

Piasa Birds Come Back In Second Half To Beat Litchfield

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
September 1 2023 11:30 PM



PIASA – If history were to repeat itself, the Piasa Birds wouldn't mind one bit.

The Piasa Southwestern football team defeated the Litchfield Purple Panthers in their home opener by a score of 27-21 Friday night.

The win brings Piasa to 2-0 on the season. The last time they did that was two seasons ago and it later resulted in them making the playoffs.

“That's right,” Southwestern head coach Pat Keith said after the win over Litchfield.

“If we win our home games, we’ll have five wins. One week at a time though. Focus on staying healthy and keep battling.”

Logan Keith, Pat’s son, and an important senior, two-way player knows what the win means too.

“That’s what I’ve been thinking all week. So, hopefully, it’s a good sign to come and we can do it again,” he said.

In the 2021-22 season, the Piasa Birds opened up to a 4-0 record with wins over Staunton, Wesclin, Litchfield, and Greenville. They lost four straight after that forcing a must-win week nine game against Gillespie which they handled with a 48-24 victory, earning a postseason game.

Piasa had won the last six games over Litchfield and the streak stayed alive Friday night.

Nothing was working for either team offensively early on though. Litchfield received to start off and only gained three yards before punting. Piasa took over at their 35-yard line, earned a first down, but turned it over on downs after failing a 4th-and-1 attempt.

The Purple Panthers regained possession at their 43 but immediately threw an interception. The teams would each have another possession where they turned it over on downs before some points went up on the board.

The Piasa Birds regained possession at the 50 and would score after two breakout plays. Sophomore quarterback Blake Rimbey hit senior receiver Hunter Newell with a 26-yard pass before senior Rocky Darr carried it in from 17 yards out. The extra point was good from junior Ian Brantley and Southwestern had a 7-0 to end the first quarter.

The Purple Panthers proceeded to outscore Piasa 21-0 in the second quarter, giving them at one point a two-possession lead.



After taking over at their 44, a long drive ended in a rushing TD for Litchfield. The kick was good, and the game was tied at seven. After going for it on a 4th-and-2, they managed to turn that into a 16-yard rushing TD, but the PAT rang off the post and was no good. A Piasa fumble gave it back to Litchfield just 35 yards out and the Purple Panthers took advantage with a long reception to make it 21-7.

Following that score, Piasa sophomore Remy Malone brought it up to his 33-yard line. Rimbey and Newell connected again, this time for a 28-yard gain. The team decided to go for it on 4th-and-8 and the duo once again came up clutch to get the first down before another 25-yard TD completion. Brantley's kick was blocked so it was Litchfield up 21-13 at the half.

The third quarter saw no scoring, just two interceptions and a fumble, setting up an intense final 12 minutes.

With Newell's interception to close the third quarter, Piasa began with the ball at Litchfield's 45. After a long drive, including two fourth-down conversions, Piasa would come up just short. On a 4th-and-goal from the six-yard line, Rimbey kept it and ran himself, getting tackled and coming up half a yard short.

The Purple Panthers took over at their one-yard line, but the Piasa defense held them, forcing a punt. The kick was returned back to Litchfield's 38. On the first attempt, Rimbey broke free from a tackle before launching one to the endzone, into the arms of Newell again. Logan Keith carried in the two-point conversion and just like that the game was tied up at 21 with 6:16 left in the game.

Litchfield took over at their 45 before coming up short on a 4th-and-6 attempt. Faking a kick, the Litchfield QB kept it himself but was stopped just before the first-down marker.

The ball was turned over at Litchfield's 42 with 4:39 left. Logan Keith picked up a nice 14-yard gain and a first down, setting up another rushing TD for Darr, this time from 14 yards out. Brantley's kick was blocked again so it remained a six-point lead at 27-21. After being down by 14, Southwestern had come back, all they needed was a stop.

The Purple Panthers had a long way to go from their 28-yard line with 2:26 to go. After what seemed to be a promising drive, one slip-up ended with Newell picking off a pass. He took a knee as the Piasa Birds set up in victory formation.

The story of the night was the connection between Rimbey and Newell.

Rimbey threw for 198 yards and was 13/20 on the night. Seven of those passes were to Newell. He ended up with 145 yards receiving and tacked on 24 more rushing. Darr rushed for 70 and Keith had 50.



Rimbey also had a sack and two interceptions while Newell led the team with five solo tackles. Brantley and junior Ryan Lewis each had an interception.

“I’m really proud of the guys tonight,” coach Pat Keith said. “Good, gutsy effort. Two weeks in a row we played good in the second half.”

“We made some adjustments at half time, made some plays that we needed to make, but we still have things to fix though, fumbles again, a couple penalties, a personal foul once. So, we have some things to clean up, but at this level, a win’s a win.”

This result comes off the back of a 22-7 win at Gillespie. It was a good win, but the game will be remembered for a season-ending injury. During that game, one of Southwestern’s go-to receivers, junior Greyson Brewer broke his clavicle, but in his absence, his team still got the job done.

“All the guys knew that we had to put the extra load on our back and step up, make some plays,” Newell said.

“They played hard, never gave up. I’m really happy with their effort,” coach Keith added.

Piasa's next game will be on the road at Pana. The Panthers find themselves with a 2-0 record with wins over Vandalia in week one and then on the road at Carlinville.