

Sports

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Mancuso updates record book; leads Panthers in rout at Riverside

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Gainesville - Six games into the 2013 season and Union County (4-2, 2-1) sophomore quarterback Joseph Mancuso has left an impression.

After putting up 318 yards of passing in Union's comeback win over Oglethorpe County, Mancuso was named *Gainesville Times' Blitz* Player of the Week.

Last Friday, 8-AA continued to get shredded by the Panther sophomore, this time it was a 40-24 win over a much-improved Riverside Military Academy (2-4, 1-2).

In the first 36 minutes, it was all Union as they scored on six of their seven possessions.

Trailing 40-10 early in the fourth, the cadets could only seek shelter as the Panthers' vertical passing attack rained down terror from above.

Mancuso who led the air assault, was flanked on both sides by juniors Jacob Rogers and Robert Prunier, and a healthy sophomore Sam Gilbert, who returned to action after missing the Oglethorpe contest.

With all the weapons returned to his arsenal, Mancuso compiled one of the more impressive stat lines in school history.

Union's signal caller completed 25 of his 29 pass attempts, for an 86.2 completion percentage. After the first quarter, he would only misfire on one attempt and had a 14-for-14 stretch in the second and third quarters. Mancuso also matched Kolt Owenby's school record by connecting on six touchdowns through the air.

(Owenby threw for six scores at Dawson County in October of 2009.)

Prunier was the beneficiary of Mancuso's first score, hauling in an 8-yard scoring strike. Then, Rogers found himself wide open in the endzone for a 3-yard toss. Rogers scored the third touchdown when Mancuso hit the junior wide out on a 61-yard catch-and-run.

Junior Brett Dietz reeled in a touchdown pass from 18 yards out before an Eagle field goal made it 26-10, but on Union's ensuing play from scrimmage, Mancuso shook a pass rusher, stepped up in the pocket, slightly off-balance and hit Gilbert in stride and he took it to the house for a 58-yard touchdown pass. On the first play of the fourth quarter, the sixth and record-tying score was a 1-yard shovel pass to Prunier on 3rd-and-goal.

Despite sitting the final 11:54 of the game, Mancuso feasted on the Eagles' secondary for 326 yards and no turnovers.

Mancuso became the first sophomore in team history to go over the 300-yard plateau four times in a season and throw for more than five scores in a game.

By the way, at Riverside,



Joseph Mancuso lit up RMA and has thrown 18 touchdowns to only three picks on the season. Photo/Todd Forrest

Mancuso also led the Panthers' ground forces with 69 yards on 11 carries. For the season he has 18 touchdown passes while surrendering a meager three picks - all coming in the loss at Fannin.

"That Fannin game was where he turned the corner," Coach Allison said. "But obviously the big game for his confidence was against Oglethorpe. He has a big arm and is putting up good numbers. He's a talented kid."

Union's defense kept Riverside's rushing attack in check, allowing 75 yards on 29 carries.

The Panthers stopped the Eagles for a loss 12 times during the contest, forcing Riverside to air-it-out at times. The Eagles' passing attack had its moments, but in the end, it wasn't enough to keep pace with Union.

The Eagles struck on a 30-yard scoring pass with 1:31 to play in the half, making it a 14-7 game.

Union quickly went to work and Mancuso hit Clay Wallis for 8 yards, Rogers for 11 yards, before the third play went back to Rogers for a 61-yard score at the 1:03 mark of the half.

Riverside's second score was a 19-yard field goal on the heels of a 75-yard screen pass that set the Eagles up with a 1st-and-goal from the one.

"One positive thing about the 75-yard run was Andrew Brown running him down from behind and stopping him at the one," Coach Allison said. "He saved us four points."

The Panther defense forced a back breaking 4-yard loss on the first play. The Eagles would get no closer than the two and the home team took the sure three points - making it a two possession game at 26-10.

The Panther defense was playing short-handed with starters Lance Rich, Reid Watson, and Mekiah Martin all missing action. Watson and Rich are both out with concussions and according to Allison, Watson is the only one who could return this week, but his status is still very questionable. Rich is also the short snapper for



Sam Brown bringing the heat extra points and field goals.

Martin is out with a neck injury and won't see action this week either. "I thought we played well on defense," Coach Allison said. "We allowed them to break containment a few times and gave up some scrambles. That was a drill that we had worked on in practice but we just lost focus during the game."

It wouldn't be a two possession game much longer thanks to the Mancuso to Gilbert hookup.

When the third quarter wended down, Union had the ball on the Riverside 1-yard line. The first play of the fourth was a shovel pass to Prunier, giving the Panthers a 30-point advantage and bringing the running-clock into play.

