

# Sports

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## Hunter's 37 isn't enough as Lady Panthers' rally falls short vs. Rabun Union County bounces back on Friday with 57-44 victory at Banks County

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Union County senior Ava Hunter shattered her previous career-high (32) with a 37-point outing vs. No. 3 Rabun County (13-3, 1-0) on Tuesday, Jan. 11 in Blairsville.

Unfortunately, the Herculean performance came in a losing effort as the Lady Panthers dropped a 74-73 thriller to the Lady Cats.

Union County (11-6, 1-1) rebounded three nights later in a 57-44 win at Banks County - the Lady Panthers' first region victory since the 2019-20 Region 8-AA Championship game, also against Banks. Additionally, last Friday's win came without the services of sophomore starter Lara Turner (ankle). The severity of her injury remains unknown as of Monday, Jan. 17.

The threat of winter weather canceled Saturday's Senior Night showdown vs. No. 1 Elbert County (17-2, 1-0). As a result, the UCHS Senior Night festivities have been rescheduled for Jan. 25.

**Lady Panthers 57, Banks County 44** - Four Lady Panthers scored in double figures and Union erased a 26-25 halftime deficit with a 17-8 third quarter.

Ahead 42-34 after three, the Lady Panthers outscored the home team 8-2 over the first four minutes of the fourth to put the Leopards (8-11, 0-2) away for good. Union eventually built its largest lead of the contest at 56-38, capping off a 14-4 run with just over a minute remaining.

Ariel McCarter poured in a career-high 17 points, including four free throws during the final frame. The freshman also led the way with a team-high four steals.

Hunter and sophomore Sofia McNabb added 12 points apiece with McNabb scoring 9 points in the third period and Hunter putting up nine during the second half.

Hunter also pulled down 12 boards and collected two steals. McNabb had three rebounds and two steals.

Senior Rebekah Chambers finished with 10 points, nine rebounds, three assists and two steals. Junior Corinne Hill had 6 points, three assists and two steals.

Banks County's all-region junior post, Kamryn Grier, led her squad with 17 points, nine rebounds and two blocked shots on 8-of-14 shooting.

Sophomore forward Carley Segars scored 12 points with seven boards. Sophomore guard



Ava Hunter scores two of her 37 points to move Union County within four points late in the fourth quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

Addison Hoard had 8 points and four steals and senior guard Kalyn Beasley added 7 points and five assists to round out the Banks County scoring.

Trailing 31-26 early in the third following a trey and a deuce by Grier, Union's second-half turnaround began with a pull-up jumper by McNabb at the 5:37 mark of the quarter.

After an uncontested Leopards' layup off an inbounds play, Chambers found McNabb on the wing for a 3-point basket. Later, the sophomore hit 1 of 2 at the line with 4:24 left in the third, then capitalized on a Banks' turnover by hitting another triple 13 seconds later off a one-handed pass from Hill.

Leading 35-33, Union's full-court press forced an errant Leopards' pass that was picked off by Hill, resulting in a 1-for-2 trip to the line by Chambers on the other end.

A Hunter putback and a Chambers steal-and-score extended the margin to 40-34 with 2:46 left in the third. Later, Chambers made it 42-34 when she ended a near-two minute scoreless drought by converting a dribble-drive layup from the high post with 50 seconds on the clock.

Chambers' drive would be the final points of the frame and the Lady Panthers took an eight-point edge into the fourth.

A little over a minute into the final frame, the pressure defense led to a McCarter steal and two free throws by Hunter. And following a Banks County miss from deep, Hill knocked down a pull-up jumper from 15 to open up a 46-34 advantage with 6:20

remaining. After two Leopards' free throws, a trailing Hunter followed a McCarter miss on the break to move Union back in front 48-36 with 5:25 to play. On the ensuing Lady Panthers' possession, Hunter posted up Grier down low and overpowered the Leopards' star-player for a 50-36 score.

Grier scored in the paint with 3:48 left but McCarter hit two free throws 56 seconds later for a 52-38 advantage. The freshman guard then put the game out of reach just inside of two minutes when McNabb came up with a loose ball and fired ahead to McCarter for a breakaway layup and a 54-38 lead.

During the final minute, McCarter hit two free throws for a 56-38 advantage and Hill split a pair to keep the margin at 57-40.

During the early going, Union County faced first-quarter deficits of 13-4 and 17-10. Down 17-13 to begin the second, the Lady Panthers raced ahead briefly during the second at 25-24 before trailing 26-25 at the break.

**Team stats:** Union County shot 40% (19 for 47) from the floor to Banks' 37% (19 for 52). The Lady Panthers hit 6 of 13 (46%) from 3-point range while Banks hit 2 of 13 (15%).

Union went 13 for 23 (57%) at the charity stripe; Banks finished 4 for 10 (40%). The Lady Panthers out-rebounded the home team 38-27 but points in the paint went to the Leopards, 32-18.

Banks County committed 18 turnovers to Union's 20. The



Sophomore Lara Turner keeps Union close, scoring off a steal with 3:38 left in the game. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers, however, won the points-off-turnovers battle, 21-17.

