

Babylon Football:

PANTHERS LONG ISLAND CHAMPS, NIP RIDERS IN SUPER COMEBACK

By Tony Spota

The Babylon Panthers came from behind to edge the Roosevelt Rough Riders, 27-26 last Friday afternoon at Hofstra University's Stuart Stadium. The contest was played for the Long Island Class IV Championship, Babylon's sixth in the last eighteen years. During that stretch, Babylon has faced Roosevelt five times and has won four. This one was a beauty as the Panthers overcame a fourteen point deficit with a brilliant second half to win it.

Babylon has gone undefeated over the past two seasons, winning a school record 24 straight. It's the longest current winning streak on Long Island. Quarterback Nick Santorelli completed 26 passes in 41 attempts for 286 yards, all BHS records. The 41 pass attempts tied a Long Island Championship (LIC) record (Joe Capobianco of Lawrence in 2011). The 26 completions and 286 yards are second highest in LIC games. Other records fell as the Panther offense roared on. Babylon's Twin Towers, Ray Wardell and Jake Carlock had eighteen receptions between them and Babylon's go-to guy, Luke Zappia, had seven. The previous record for an individual LIC receiver had been eight, held by four players from 2001-2011. Wardell tied the record with his eighth catch early in the third period. He was surpassed by Carlock in the final quarter. Jake's total of ten receptions set a new LIC single game record.

Babylon set many school records during the season which were finalized in this game. These will be reported in a later article. But the best, by far is the record for sacks against Santorelli – ZERO, ZIP, NADA! He's never been sacked in the past two years, nor in the two games he played in 2011. You can chalk that record up to the great Babylon lines. This year it was center Matt Pinto, left guard Ryan Matthews, right guard Joe Cosby, left tackle Tyler Christiansen and right tackle Shea Amdur. That, by far, is the best offensive line in Division IV.

Through the year, Babylon's offense proved unstoppable. They finished the season with 510 points, a record for Suffolk County teams previously set by St. Anthony's at 500. Roosevelt's defense was the stingiest on Long Island, allowing only 30 points, without having yielded a TD since October 19. Even having given up this game's 27 to Babylon, they led the Island with only 57 points against. You can attribute that success to their super defensive front four (Raymond Jones, Robert Hansen, Sam Edouard and Chris Anderson) and inside linebackers (Dorkim Simeona and Jordan David).

Babylon opened with an aerial barrage that never stopped. Santorelli and Co. went 58 yards on nine plays. The last two were a left square-out to Zappia for nine yards followed by a right look-in, again to Luke for 17 and the TD. Roosevelt countered right back. On their first play from scrimmage, Jones raced around right end and streamed 79 yards for the score. They didn't stop there. On their next possession, Hansen gunned a right fly to Justin Terry who gathered it in and raced for the TD. Then Babylon tied the score on a 68-yard drive with Santorelli hitting on four passes for 40 yards and carrying four times

for 32. Tailback Eric Schweitzer took it to the 2 on a pair of carries and Santorelli capped it from there through a hole opened over right guard by Cosby. That tied the game 12-12.

Roosevelt responded quickly again, going 80 yards on three plays. Denzel Barnes zipped around left end and was gone, 69 yards for the TD. The Panthers were then stopped at midfield going for it on fourth and a foot. The Riders moved it deep, but were stopped with a turnover at the Panther 4 as Babylon cornerback Juawun Porter covered a fumble.

The Panthers dug out of the hole and took the ball into Rider turf. Along the way, they made a pair of BHS records on the same play. Santorelli hit Carlock on a left square-out for nine yards. It was his fourteenth completion of the game, tying his own record set earlier in the year and the nine yards gave Carlock a lifetime total 1518 yards receiving, surpassing the previous mark (Steve Loudon 1514 yards, 2008-2010). Unfortunately, three plays later, an attempted inside shovel pass caromed into the air and was picked off by Shamari Kirkpatrick at the Rider 30 and taken to the 44. The Roosevelt attack was mired near midfield when Wardell intercepted a pass to end the half with the Riders up 18-12.

