Russellville Panthers' season ends with 53-0 playoff loss to Bethlehem

BY WES ELROD
NEWS-DEMOCRAT & LEADER

Friday night the Russellville Panthers went on the road for their opening round of the Class 1A KHSAA State Playoffs. Going up against the Bethlehem Eagles, the last time the two teams met was in the playoffs two years ago at Rhea Stadium, where the Panthers came away with the 28-27 win. Two years later, the result was not as kind, as the Panthers were shutout for only the second time this year, falling 53-0 to close out their season.

Prior to their playoff game, seven of the Panthers' players received SKY Conference small-school All-Conference honors. Freshman Darrius Browder was named to the first-team offense and defense as a wide receiver and defensive back. Senior lineman William Holloway was named to the first-team offense as well. Named to the second-team offense were freshman quarterback Amari Beard, offensive lineman Taytum Caudill, and senior athlete Jacoveon Temple-Dickerson.

Randall Morrow at linebacker and defensive back MJ Merriweather were each honored on the second-team defense.

Talking with the Panthers first-year head coach William Griffin, he was encouraged by his team's willpower, but the miscues were too much to overcome. "I thought our kids fought hard and didn't quit, which they've done all year so I was pleased with that. We just had too many miscues and gave up two special teams touchdowns, especially the punt where we didn't down the ball and allowed them to scoop it and score, which really hurt us."

The Panthers had a tough day at the office in all three phases of the game. On offense, the Panthers turned the ball over twice, giving up four sacks, and were unfortunately overpowered. Defensively the Panthers struggled to contain the run, surrendering 179 yards rushing, and allowing two punt return touchdowns made it tough to compete.

Griffin expressed that the execution overall was a challenge against the Eagles. "We felt like there were some areas we could have hurt them offensively but unfortunately we did not block and execute very well. We had too many missed blocks and blown assignments. Defensively it was just a lot of the same issues we've dealt with all year, such as alignment, assignment, and responsibility and overall tackling and physicality."

With the Panthers concluding their season, it has been a rocky start for Griffin in his first year, but there is plenty of optimism ahead for next year. "We obviously hit a rough patch this year and to end the season, we had two seniors quit after our regular season finale on senior night, which pretty much summed up the way our season went. Although I am disappointed in how things ended, I'm glad to get the first season under our belt and now excited about being in Russellville a full off-season to prepare for the 2027 season. Looking forward to developing kids and the overall strength and conditioning of our football program."

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LOGAN

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Proposed projects include seeking funding to preserve historic sites—such as Shakertown, the SEEK Museum, Savage Cave, the Auburn Museum, and the Red River Meeting House—as well as exploring a park along the Red River in Adairville and an outdoor agricultural arena at the Extension Office. Local officials are also exploring restaurant taxes to support community events.

Separately, BRADD is advertising grant funding applications through Oct. 30 for brownfield redevelopment to clean up contaminated industrial sites.

Following its review, the steering committee is planning a second public meeting in October, with its next formal committee meeting scheduled for Dec. 9 to finalize priorities and position the county for federal improvement grants.

Denise Shoulders can be reached by emailing dshoulders@newsdemocratleader.com.

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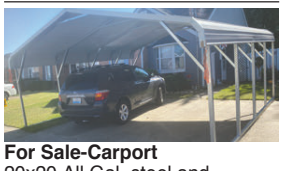

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