The Eagles would eventually score two garbage touchdowns in the final minutes of the fourth. Most of Riverside's 238 yards of passing offense came on a couple of defensive breakdowns or during mop-up duty in the final moments.

Junior linebacker Chase Barnett once again anchored the Panther defense with 12 tackles and Brown recorded 7 tackles and an interception. Prunier chipped in with 7 tackles. Luke Chatham made 6 tackles, Ralston Drake - 4, and Luther Jones - 4 tackles and a quarterback hurry.

The Panthers will host Greene County on Friday at 7:30 p.m. for Homecoming. The Ti-



Ball is secure and one foot down in-bounds Jacob Rogers continues to be one of Mancuso's favorite targets in 2013. Photo/Todd Forrest



Chase Stencil (3) and Nic Sparks drag down and nearly strip the Riverside ball carrier. Photo/Todd Forrest

gers are coming off a humiliating 56-16 loss at the hands of No. 4 Washington-Wilkes.

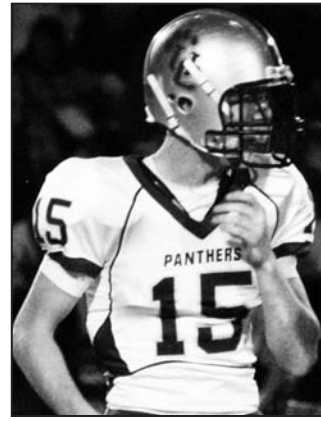
Last season, in Greensboro, Union held a 19-14 advantage in the third but let things get out of control in the second half when five turnovers allowed Greene to pull away for a 37-19 win.

Coach Allison says that this year's Tiger team is comparable to the 2012 squad that reached the Class AA State Playoffs and that turnovers will again be key.

Luckily for Allison, Mancuso has attempted 133 passes since his last pick. So the coach is confident playing in Blairsville



Sophomore Knox Kiernan



Senior T.J. Smith

this time, with the added intensity of Spirit Week and Homecoming. But ultimately, this is a make-or-break game for Union's State Playoff aspirations.

"A win can put us in, but a loss won't put us out," Allison said. "If we want to get over that playoff hump, we have to win. If we win, you can say we got over the hump. If we don't win, then we aren't ready to be a playoff team yet."

"I feel that Greene is better than Oglethorpe but not as good as Washington-Wilkes, as far as teams we've seen."

BOYS VARSITY FOOTBALL

Passing Stats

#		CMP	ATT	%	YDS	YDS/ATT	LNG	TD	FUM	INT
9	Mancuso, Joseph	25	29	86.2%	328	11.3	61	6	-	-
11	Drake, Rolston	0	3	0%	0	0	0	0	-	2
	Total	25	32	78.1%	328	10.3	61	6	-	2

Rushing Stats

#		ATT	YDS	AVG	LNG	TD
9	Mancuso, Joseph	11	69	6.3	20	0
11	Drake, Rolston	4	28	7	20	0
40	Whittle, Nick	7	20	2.9	7	0
44	Barnett, Chase	1	2	2	2	0
	Total	23	119	5.2	20	0

Receiving Stats

#		REC	YDS	AVG	LNG	TD	FUM
-	Wallis, Clay	2	14	7	8	0	-
22	Rogers, Jacob	10	153	15.3	61	2	-
28	Dietz, Brett	1	9	9	9	1	-
33	Moose, Dalton	0	0	0	0	0	-
40	Whittle, Nick	2	39	19.5	25	0	-
43	Prunier, Robert	6	33	5.5	9	2	-
82	Gilbert, Sam	4	80	20	59	1	-
	Total	25	328	13.1	61	6	-

Union County offensive statistics courtesy of Paul McBride

Lady Panthers enter State Tournament as No. 3 seed; visit Lovett

By Todd Forrest
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The 12th ranked Lady Panthers are back into the field of 32 teams to determine a State Champion.

Although this year is the fifth straight year they've appeared, Union is used to hosting a first round series. This marks the first time since 2009 they haven't hosted the opening round.

Union avoided the No. 4 seed by thumping Oglethorpe County 8-0 in the consolation game. Unfortunately during the best-of-three Semi Finals, Union fell into a 6-0 crater after three innings in Game One and were unable to dig their way out to threaten the third ranked Social Circle Lady Redskins.

When Union's bats eventually awoke, it was too little too late. The Lady Panthers posted two runs in the fifth but Social Circle got both runs back and took an 8-2 lead into the sixth. The six-run difference would hold up for the remainder of the contest and Union dropped Game One, 8-2.