The second half kickoff was bad news for the Panthers. Kirkpatrick hauled it in at the Roosevelt 14 and then took it to the house, 86 yards for the TD. Jones hit Barnes for the 2-point conversion, the first extra points of the afternoon and the Riders were up 26-12.

It was time for the Cats to settle down and go to work. And that they did. Whatever was said at halftime clearly worked well. They adjusted, got their heads straightened and owned the remainder of the game. Babylon drove 70 yards on thirteen plays, mostly with an aerial storm. Closing in, Santorelli hit Zappia on a left screen and the fleet back took it 21 yards to the 10. Santorelli then capped it with a left square-out to Carlock. The 2-point conversion was a beauty. Santorelli went in motion to the right. Schweitzer took the snap back and ran left, pitching it back to Carlock coming from the left flank and running to the right. He then lofted a soft pass to a wide open Santorelli, waiting in the right side of the end zone. That put the score at 26-20.

There was more work to be done. A sack by Christiansen set the tone. But a deep left fly from Hansen to Barnes was grabbed by both the receiver and Joey Savastano. Both came down in a heap wrestling for control. It appeared that Savastano had most of it, but the ruling went to Barnes and Roosevelt had a first down at the Babylon 42. Two plays later, Wardell recovered a fumble and it went back over to the Panthers. They then went 58 yards on eight plays with Santorelli hitting Carlock for 8, Schweitzer for 7, Carlock for 17, running around the left side for 15 and capping it from the 7, gunning to Carlock in the deep left corner of the end zone for the TD. The reception was a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Jake went way up, hooked it with the right paw and brought it in – a circus catch to tie the score. Santorelli kicked the extra point to put the Panthers up by 1.

The D stifled the Riders from there and the Panthers ate up the clock with a 71-yard drive that fell short at the Rider 5. Johnnie Akins took them out of the deep hole with a 22-yard run to the 27. But a big rush and hit by John Visgauss caused Terry's attempted deep pass to flutter in the air and be gathered in by Carlock near midfield. It was Jake's ninth pick of the year, tying his own interception record set last season. Three genuflects ended it and the Panther were Champs again.

It was Coach Rick Punzone's 99th victory, tying him with previous Panther coach Hans Wiederkehr (1988-2002). Rick's record is 99-19 for an incredible .839 winning

percentage. He was totally elated after the game. “The team has beautiful chemistry. These guys are role models. When they visit the Babylon Grade School where I teach, the kids look up to them and they’re treated like rock stars. It’s been a great year with a great group. I know I’ll cry when they go. We had to adjust the defense to begin the second half and we went to a 5-2. It worked well. Roosevelt is a very good team, a classy program with a great coach [Joe Vito]. They did a great job.”

Other stuff – The game provided an incredible offensive display. Babylon had 50 plays from scrimmage, going for 388 yards. Roosevelt countered with 410 yards on 35 plays, making the two-team total 85 plays and 798 yards. For Babylon, Santorelli had 18 carries for 63 yards and a TD. Add that to his 286 yards and three TDs passing makes it 349 all-purpose yards and four TDs. Carlock caught ten for 113 yards and two TDs. Add 42 yards in kick returns for 155 all-purpose. Wardell caught eight for 85 yards and had 16 yards in kick returns for 101 all-purpose. Zappia caught seven for 81 yards and a TD and had six yards rushing. Schweitzer had eleven carries for 31 yards, one catch for 7 yards and returned a punt for 9. The Cheerleaders for both teams did a great job and performed at the half. The bands were there, as well, playing in tough and cold conditions.

For Roosevelt, student Kanisha Haines opened with Our National Anthem. On the field, Hansen completed three of five passes for 119 yards and a TD. He also had five yards rushing for 124 all-purpose. Jones had nine carries for 107 yards and a TD. Barnes had five carries for 103 and a TD. Add 39 yards on a catch for a total 142 all-purpose. Terry had two receptions for 80 yards and a TD. Kirkpatrick had three kick returns for 112 yards and a TD. Hobbled by injury, Rider super back Johnnie Akins still had eleven carries for 71 yards. He totaled 2593 yards this season to set a Nassau County record previously held by Holy Trinity running back Anthony Brunetti (2541). With these two warring clubs, records were falling left and right.