

Sports

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Football: Varsity piles up 385 yards in first half of scrimmage Panthers' first team defense limits Chestatee to just 98 total yards

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The Union County offense was firing on all cylinders Friday night, scoring six touchdowns against a short-handed Chestatee squad in the first preseason contest of 2019.

With the varsity units on the field in the first half, Union County senior quarterback Pierson Allison orchestrated five touchdown drives. Meanwhile, the Panthers' defense kept Chestatee, who was held to 98 total yards in the first half with no touchdowns, out of the endzone for four quarters.

The Union County defense employed a bend-but-don't-break philosophy, giving up yards between the 20s but ultimately clamping down and allowing Chestatee just one unsuccessful visit to the red zone.

As for the Panthers' offense, no official score or stats were kept, but unofficially, Allison connected on four scoring tosses to four different players in the first half. On the ground, junior running back Jonah Daniel and freshman Caleb Rogers tacked on pair of scores in the second and third quarters, respectively.

"Overall, I thought there were some areas where we played pretty well," Union head coach Brian Allison said. "I thought the offensive line did a nice job protecting the quarterback and I thought we were pretty good at throwing and catching the ball."

Pierson Allison's night came to a close at halftime but not before he tallied 314 yards and four touchdowns through the air while connecting on 17-of-23 attempts.

"It felt great to be back out on the field and playing football with my brothers," Pierson Allison said after the game. "I feel like we got a lot better tonight and I think we can use it as a stepping stone. Practice has been rough but I feel much better [about the offense] after tonight."

Senior Cayden Rich started things off by getting open in the back of the endzone for a 10-yard score with just under 9 minutes to play in the first quarter. Rich's



Junior running back Jonah Daniel bursts through a hole created by excellent blocking from his O-line and wide receivers. Daniel scored two TDs, one on the ground and one through the air, while compiling 106 total yards of offense in one half. Photo/Todd Forrest

touchdown was set up by a 50-yard deep-strike down the near sideline to senior Sawyer Drake.

Rich finished his one half of football with a team-high 90 yards and a score on four catches. Drake had three grabs for 85 yards and a touchdown.

Following a three-and-out by the War Eagles, penalties would stall Union County's ensuing drive in Chestatee territory after senior wideout Kyle Morlock took an Allison screen pass 47 yards.

The Panthers struck one more time in the first period after taking over near midfield following another punt. Daniel took a second-down handoff 16 yards, then Morlock reeled in a 10-yard grab. With a first down from the 16-yard line, Drake took a short completion and outran a defender down the sideline for six points.

After a botched hold on Union's first point-after try, junior Mason McCombs drilled the second extra-point attempt of the night with 2:22 left in the opening frame.

Morlock ended up with four receptions, 80 yards and one score. Daniel caught three passes for 53 yards and a touchdown. He also recorded 53 yards and a score on six

carries.

Chestatee tried going up top on the first play of the next series but senior John Mancuso came down with the interception near the Panther 30-yard line. From there, a pair of gives to Daniel went for 10 yards and 4 yards, respectively. Senior Sloan Sutton's first carry of the day was good for 12 yards and Rich picked up a dozen more on a connection from Allison.

The drive eventually stalled and the War Eagles took over inside their own 10-yard line and proceeded to drive to the Union 37 where the Panthers would get the ball back on a fourth-down incompletion. Two penalties negated big plays by Union County but a 22-yard completion to Daniel on third-and-long moved the chains. On the very next play, Morlock found paydirt on an 11-yard hookup from Allison with 5:10 left in the half.

Another Chestatee punt gave the ball back to Union near midfield at the 3:41 mark and a quick strike to Mancuso picked up 10 yards. On 1st-and-15, Rich and Allison hooked up for a 28-yard gain before Daniel showed his open-field elusiveness, taking a short dump-off from Allison

and weaving through traffic for a 22-yard score.

The Panthers varsity got one more shot in the first half before giving way to the younger guys. Taking over at the War Eagle 41 with 49 seconds on the clock, Rich got open over the middle and picked up 40 yards before getting pulled down at the 1-yard line. A play later, Daniel punched it in from three feet for his second touchdown of the scrimmage.

"I thought Jonah (Daniel) and Sloan (Sutton) did a nice job for us at running back," Coach Allison said. "I felt like there were some positives but overall we were pretty soft and that's what I told [the team] after the game. We still weren't as physical as we're capable of but we have a couple of weeks to work on that and improve on both sides of the ball."

Panther sophomore Logan Helcher took over behind center in the second half and engineered a two-play, 80-yard scoring drive with 27 seconds left in the third quarter. Most of the damage came on a 76-yard catch-and-run by freshman Elijah Helton, followed by a 4-yard scoring plunge from freshman Caleb Rogers -- the game's final

touchdown.

"It was kind of difficult to gauge the offense since the quarterbacks were very limited in the run game," Coach Allison said. "[Chestatee] was also in the same boat, but when the quarterback isn't allowed to use his feet, that can throw the offense out of whack just a little bit. A couple of plays were blown dead (due to the no QB contact rule) and that put us in some third and longs, but overall I thought things went well and I'm excited about our offense."

"My biggest concern is that I felt like we were a little bit too soft on the defensive side of the ball."

One of the question marks coming in was the offensive line and the running game. Sutton would split time at linebacker and running back but still led the team with 55 yards rushing on five carries. Rogers would tote the rock seven times for 27 yards and a score.

Meanwhile, the Panthers' front-five drew praise from their coach. With three new starters up front and the two returners adjusting to new positions, Union's offensive line has been one of the biggest question marks during the offseason.

"I've seen some significant improvement in the line since the first or second shoulder pad camp that we attended and I've been very pleased with them so far," Coach Allison said.

Union County would cough up the football twice in the fourth quarter while Chestatee put it on the turf once, where it was recovered by freshman Chance Schmeltz.

When asked if any players stood out during the scrimmage, Coach Allison had praise for two players on each side of the ball.

"Like I mentioned earlier, I thought Jonah (Daniel) ran the ball very hard," he said. "Cayden (Rich) had a nice game on offense and I thought he was very physical. Clayton Lester looked good on the defensive line and John Mancuso played very well in the secondary."

This week, the Panthers will take a step-up in competition as they visit Habersham Central, a Sweet 16 squad from Class 6A, Georgia's second largest classification.

"Chestatee didn't really open up the offense against us so I think we'll learn a lot more about our defense this Friday night," Coach Allison said. "As long as we continue to improve on defense, then I'll feel pretty good [after the scrimmage at Habersham]."

"There is no doubt we'll see an increase in the physicality this week and we will have to step up to match it. If we're not physical, we're going to struggle on both sides of the ball, but especially on defense."

"They [Habersham] have a new coach so they're built a little different from last year. I think they will be a bit more run-oriented this year so we will find out for sure on Friday how our defense will handle it."

Coach Allison also gave a shout-out to the community for their support at last week's scrimmage game.

"I want to thank everyone that came out and supported us on Friday night," he said. "The cheerleaders were there and I really appreciate that and all of their support. I think things went well and ran really smooth."



Union County junior linebacker Noah Underwood (16) fights through an obvious hold (no flag) to harass a War Eagles ball carrier in the backfield. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Cayden Rich delivers a stiff arm to a Chestatee defensive back during a Union County scoring drive late in the second quarter. Rich led the Panthers with 90 receiving yards. Photo/Todd Forrest