterback was out against Rabun so that could have made the score look a lot worse," Coach Allison said. "They are huge up front. They have three 300-pound lineman and one is about 360. That will be a challenge for us on both sides of the ball because those kids play both ways. We're going to have to find a way to block them and it's going to be very interesting."

One player in particular that Union County will be dealing with in the trenches is Ken Sheats, a 6-4, 365-pound returning First Team All-Region 8-AA selection.

Prior to the Rabun County debacle, the Redskins suffered a 54-35 loss at Putnam County, ending a two-game winning streak -- Clarkston 48-

14, Oglethorpe County 36-23.

In other region action, Social Circle fell 47-7 to Elbert County and 32-10 to Banks County.

According to Coach Allison, the Redskins are a power running team that is similar to Putnam County.

"They're going to try to run it right at you like Putnam," he said. "We did a decent job defending them but it was only 13-0 at halftime. I don't know if that's the best analogy, but of the teams on our schedule, I would say they're most comparable to Putnam County."

"They're a two-back shotgun offense that looks a lot like us except they're about 80/20 run-pass while we're more 50/50."

Like the Panthers, Social Circle's leading rusher resides at the quarterback position, although his status for Friday remains uncertain. Tate Peters, a 6-3, 210-pound senior averages 7 YPC and 84 yards-per-game on the ground with four touchdowns. Through the air, he's a 48-percent passer who averages 90 yards a night with 4 touchdowns and only one pick on the year. Last season, Peters was a second team all-region selection as a receiver.

At running back is senior Chandler Ball (5.9 YPC) and sophomore Hunter Muse (6.2 YPC). The team's go-to receiver is, without question, Davis Smith.

At 6-foot-5, Smith accounts for half of his team's 34 receptions with 17. He's also responsible for 67 of the team's 90 receiving yards per game.

Defensively, Sheats is

tied for first on the team with 2 sacks and is second with 9 tackles for loss. The leader in TFL is junior Rod Nunnally with 12.

Quin Spell and Muse lead the Redskins in tackles at 36 and 34, respectively.

Connor Bailey, Eric Taylor, and Chad Branch are tops on the team with one interception apiece. Meanwhile, Muse leads the way with two fumble recoveries.

With one of the biggest games in program history waiting for the Panthers on Nov. 2, Coach Allison is determined to keep his team focused on this week's opponent.

"Win-or-lose (against Social Circle) and we still play for the region championship so there's some concern that we might overlook Social," he said. "Obviously, it could be an issue but we're at home and it is Senior Night so hopefully these guys will be jacked up to play their final regular season home game."

Game notes: Union's 56-point win is the most one-sided win in program history, surpassing last month's 55-0 victory over Putnam County.

With 17 rushing touchdowns for his career, Buzzard can become just the fourth Union County running back since 1990 to score 20 touchdowns. Buzzard would join Gabe Montovani 27, Matthew West 27 and Bo Lynch 26.

Union County is 4-2 all-time vs Social Circle with four straight wins. The Panthers also hosted the Redskins for Senior Night in 2012 and won 31-0.

Scoring Summary			
Quarter	Player	Yards	Score
First Quarter	TD Chad Buzzard 2 Yd Run (Brian Smith Kick)	2	7 - 0
	TD Chad Buzzard 2 Yd Run (Brian Smith Kick)	2	14 - 0
Second Quarter	TD Jonah Daniel 21 Yd Run (Kick)	21	20 - 0
	TD Kyle Morlock 15 Yd Pass From Pierson Allison (Brian Smith Kick)	15	27 - 0
	TD Chayton Schafer 8 Yd Run (Brian Smith Kick)	8	34 - 0
Third Quarter	TD Kannon Hemphill 60 Yd Kickoff Return (Brian Smith Kick)	60	41 - 0
Fourth Quarter	TD Jonah Daniel 1 Yd Run (Brian Smith Kick)	1	48 - 0
	TD Payton Ivester 5 Yd Run (Mason McCombs Kick)	5	55 - 0

More statistics from the Union County at Oglethorpe County game are available on page 3B