

Hot-shooting Panthers throttle Pickens; enter BOTS undefeated

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The Union County Panthers (9-0, 2-0) went 7-for-14 from 3-point range in the first half en route to a 42-19 advantage at the break. After weathering a 16-3 Pickens run to open the third, sophomore Sawyer Drake scored or assisted on 15 of Union's first 17 points of the fourth period as the Panthers cruised to a 72-50 victory.

Drake would finish with 20 points and nine rebounds -- both game highs -- to go with a team-leading four steals and four assists.

With Crawford Colwell serving the final night of his two-game suspension, Union County got 12 points each from his senior classmates Patrick Baggett and RJ Banton, while sophomore Pierson Allison added 11 to round out a balanced Panther attack that saw four players score in double figures.

Trailing 5-3 early, Union County closed the first quarter with a 14-4 run, triggered by a Drake putback and a steal-and-score from Allison.

Baggett made it 12-5 with the first of two first half treys before a Drake free throw and two Banton layups -- one coming at the buzzer -- made it 17-9 after one.

The Panthers blew things



Senior Patrick Baggett (10) had 12 points, five assists and 2 steals in the win over Pickens. Photo/Todd Forrest

open with five treys during a dominating second period that saw Union outscore the visitors 25-10 and shoot a sizzling 63-percent (15-for-24) in the first half.

Allison drilled two more threes in the second as the sophomore scored all of his 11 points during the first half on 3-of-6 shooting from beyond the arc. Baggett also connected

from deep early in the second frame to give his team its first double-digit lead of the night at 22-11.

Banton scored on a pair of offensive rebounds and a Drake added driving layup to cap off Union's second highest scoring first half of the season (46 at Rabun) with a 42-19 advantage.

Senior Cole Davis would also get in on the action, scoring all of his season-high 8 points in the second period on 2-of-3 shooting from 3-point land -- the second trey coming as the half horn sounded to give his team a 23-point lead.

The third quarter was a different story as Union County opened ice-cold. Three Baggett free throws accounted for the only points over the first four minutes as the Dragons trimmed the margin to 45-35 with a 16-3 run.

A Baggett trey at the 3:23 mark was the Panthers' first field goal of the third but Pickens answered with a deuce to stay within 11 at 48-37. That's when Britt Waller rolled off five straight points to help Union regain control heading into the final period.

Waller, making his first

start of the season, scored all of his 5 points in a 39-second span late in the third. But it couldn't have come at a better time.

The Panthers, who shot 27-percent in the period and were clinging to an 11-point margin after leading by 23 early in the third, were searching for an answer when Waller drew a foul on a layup, then sank a free throw to convert the and-one.

On the ensuing Union County possession, they went back to Waller and the junior went to work inside, extending the lead to 53-37.

With Pickens trying to make it a game over the final 8 minutes, the Panthers put the game in Drake's hands where the sophomore seemed to welcome the role as the team's closer.

Union County would shoot 8-for-12 (75-percent) in the fourth, led by Drake's 13 points and 1 assist. They would outscore Pickens 19-11 over the final eight minutes.

The fourth quarter began with Baggett feeding Drake inside off a high screen-and-roll. Following two Dragon free throws, Union went back to the screen-and-roll, and this time, Davis hit Drake inside, resulting



Senior RJ Banton scored a season-high 12 vs Pickens. Photo/Todd Forrest

in an and-one.

A Pickens three to pull within 14 was answered by a right-handed jump-hook by Banton, opened up a 60-44 advantage with 6:38 remaining.

The next six points all belonged to Drake on three field goals in the paint -- one an offensive board.

Leading 66-46, Drake found an open Banton with a bounce pass under the basket for a 22-point lead at the 2:30 mark.

Drake would hit 2-of-2 at the line with 1:45 remaining to finish 6-of-9 at the line and bring his night to a close with an impressive 20-9-4-4 stat line.

Coleson Daniel and Colton Day each finished with 2 points apiece while Candler Colwell had 4 rebounds, 3 dimes, and 2 steals.

