

Sports

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Panthers score 42 in the second half, shutout Putnam Co. 55-0

Union puts 5-0 record on the line Friday at Elbert County's Granite Bowl

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With a region showdown at Elbert County on deck, Union County improved to 2-0 in 8-AA with a 55-0 thrashing of Putnam County behind four touchdowns and a career high 403 total yards from junior quarterback Pierson Allison.

The win marked the most lopsided victory in the program's history. The 55-point blanking of Putnam was the largest margin of victory in a shutout, surpassing a 54-0 win over Towns County in 1985. Although not a shutout, Union matched that 54-point margin with a 61-7 win over Hayesville, NC in 2016.

"It's pretty difficult to get a shutout nowadays with the defenses spend on the field," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said when asked how it difficult shutouts have become due to the recent trend of no-huddle, up-tempo style offenses. "We made a few mistakes defensively but the good thing is, they're mistakes that we can correct so I know we're capable of getting better."

Despite the one-sided final score and the gaudy offensive numbers, it was the Panthers' defense and special teams that did most of the heavy lifting during the first half. At the break, Union County was nursing a 13-0 lead thanks to a pair of Brian-Smith field goals -- the second kick set up by a Chayton Schafer blocked punt.

"The last two games we've shot ourselves in the foot with early turnovers and penalties," Coach Allison said. "I thought we had gotten into a decent rhythm. But the mistakes, we kind of did that to ourselves."

Better late than never, the Panthers delivered a 42-point knockout blow in the second half, but not before Pierson Allison opened the third frame just 3-0-7 through the air, including a stretch of four incompletions in five attempts. After working out the kinks, he was perfect on his final four pass attempts, tallying 110 yards and 3 touchdowns over the final 17 minutes of the contest.

Pierson Allison's fourth and final scoring toss of the night came on a 72-yard strike to Sawyer Drake on a deep post route that opened up a 34-0 lead with 9:54 remaining.

Drake was also the target of Pierson Allison's first touchdown pass of the night. A 28-yard catch-and-run where Drake came across the middle and found an opening in the Putnam zone, resulting in an easy throw that allowed the junior receiver to do the rest.

Already on top 3-0 fol-



Sophomore running back Jonah Daniel stretches the ball just inside the pylon for his third touchdown of the night. Photo/Todd Forrest

lowing a 37-yard Smith field goal, Drake's score opened up a 10-0 advantage with 9:38 before halftime. Drake would go on to record his first 100-yard game of the season and the third of his career with 118 yards and two scores on five grabs.

The Panthers quickly added to the lead when Schafer blocked a punt attempt, setting up the offense at the 23. But Union was forced to settle for 3 when Drake was dropped for a loss on a third-down screen pass, sending Smith onto the field to connect from 41 and stretch the lead to 13-0.

The offense wasn't finished leaving points, however. After Putnam County picked off a Pierson Allison underthrow at the 5-yard line at the end of the first quarter, the offense was flagged five times on its final drive of the second quarter. Needing 75 yards with 2:01 on the clock, Union overcame a pair of false starts and a delay of game penalty to march inside the War Eagle 25-yard line. However, a holding call dropped the Panthers back 10 yards and three plays later, the clock hit zero out when Pierson Allison was sacked with no timeouts remaining.

"If Brian (Smith) doesn't hit those field goals or if we don't block the punt, the game looks a whole lot different at halftime," Coach Allison said. "At the same time, if we don't get those two holding calls, we're probably looking at a 28-0 lead at halftime."

The third quarter got underway with a Union County drive stalling at the Putnam 30-yard line but after one War Eagle first down the defense got the ball back.

Starting at their own 36, Pierson Allison moved the chains on 3rd-and-4 with a 12-yard completion to Kyle Morlock. Two quick misfires brought up 3rd-and-10 but a throwback screen to Kannon Hemphill was good for 30 yards. Runs by Chad Buzzard and Pierson Allison gave Union a 1st-and-goal at the eight, and on the very next play, Hemphill came down with

a jump ball in the end zone, extending the lead to 20-0 with Smith's PAT.

"We weren't content with being complacent," Kannon Hemphill said. "We knew we were beating them worse than what the score showed but we just weren't doing our jobs. The defense was playing lights out but the offense needed to start driving and stop beating ourselves with penalties."

"We need to go out in the second half and start finishing drives. We knew we would have it made if we could just start firing on all cylinders."

Another War Eagle special teams miscue, this one self-inflicted, provided the Panthers with excellent field position, resulting in a two-play scoring drive.

