

Babylon Football:

COUNTY CHAMPS !!! PANTHERS CLAW KNIGHTS, 46-21

By Tony Spota

The Babylon Panthers won Suffolk County's Division IV Championship, defeating the Glenn Knights 46-21 at Stony Brook University's LaValle Stadium last Friday night. During the current playoff process, begun in 1996, Babylon has gone to the post season games all eighteen years. They've reached the County Final seventeen times, winning ten times. They will go on to the Long Island Final having won the Island Championship five times and hoping to add another.

The evening's pregame ceremony introduced the players from both teams and Our National Anthem was sung by Babylon seventh grader Aubrey Alvino, a voice you will certainly hear in the future. She is Good.

Babylon's super offense opened with two quick scores. The Panthers began with a 75-yard drive on seven plays. Quarterback Nick Santorelli deftly moved them to the Glenn 34-yard line and Luke Zappia raced up the gut for the touchdown. Next, they went 60 yards on six plays, mostly on Santorelli's arm. He fired three times to Jake Carlock and capped it on a left flag for 21 yards and the TD. Santorelli kicked the first of his two extra points. This one set a new Babylon record, his 48th of the season. The previous mark of 47 had been set by Mike Parrinello in 2002 and matched by Alex Malhas last year and Santorelli last week.

In less than two minutes, Babylon would be on the board again. The Knights attempted a left flair, which was picked off by Ray Wardell at the Glenn 46 and raced into the end zone. The extra point attempt was blocked by Juan Portillo. Within eight minutes, the Panthers were up by three scores and it looked like another Babylon runaway.

But not so fast. Glenn wasn't buying. They calmly marched 68 yards on seven plays with quarterback Tom Balacki hitting wideout Steve Orkiszewski thrice for 43 yards and capping it off with a left hitch to Wayne White from the 4 for the TD. David Wicks added the first of his three extra-point kicks. Glenn held Babylon to three and out, a rare occurrence with the high scoring Panthers. Aided by a number of penalty calls, the Knights seized the initiative and drove 70 yards. Balacki capped it from the 4, racing through a gap at left guard for the score, and cut the lead to 19-14.

Glenn's momentum continued as Wicks took in an interception near midfield. An added penalty placed the ball at the Bab 45 and it looked like a brand new ball game. But the Black D said nuthin' doin' and stopped the Knights in their tracks. Babylon's next score followed a punt to their 23. In one play, the momentum shifted again. Zappia blasted up the middle and outran the secondary for the longest run of the game, 77 yards to pay dirt. Babylon took a 25-14 lead into halftime.

Babylon corner Joey Savastano picked off a Glenn pass at the Knights 23. But the Glenn defense answered with a pick of their own in the end zone to thwart the Panther attack. The Black D held again and following an errant punt, the Panthers had the ball at the Glenn 38. Santorelli gunned a right button hook to Wardell for 11 and then a left post

to Carlock for the score. That made it 31-14 and another Babylon record was broken. The TD got the Panthers to 468 points for the year, passing Babylon's previous mark (465) set last year. Undaunted, the Knights struck right back going 55 yards on six plays with Balacki hitting Orkiszewski twice (one went the distance, but called back) and then lofting a right bomb to T. J. Tiernan for the TD. The scoring play went for 45 yards.

It appeared like the Knights had some play left and could threaten again. But the Panthers dominated the remainder of the game. From then on, the D stifled the Knights and the offense hogged the ball while chewing away at the clock. They went 80 yards for their next tally, with Santorelli racing around the left side 25 yards for the TD. Then they scored again as tailback Eric Schweitzer got them to the Glenn 5. He ran off left tackle for an apparent score, but the play was called back for an illegal shift. Two plays later he ran it off the left side again, this time from the 10, fighting his way to the goal line and stretching it in for the score. Santorelli hit Carlock on a pass into the left side of the end zone for the 2-point conversion. Babylon was clearly up for good and the game was salted away.

The Panthers have won 23 in a row, the longest current win streak on Long Island. Coach Rick Punzone praised his club. "We overcame all those penalties and executed well. They [the Knights] were very good with all those spreads, very hard to cover. They're a good, well coached team."

Other stuff – The game provided an offensive display, 715 yards, with Babylon accounting for 436. The refs had a bit of yellow fever, tossing flag after flag, odd for these two very well disciplined teams. In all, there were 21 penalties for 155 yards. Babylon absorbed 14 for 95 yards. Santorelli was 8 for 13 passing for 128 yards and two TDs. He had 9 carries for 69 yards and a TD, making it 197 all-purpose yards. Zappia had five carries for 122 yards and two TDs. Schweitzer carried 17 times for 105 yards and a TD. Add two kick returns for 13 yards and a total 118 all-purpose. Carlock caught five passes for 99 yards and two TDs. Add a 22-yard punt return and a 4-yard run loss for 117 all-purpose.

For Glenn – Balacki completed ten of 26 passes for 135 yards and two TDs. He had nine carries for 62 yards and a TD. Keeshawn Boodie had 15 carries for 73 yards. Orkiszewski caught five for 78 yards.

Next up –The two County Champs will duke it out at Hofstra University this Friday at noon. Undefeated Babylon (11-0) will meet the undefeated Roosevelt Rough Riders (11-0) in what promises to be an exciting match up. The two have met four times in the LI final with Babylon holding a 3-1 edge. They played last year and Babylon won big, 48-18. This year, Roosevelt came from behind to edge Seaford in the Nassau final, 6-3. They've yielded only 30 points all year and haven't given up a touchdown since October 19. They can boast of the best defense on the Island. On the other hand, Babylon has outscored all teams on the Island, amassing 483 points. This struggle could go any way, either a low scoring tight one or an open, high scoring slugfest. Roosevelt will seek to avenge. Both will be up. Should be a good one.