After starting 7-of-14 from downtown, Union County finished 8-for-20 (40-percent) from deep. The Panthers also hit 12-of-15 (80-percent) from the charity stripe despite losing the turnover battle 18-to-14.

Union dominated the boards, however, out-rebounding the Dragons 43-to-21 overall and 13-to-3 on the offensive glass.

Allison matched Drake's game-high nine rebounds while Banton pulled down six boards. Davis hauled in five, and Waller had three. Baggett dished out a team-high 5 assists while Allison and Davis had three dimes each.

Baggett also picked up a pair of steals while Davis, Waller, and Day had one each.

The Panthers shot a season-high 47-percent (26-for-55) from the floor and 40-percent (8-for-20) from beyond the arc. Their 8 treys made matches a season-best (at Gilmer and at Rabun) for makes. Union also hit 80-percent (12-for-15) from the line for the first time this season.

The Panthers open the new year with another unbeaten team in region play when they host East Hall on Tuesday, Jan. 2. On Friday, Jan. 5, Union County hosts Battle of the States participant Lumpkin County in another Region 7-AAA clash. The following Tuesday, Jan. 9, the Panthers travel to Dawson County where the playoff picture should begin to come into focus.

Tip-off for both Tuesday games is 6 p.m. for the girls and 7 p.m. on Friday vs Lumpkin.



Cole Davis scored 8 points vs Pickens on Dec. 21. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union County shocks Class AAAA's Lady Dragons, 57-53

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Heading into the final week of play before Christmas, the Pickens Lady Dragons were riding high with an 8-0 record and were ranked as high as third in the *MaxPreps* ranking following one-sided victories over Fannin County and Gilmer.

Then on Monday, Dec. 18, Pickens suffered an 88-58 home loss to the defending region champ Northwest Whitfield.

Three days later they traveled to Blairsville, and still reeling from their first defeat, fell behind 7-2 and 11-4 out of the gates thanks to 3-for-13 first quarter shooting.

They would gather themselves in the second and regain the lead on 4-of-4 from long distance and 8-of-13 overall.

With Pickens leading 29-25 at the break, the Lady Panthers (6-3, 1-1) trailed by as many as six on two separate occasions during the third. However, Union County refused to cave and rolled off 10 straight points for a 37-33, capped off by a Daniel trey with 48 seconds left in the third.

Unfortunately, sophomore post Kait McCarter picked up her fourth foul during the 10-0 run and was forced to take a seat with 2:55 to play in the third.

Pickens would narrowed the gap to 37-36 on its final possession of the



Sophomore Kait McCarter (30) goes up for two during the second half vs Pickens. Photo/Todd Forrest

quarter when they hit 1-of-2 from the line with 6 seconds left and rebounded the miss and scored on a putback at the buzzer.

The Lady Dragons went ahead 38-37 with a pair from the line before Daniel answered with a deuce before collecting her fourth foul at the 6:15 mark.

Pickens led by three at 42-39 before Andelin Hill caught fire and proceeded to score nine of her team's next 13 points, including a stretch of seven in-a-row beginning at the 4:15 mark.

First, another sopho-

more, Brooke Dockrey gave the Lady Panthers a lead they would never relinquish at 43-32. Junior Jordan Rogers would then sink two pressure free throws during a 1-and-1 situation with her team leading by one.

Once again, Pickens kept the heat on the young Union County squad by trimming their lead back to a point at 45-44 with under 4:30 to play.

With the Dragons applying full-court pressure, Brooke Dockrey raced up the court where she found Hill, who spotted up in the corner

for a wide-open trey.

After a Pickens deuce on the other end, Hill putback a McCarter miss to take a 50-46 lead with 3:28 left. The Lady Dragons immediately answered with another three to make it a one-point game.

Both teams went more than a minute without scoring as the Lady Panthers were clinging to lead of 50-49 when Hill delivered by crashing the boards one more time.