Following a three-and-out by the defense, a Putnam snap sailed over the punter's head and was recovered by Schafer at the 5-yard line. Two plays later, Allison found a wide open Kannon Hemphill in the back of the end zone for the score.

Hemphill's two touchdown performance was his first multi-score game since the 2016 Fannin County game when he recorded a career-best 106 receiving yards. On Friday, the senior would also match a career-high with six catches for 98 yards.

Trailing 27-0 early in the fourth, the War Eagles were sacked on 3rd-and-10 when Union County blitzed two linebackers but sophomore tackle Clayton Lester arrived at the quarterback first.

"We knew defensively that if we kept doing our job and helping out the offense, they would eventually get going," junior linebacker Sloan Sutton said.

After the War Eagle punt, the Panthers took over at the 37 but a flag pushed them back to the 28. That's when Pierson Allison went deep over the middle to Drake for a 72-yard score that all but put the game away. The deep ball came just one play removed from a 55-yard touchdown throw to Drake that was



Junior linebacker Sloan Sutton (6) drags down a Putnam County running back. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior QB Pierson Allison (17) recorded his first 300-yard passing game to go along with 101 yards on the ground. Photo/Todd Forrest

brought back on a flag.

Union's second blocked punt of the night gave the offense the ball at the four and sophomore Jonah Daniel scored the first of his three touchdowns.

"When Daniel comes in he's a huge change of pace," Coach Allison said when asked about the contrasting styles of his two running backs. "He hasn't played since middle school but he's starting to catch up and learn what's going on. Daniel is a little quicker while Buzzard is more of a (power back) but the two of them give us a really good combination."

"Buzzard does everything to the best of his ability. He's a tremendous leader and a tremendous asset to this team. And Daniel, we can bring him in when we need a bit of a change-up."

With 7:38 remaining, Union took over at the Putnam 44 and after moving the chains on 3rd-and-3, Daniel broke free for 23 yards with a personal foul tackled on. On 1st-and-goal at the three, the sophomore running back continued to show a nose for the end zone as he powered his way through three defenders at the goal line.

Daniel wasn't finished as Union got the ball one last time at its own 41 with 3:29 to play. Freshman quarterback Logan Helcher carried for 10 yards into War Eagle territory to open the drive. Then, on 1st-and-10 from

the 49, Daniel took the give and shipped a would-be tackler at the 40 before bouncing outside and winning the race to the goal line as he stretched the ball inside the pylon as he was getting pulled to the turf.

For the second straight game, Daniel flirted with the century mark, piling up 94 yards and 3 touchdowns -- both career highs -- on just seven rushing attempts.

Defensively, Union County recorded its first shutout since 2014 when the Panthers blanked Oglethorpe County 46-0 in Lexington. The last home shutout came five years ago during a 42-0 Homecoming night rout of Greene County in 2013.

"We wanted the shutout," Sutton said. "It's been a long time since we've shut someone out so that was a goal for us this season. We had a few missed tackles tonight so I think that's something that needs to be worked on before we go to Elbert."

Game Notes - Kannon Hemphill's six catches tied a career-high from the 2016 North Hall game. His 98 yards were the most since he put up 100 yards vs Fannin County last year.

Smith recorded his first

two field goal game since 2016 at Greater Atlanta Christian. His 10 points on Friday were a career-high, topping his 9-point performances against East Hall in 2016 and at Towns County earlier this season.

Looking ahead - This week the Panthers pay a visit to the legendary Granite Bowl in Elberton - the only stadium in Georgia listed as a State Historical Site.

Meanwhile, the team that occupies the Granite Bowl is one of the most consistent programs in North Georgia.

In 62 seasons of football in Elberton, the Blue Devils have compiled a winning percentage of 60.2 percent while producing 49 all-state performers, including UGA standout Mecole Hardman - the 2015 Class AAA Offensive Player of the Year.

This season, Elbert returns one all state selection, defensive lineman Daniel Lavender, who was also the 8-AA Defensive Player of the Year in 2017.

Joining Lavender on last year's defensive All Region First Team is sophomore linebacker A.J. German. Second Team defensive selections are DL Javoris Gibbs and DB Tron Eberhart.

Despite graduating first team All 8-AA QB Kyle Goudelock, the Blue Devils return junior running back Shun Allen and senior receiver Metris Fleming.

When asked what concerns him most about Elbert County, Coach Allison made it clear there wasn't a whole lot about the Blue Devils that didn't concern him.

"Their speed, their size, and their physicalness on both sides of the ball," he said. "One of their receivers won State in the 110 (meter) hurdles and their defensive end has a lot of offers and is probably a 3-star recruit."

