

Babylon Football: PANTHERS RIP BONACKERS IN SEASON OPENER

by Tony Spota

It was opening night at Williams Field last Friday and the Babylon Panthers roared to a 44-7 victory over the East Hampton Bonackers. Babylon showed plenty with an explosive offense and a rock solid defense, rushing for 243 yards, passing for 143 more and compiling 18 first downs, while holding East Hampton to 44 rushing, 13 passing and three first downs (two on their last possession).

Unveiling a shotgun style spread, the Panthers opened their game to a balanced attack with the Big Cats taking total control on the line – center Matt Pinto, flanked by guards Joe Cosby and John Dertinger and tackles Andrew Watson and Tyler Christiansen. The varied formations from what used to be called the double wing were led by Nick Santorelli working from the tailback slot. His pinpoint passing to fellow juniors Eric Schweitzer, Jake Carlock and Ray Wardell made for lightning strikes against the Bonacker defense. The balanced running game included eight different ball carriers.

Babylon hit early and often, scoring on their first three possessions. The opening drive went 60 yards on eight plays, capped on a blast by Luke Zappia behind Dertinger and Christiansen from the 1 yard line. Then they went 61 yards with fullback Brian LosKamp blasting up the gut for 16 and Santorelli hitting Carlock on a square-in and the receiver zipping 45 yards for the touchdown. They added a 2-point conversion on each score, the first on a pass from Santorelli to Carlock and the second on a run by Alec Zamet.

The third drive went 72 yards, mostly in the air as Santorelli hit Schweitzer on a left flair for 16, Wardell on a right fly for 25 and Schweitzer twice more for 14 and 18. Schweitzer capped this one behind Watson from the 1, a half minute into the second quarter. Santorelli kicked the first of his four extra points. The next Panther attempt was thwarted when Bonacker linebacker Jamie Wolf picked off a pass at the Bab 40 and ran it to the 13. Quarterback Cortland Heneveld hit Peter Vaziri, who raced it in for the TD. Sergio Betancur kicked the extra point. Babylon attempted to answer as Santorelli raced 34 yards into the end zone, but the play was called back on a holding penalty. A sack by LosKamp pushed the Bonackers back deep and their ensuing punt was gathered by Carlock at the 44 and raced back to the Bonacker 1. Zappia raced it in from there.

A shared sack by LosKamp and Dertinger stopped the next East attempt, but two interceptions followed on the next two plays. Safety Thomas Nelson made the first for East and Carlock grabbed the second for Babylon. He then zigzagged all over tarnation, breaking tackles and picking up blocks until finally scoring. The play went for 46 yards, but the ground he covered may have been twice that.

Babylon came into the second half with a 37-7 lead. The first drive went 69 yards with Schweitzer racing through a big hole at right guard and zipping into the end zone. The Smurfs took over from there. These are the guys who undergo the poundings in practices and wait to get into the games. They proudly wear their badges and more than held their own against East Hampton's best. They ate up the clock on their possessions and stifled the Bonackers on defense.

Coach Rick Punzone was happy with the team's effort. "This was a good start. We're learning with a more open offense and the offensive line did a great job. We were really good on both sides of the ball. We hope to continue to gain momentum and look forward to a good season."

Other stuff: Nick Crawford, Matt Desiderio, A. J. Giuliano, Tyler Jacinth, Ryan Keane, John O'Brien, Matt Pinto, Joe Savastano and Rich Wilson made their varsity debuts. The Black D was solid. Up front were Dertinger, LosKamp and Kevin Smith. Along with linebackers Zappia, Schweitzer, Watson, Crawford and Giuliano, they smothered the Bonacker running game. On offense, eight running backs shared the rushing duties. Santorelli had eleven carries for 80 yards, Joe Mankiewicz five for 56, Schweitzer and Zappia had a pair of TDs apiece. Santorelli completed seven passes in eleven attempts for 143 yards and a TD. Adding his 80 rushing yards, his all-purpose yardage total was 233. Schweitzer had 58 yards receiving, 46 rushing and 49 in returns for a total 153 all-purpose. Nelson boomed a 58-yard punt for East Hampton.

Other Other stuff: The band was there under the direction of Angela Turk and opened the evening with our National Anthem. The cheerleaders overcame a few sound system glitches and did their excellent flips in a halftime display. They're coached by Jeanne Allen.

Next up: Tomorrow evening, Friday, September 14, the Panthers go to Elwood and meet the Glenn Knights. Last year, the Knights won both their contests with the Panthers, on their way to the Long Island Championship. Every game in this long rivalry has been outstanding. Should be a good one. Kickoff is scheduled for 7 pm.