

Granite City opens with 49-30 win over Jersey at home

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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GRANITE CITY – One or two plays can often turn a football game around.

Granite City knows that well as the Warriors built momentum from a late first-half touchdown from Brandon Bettag – one of three he scored in the game – then got another touchdown early in the second half from Bettag and a 10-yard interception return for a touchdown from Earl Green on their way to a season-opening 49-30 win over **Jersey** at Granite City's Memorial Stadium Friday night.

“We have a really young team and we made a lot of young mistakes,” said Panther coach Dave Jacobs. “The penalties killed us, killed drives and that's very uncharacteristic of our team. But again, we have a very young team and they got something that we can't teach them, game experience under their belts against a very good team. We'll go watch the film and we'll learn and we'll go from there.

“I want to congratulate Granite City, they played hard, they have a good senior quarterback (Gabe Jarman) and they have some good athletes.”

The Warriors entered the game coming off a 1-8 year in 2014 and it took them a bit to get untracked. “The first half, we had some jitters, had some kids who hadn't played football in awhile, they had to get used to it, get acclimated to playing in a Friday night football game,” said Warrior coach Carl Luehmann. “I told them at halftime that the

second half should be different, and the kids responded; they came out and played their butts off. They got a huge win for us.

“We need to build on our offensive line; that's what wins games. They played well tonight but we've got some work to do. We have a long week to work at it; we've got Riverview Gardens (next Saturday). The kids are hungry and we'll come out and work all week.”

The Panthers didn't take long to get on the board however; they got on the board first with a 73-yard touchdown pass when Drew Sauerwein connected with Derrick Hill, who eluded a pair of tacklers and raced in just three minutes into the game for a 7-0 lead. The Warriors countered on the next possession when Jarman called his own number and raced in from 27 yards out with 4:42 left in the opening term to tie things up at 7-7.



Jersey reclaimed the lead two minutes later when Logan Metzler scored from nine yards out on a pass; things stayed that way until very late in the first half, when the Warriors put together a drive down to the Panther goal line. On fourth-and-goal from the 1, Battag got the call and he drove his way into the end zone for a score. The conversion attempt missed, but Granite was within a point at 14-13 at the long break.

Just 3:24 into the third term, Granite grabbed the lead for the first time when Battag scored from 3 yards out, with a two-point convert putting the Warriors up 21-14. It quickly became 28-14 when Green made a diving pick at the Panther 10 and quickly found himself in the end zone. Battag then scored very late in the third from three yards out to put the Warriors up 35-14.

Jarman extended the lead to 42-14 in the opening stages of the final quarter on a 3-yard run before the Panthers scored on a 48-yard touchdown pass to Jonathan Pirtle from Sauerwein, with the two-point convert making it 42-22. On the ensuing kickoff, though, when Eugene Willaba took the kick and raced 85 yards to paydirt for a 49-22 Warrior lead. The game's final score came when Jersey's Chase Murray ran it in from two yards out, with the two-point convert making it 49-30.

The Warriors travel to Riverview Gardens for a 1 p.m. Saturday clash with the Rams, while the Panthers try to bounce back with a 7 p.m. Friday trip to Mount Zion.