**Lady Panthers 73, No. 3 Rabun County 74** - A hot-shooting Lady Cats squad did everything in their power to deliver the early knockout blow, and actually came as close as possible, jumping out to a 34-18 lead with under a minute left in the first quarter.

Down 34-21 after one, Union County battled back to within 45-43 late in the second, eventually trailing 49-45 at the break.

Hunter, who finished with 37 points and 11 rebounds, scored 20 points in the first half to keep the Lady Panthers in contention.

Union moved within a point at 51-50 early in the third but Rabun slowly inched ahead 65-59 by quarter's end. Hunter entered the final frame with 30 points - two shy of her career-best.

Rabun built a 72-61 advantage at the six-minute mark and remained out front 72-64 inside of four minutes. But a Turner steal-and-score at the 3:38 mark and a Hunter putback with 2:49 to play tightened things up at 72-68.

The Lady Cats converted an offensive board with 2:18 left but they missed two crucial free throws 49 seconds later, leaving the door open for Union County. And as was the case all night, Hunter delivered, driving inside for a bucket that kept the Lady Panthers within four at the 1:15 mark.

Each team traded turnovers but Rabun missed the

front-end of a 1-and-1 with 36 seconds remaining. Off the miss, Turner went on the attack, scoring on a baseline drive that moved Union within 74-72 as the clock ticked under 25 seconds.

Once again, Rabun couldn't hit the front-end of a 1-and-1 and Union called timeout with 12 seconds left.

Inbounding from the frontcourt, the Lady Panthers were unable to get the ball inside and Hill fired a 3 from the top of the circle that didn't fall. But Hunter pulled down the rebound and drew a foul on her shot attempt with four-tenths of a second remaining.

The senior would hit 1 of 2 and Rabun County escaped with the 74-73 victory.

McNabb scored nine of her 12 points in the first half to go with five rebounds and two steals. Meanwhile, Turner scored half of her 12 points during the fourth quarter and pulled down eight rebounds and dished out two assists.

The Lady Cats finished 11 for 25 from long distance with six 3s coming in the first six minutes of their 34-point opening frame.

Leading 11-10, Rabun sank its third and fourth treys on consecutive trips, resulting in a 17-10 advantage at the midway point of the first. Rabun's fifth 3 built a 27-12 margin at the 2:27 mark and No. 6 made it 30-14 on the very next possession.

With her team trailing 34-18, McNabb knocked down a 3 in the final seconds of the quarter to slice the margin to 13 after one.

Hunter and McNabb opened the second with baskets in the paint to move Union within single digits at 34-25. Later in the quarter, McNabb completed a fast break to cut the Rabun lead to 40-33 at the 4:41 mark.

A Hunter putback and a pull-up jumper by Hill off a Lady Cats' turnover made it a one-possession game at 40-37 just inside of four minutes.

After a Rabun County triple, Hunter and Chambers each scored down low for a 43-41 deficit. Two free throws by McNabb kept Union within a basket but the Lady Cats scored on consecutive trips to mount a 49-43 advantage. But with time running out in the half, Turner converted an offensive board that sent Union to the locker room down 49-45.

Hunter drilled a trey from the top of the key early in the third, trimming the Rabun lead to 51-48; then Chambers made it 51-50 with a baseline drive just shy of the six-minute mark.

The Lady Cats extended their lead to 58-52 but a 3-point play from Hunter cut the deficit in half. McNabb and Hunter kept Union within three until Rabun beat the third-quarter buzzer with a long trey to spot the visitors a 65-59 advantage.

Two free throws from Hunter kept Union within a half-dozen but a Rabun steal-and-score, followed by a 3-pointer, opened up a 72-61 Lady Cats' lead with 6:00 remaining.

But McCarter split a pair from the line and Turner scored off an inbounds play, moving Union back within single digits at 72-64.

**Team Stats:** Union County shot an impressive 57% (30 for 53) from the floor. Rabun County connected on 40% (29 for 73) of its shots.

The Lady Cats sank 44% (11 for 25) from long distance while Union hit just 2 of 7 (29%). At the line, the Lady Panthers were 11 of 15 (73%) to Rabun's 5 of 12 (42%).

Union out-rebounded Rabun 41-29 and nearly doubled-up the Lady Cats in points in the paint, 54-28.

The turnover battle tilted heavily in Rabun's favor, 23-11, resulting in 21 Lady Cats' points of turnovers.

**Up next:** Both Union County teams are off Tuesday. The Union men return to action Friday with a Region 8-AA road trip to Riverside Military Academy.

Saturday features a full slate of games when Union County visits Lumpkin County at 4 p.m.



Sophomore Sofia McNabb attempts a floater in the paint during the second half of Tuesday's Rabun County loss. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Corinne Hill goes up for a layup during a Lady Panthers' fast break vs. Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Coach Mandy Hunter calls a play vs. Rabun. After Friday's win at Banks County, Coach Hunter said, "everyone was so coachable. Banks is a hard place to play and we're definitely coming together as a team." Photo/Todd Forrest