Union managed just three hits to the Lady Redskins' 14 hits. Chambers worked a complete game, allowing five earned runs and striking out one.

Maddie Garrett and Kelsey Nix brought in both Union runs with base hits. Courtney Busbee singled and scored and Kendra Tanner walked and scored.

Social Circle put up two in the first after the lead off hitter reached on an error. Four straight singles followed the Lady Panther miscue, and the home team had an early 2-0 lead.

Another run came in the second when an RBI single followed a lead off double.

The Lady Redskins added



Postgame: The Union County Lady Panthers after picking up a home victory. Photo/Todd Forrest

three more in the third thanks to another lead off double. A ground out brought in the fourth run, an opposite field single scored their fifth run, finally the sixth run came around on an error.

Union's fifth inning opened with promise when Courtney Busbee singled to center and Tanner drew a five-pitch walk. Hallye King flew out to right but Garrett went the other way for a single, scoring Courtney Busbee. Kelsey Nix lined a single to left, scoring Tanner.

Social Circle answered with two more in the bottom half of the fifth to put the game away. A lead off single was followed by a double - making it a 7-2 game. A two-out RBI single was the final dagger in the Lady Panthers' back.

In Game Two, Union held the Lady Redskin bats in check but were unable to manufacture anything at the plate in a 4-0 loss. Crystal Busbee limited Social Circle to just six hits, two walks and two earned runs, but the

Lady Panthers churned out only three hits.

King, Garrett, and Karley Nix produced Union's three hits.

Once again, the Lady Redskins struck early for two runs. A lead off double was once again the story for the home team. They would follow it up with a pair of singles, making it a 2-0 game.

Social Circle opened the second with another lead off double and things got only got worse for Union. The Lady Panthers followed up the two-bagger with an error. The Lady Redskins eventually scored on a ground out - taking a 3-0 lead.

Social Circle used a Lady Panther error to put one aboard in the sixth. They would eventually score after a pair of ground outs advanced her to third and then home.

Unlike the first game, Union had its chances in Game Two. The Lady Panthers loaded the bases in the second after Crystal Busbee walked, King reached on an error, and Garrett

singled. But a bouncer back to the pitcher resulted in an inning-ending double play.

The Lady Panthers put two on with two outs in the fifth when Kelsey Nix was hit by a pitch and Karley Nix singled. However a ground out to third would end the inning.

King singled with one out in the seventh but a strike out and ground out preserved the shutout for MaxPreps.com's No.3 team in Class AA.

"Social Circle is a good team and I wouldn't be surprised if they are one of the final eight teams left playing," Union Head Coach Jessica Stewart said. "They are solid all the way around. We only managed three hits against them and couldn't seem to catch a break to put runs on the board."

On Saturday, Social Circle went on the road to defeat No. 4 Jefferson 11-1 in five innings, and the Lady Redskins were crowned as Region 8-AA Champions.

Meanwhile, up in the mountains, Union County and



Seniors and coaches during the 'Pink Out' game. Photo/Todd Forrest

Oglethorpe County were settling the No. 3 seed in Region 8-AA and who visited Lovett in the First Round of State.

The loser would be forced to pay a visit to Region 6-AA Champion, the 7th ranked Wesleyan Lady Wolves.

Luckily, for Union, there will be a rematch from the First Round of the 2010 Class AA State Softball Tournament when the Lady Panthers hosted Lovett, en route to claiming a second place finish.

The Lady Panthers dismantled the Lady Patriots 8-0 quickly with Union posting five runs in the first.

That was more than enough run support for Chambers.

The freshman worked five innings of one-hit ball, while striking out seven. She also finished 2-for-3 at the plate with a double and an RBI.

Union got two more runs in the third and one in the fifth to end it.

King posted a 2-for-2 day at the plate with 2 RBIs and a triple.

The Lady Panthers had a "yard call" in the third when King reached on a walk and Garrett blasted the 0-1 pitch over the centerfield fence.

"The girls did an outstanding job bouncing back and beating Oglethorpe in five innings on Saturday," Coach Stewart said. "We do play better at home and we definitely came out ready to play, getting 11 hits in the game. We had eight of nine starters get a hit for us and Laken (Chambers) pitched an outstanding one-hit game."

The State Tournament opens on Wednesday at 5:30 at Lovett High School, located at 4075 Paces Ferry Road NW in Atlanta. Game Two will take place at 7:30 and the "if necessary" game to be held on Thursday.

"Lovett is 12-14 and ranked 17th in Class AA," Coach Stewart said. "It should be a great match up and test for our girls."

Social Circle will host 6-AA's No. 4 seed G.A.C. while second-seeded Jefferson gets a visit from Westminster.