This time she pulled down a Adeline Dockrey miss and was fouled on the way up. With 1:48 on the clock, Hill made both free throws to give Union a 52-49 lead.

The Lady Dragons had an opportunity to go on top with a minute left after a basket and a Union County turnover. While guarding the ball handler, Adeline Dockrey was called for a blocking foul, sending them to the line for two.

With 1:00 to play and trailing by one, Pickens missed both free throws and Daniel was eventually fouled, hitting 1-of-2 with 35 seconds left.

On the ensuing trip down the floor, the Lady Dragons received two very good looks at a game-tying basket but missed both. The first an open 12-footer then a



Coach Garrett and Brooke Dockrey vs Pickens. Photo/Todd Forrest

layup attempt after securing the offensive rebound.

Instead, Daniel came out of the fray with the ball, drawing a foul with 13 seconds remaining. She hit both to give Union a 55-51 lead.

Pickens responded with a quick layup and a timeout with 5 seconds left but Daniel was able to avoid a turnover and earn another visit to the line with 2.9 seconds on the clock. She only hit 1-of-2 to leave a door cracked but the Lady Dragons turned it over on the inbounds pass.

Despite battling late foul trouble, Daniel finished with 19 points on 9-of-12 from the line and 2-of-4 from long distance to go with five rebounds and a pair of steals.

Brooke Dockrey had 12 points and a team-high five assists. Hill scored 9 of her 11 points in the fourth while pulling down nine boards and blocking a shot.

McCarter was also plagued by foul trouble but still managed to score 9 points, collect eight rebounds, with 2 steals and 2 blocks.

Adeline Dockrey had 2 points, eight boards, and three assists. Jordan Rogers added 2 points and a rebound.

Daniel scored 5 points and Brooke Dockrey had 4

points to lead Union to a 13-7 lead after one.

Pickens heated up in the second and outscored the Lady Panthers 22-12 for a 29-25 advantage at the break. Brooke Dockrey had 6 points in the second for 10 at the half. Daniel, McCarter, and Adeline Dockrey each scored 2 points in the period.

The Lady Panthers gave up the basketball 15 times; Pickens turned it over only nine times. The Lady Dragons were plagued by 38-percent shooting (6-for-16) from the foul line while their counterparts hit 75-percent (18-for-24).

Union County and coach Corey Garrett are still without the services of junior starter Aubree Pack, who aggravated a previous ankle injury. Her status is uncertain for when the Lady Panthers resume play in January. Union County won the offensive rebounding battle 16-12 while converting those boards into 21 second chance points.

Union County resumes region play on Tuesday, Jan. 2 when they host East Hall at 6 p.m. The Lady Panthers will be home again on Friday when Lumpkin County makes the trip across Blood Mountain.

UCHS remaining schedule

Day	Date	Opponent	Location	Time	Notes
Tuesday	Jan. 2	E Hall	Home	6:00/7:30	4:15 Girls
Friday	Jan. 5	Lumpkin	Home	7:00/8:30	4:00/5:30
Saturday	Jan. 6	Andrews	Away	2:00/3:30	12:00 Boys
Tuesday	Jan. 9	Dawson	Away	6:00/7:30	4:15 Boys
Friday	Jan. 12	Fannin	Home	7:00/8:30	4:00/5:30
Saturday	Jan. 13	GAC	Home	6:00/7:30	3:00/4:30
Tuesday	Jan. 16	Pickens	Away	6:00/7:30	4:30 Girls
Thursday	Jan 18	White	Home	6:00 JV Boys	
Friday	Jan. 19	GAC	Away	7:00/8:30	4:00/5:30
Tuesday	Jan. 23	N Hall	Home	6:00/7:30	4:15 Boys
Friday	Jan. 26	E Hall	Away	7:00/8:30	4:00/5:30
Tuesday	Jan. 30	Lumpkin	Away	6:00/7:30	4:15 Girls
Friday	Feb. 2	Dawson	Home	7:00/8:30	4:00/5:30