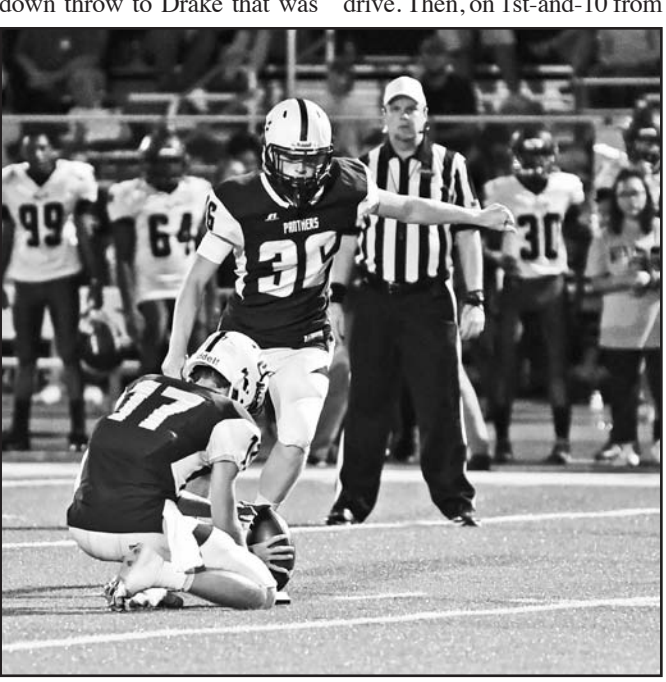
"We're going to have our hands full down there. They have a lot of tradition at the Granite Bowl."

This Friday marks the first-ever meeting between the Panthers and Elbert County but Coach Allison faced the Blue Devils twice (0-2) at Winder-Barrow. In 2004, Winder lost 17-10 in Elberton before falling 26-14 at home a year later.

"They're going to have a lot of speed on the offense, so defensively we're going to have to do our best to contain them," Kannon Hemphill said. "They are known for their speed, first and foremost. Offensively, it will be the same as (vs Putnam), just finish our drives with a few big plays mixed in."

Game Statistics: Union County / Putnam County		
Total Plays	60	71
Total Yards	551	218
Passing Yards	302	93
Rushing Yards	249	125
First Downs	20	11
Third Down Efficiency	4-10 (40%)	7-19 (37%)
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2 (50%)	0-4 (0%)
Turnovers	1	-
Fumbles Lost	-	-
Interceptions Thrown	1	-
Penalties	7	1
Yards	55	5

Scoring Summary		
First Quarter	UCHS	PCHS
FG Brian Smith 37 Yd	3	0
Second Quarter	UCHS	PCHS
TD Sawyer Drake 28 Yd Pass From Pierson Allison (Brian Smith Kick)	10	0
FG Brian Smith 41 Yd	13	0
Third Quarter	UCHS	PCHS
TD Kannon Hemphill 9 Yd Pass From Pierson Allison (Brian Smith Kick)	20	0
TD Kannon Hemphill 6 Yd Pass From Pierson Allison (Brian Smith Kick)	27	0
Fourth Quarter	UCHS	PCHS
TD Sawyer Drake 72 Yd Pass From Pierson Allison (Brian Smith Kick)	34	0
TD Jonah Daniel 3 Yd Run (Kick)	41	0
TD Jonah Daniel 4 Yd Run (Mason McCombs Kick)	48	0
TD Jonah Daniel 48 Yd Run (Mason McCombs Kick)	55	0



Senior kicker Brian Smith connects from 41 yards, his second field goal of the evening. Photo/Todd Forrest

Offense							
Passing		Comp/Att	Yds	TD	Int	Long	2PT
#17 P. Allison		16/25	302	4	1	72	-
Rushing		Att	Yds	TD	Long	Fum	2PT
#17 P. Allison		10	101	-	47	-	-
#34 J. Daniel		7	94	3	48	-	-
#24 C. Buzzard		9	21	-	8	-	-
#2 C. Schafer		1	13	-	13	-	-
#8 L. Helcher		1	10	-	10	-	-
Rest of team		1	10	-	10	-	-
Receiving		Rec	Yds	TD	Long	Fum	2PT
#21 S. Drake		5	118	2	72	-	-
#4 K. Hemphill		6	98	2	30	-	-
#84 K. Morlock		4	68	-	22	-	-
#2 C. Schafer		1	18	-	18	-	-



Senior wide receiver Kannon Hemphill hauled in 6 receptions vs Putnam County, matching a career-high. Photo/Todd Forrest