

Sports

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Panthers hang on at Gilmer; host Towns County on Tuesday

Baenninger scores 12 of his 17 in second half as Union rallies late after surrendering big lead

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Ellijay - The Union County Panthers were victorious in their season opener in what turned out to be a nail-biter after they appeared to on their way to a blowout victory over the Class AAAA Gilmer Bobcats.

With the addition of several key players from the gridiron earlier in the week, the Panthers sprinted out to an 18-5 lead after one and stretched their advantage to 23-8 with 3:00 to play in the first half.

However, Gilmer would continue to chip away until late in the third quarter when they sent Union County reeling with a 13-0 run that turned a 36-26 Panther lead into a 39-36 Bobcat advantage with 6:50 to play.

Gilmer would eventually extend its lead to 47-42 at the 4:20 mark to cap off a 21-6 outburst that spanned close to six minutes.

After managing only 26 points over the first 22 minutes, the Bobcats nearly matched that output with 24 points during a span that lasted just 8-minutes during the third and fourth quarters.

Despite trailing by double-digits for the majority of the game, Gilmer refused to go away. They trimmed a 15-point deficit to 10 at the half, then cut that lead to six after the third frame.

With 2:27 left in the third, senior Parker McCombs came up with a steal and drew a foul on his lay-up attempt. Both his tries from the line were on the money and Union was within one.

With 3:33 to play, junior Cole Dockrey worked his way inside for two and seconds later, senior Parker McCombs came up with a steal and drew a foul on his lay-up attempt. Both his tries from the line were on the money and Union was within one.

The Panthers finally forced a Gilmer miss and Baenninger delivered a go-ahead trey from the wing with 2:27 remaining to put Union back on-top, 49-47.

The defense stepped up once more and that led to a driving lay up from Wright that gave the Panthers a 51-47 edge with 1:43 to play.

Later, a pair of missed free



Lawson Baenninger continues to deliver clutch shots for the Panthers. This time, with Union trailing 47-46, he knocks down a go-ahead trey with a hand in his face as the clock approaches two minutes left in the game. Photo/Todd Forrest

visitors.

With the Panthers in the bonus, Cole Wright went to the line for a one-and-one and the junior calmly sank both attempts.

On the next two offensive possessions, Gilmer attacked the basket and were successful both times, including an acrobatic, off-balance attempt that banked its way through the net, handing the Bobcats their largest lead of the night at 47-42.

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throws by Union left the door wide-open for the Bobcats, and with 43 seconds remaining they cut the lead to one with another 3-point bucket.

Five seconds later, McCombs made 1-of-2 at the line and with a chance to regain the lead, Gilmer's shot attempt missed wide and Crawford Colwell secured the rebound and was immediately fouled.

He would hit 1-of-2 with 21 seconds to play, then with another chance to even the score, Wright blocked a Bobcat shot attempt and McCombs gathered the loose ball and secured the win with two free throws as the clock wound under 10 seconds.

Dockrey and Colwell each finished with 9 points. The Panther quarterbacks, Wright (5) and freshman Pierson Allison (4) also combined for 9 points.

All four of Allison's points came in the first half as Union took a quick 6-2 lead off treys by Baenninger and Dockrey.

Allison hit two from the charity stripe to make it an 8-2 game and fellow freshman Saw-



Parker McCombs hits a pair of fourth quarter free throws that put the game out-of-reach with less than 10 seconds left. Photo/Todd Forrest



Coach Jones instructs his squad during a break in the action at Gilmer last week. The competition takes a step up this week as Union faces what is arguably the best Towns County team since 2000. The Indians return five starters (but one is injured) off a team that ended a 36-game losing streak to the Panthers last December in Hiwassee. The last time the teams met at Union, Towns allowed a 20-point lead to slip away in a UC win. The Indians haven't defeated the Panthers in consecutive seasons since they accomplished the feat during the 1994-95 and the 1995-96 seasons. During that 1995-96 season, Head Coach Casey Jones and Assistant Coach Kevin Hughes were playing guard at UCHS while your NGN Sports Editor was a member of the Pit Crew. Photo/Todd Forrest

yer Drake was perfect at the line for a 10-2 advantage.

A lay-up by Britt Waller gave the Panthers a 12-4 lead with a minute to play in the opening period.

A pull-up jumper from Baenninger and a Colwell basket off a turnover allowed Union to take a 16-5 lead into the second

quarter.

A free throw and a put-back from Colwell was followed by a 15-footer by Allison that opened up the largest lead of the contest at 23-8.

A 1-for-2 trip to the line by Wright followed a pair of Gilmer buckets. Waller, who finished with 4 points, added a lay-up to

give the Panthers a 26-14 edge with 1:19 to play before the intermission.

Dockrey rounded out Union's first half scoring with a lay up at the 1-minute mark.

McCombs chipped in 5 points, all coming at the line and Drake added two for the Panthers, who shot 75 percent (22-of-28) from the charity stripe.

Looking ahead: Tuesday evening a pair of unbeaten teams will clash at UCHS when the Panthers host their rivals from Towns County.

The Indians are coming off a 62-59 home victory over Lumpkin County on Friday night, where they overcame shaky officiating and the loss of their 6-5 big man, senior Adam Barrett to a serious ankle injury.

Barrett, who would be a four-year starter, led the Indians in scoring and rebounding as a sophomore and a junior.

The injury came in Monday's blowout scrimmage victory over Robbinsville, NC and he is expected to miss at least two months.

In the win over Lumpkin, Towns, the Panther's allowed a double-digit lead to evaporate and wound up clinging to a three-point victory.

Trailing by two with 2.8 seconds to play, Lumpkin stood at the foul line with a chance to tie the game but an 0-for-2 trip and a 1-for-2 trip by Towns' Major Moss with 1.7 seconds left resulted in the three-point margin.

Junior Zach Davenport led Towns County with 21 points, Moss had 15, Hayesville, NC transfer Logan Cowart scored 14, and senior Will DeVries added eight.

Against Robbinsville, DeVries led all scorers with 26, Moss had 13 with three dunks, Davenport chipped in 11, and Barrett scored six before going down in the second quarter.

Tip off for the girls game is scheduled for 7 p.m. with the guys game to follow.

The Indians will be seeking their first win in Blairsville since the 1999-00 season.

Should Towns win both varsity games, it will be their first sweep at Union since the 1995-96 season.

On Tuesday, Nov. 27, the Panthers host Rabun County. The Towns County rematch will be held on Saturday, Dec. 3 at the Bill P. Kendall Gymnasium in Hiwassee.

Lady Panthers unable to keep pace at Gilmer; look to bounce back vs Towns

Both squads hoping a rivalry game is enough to put offensive woes in rearview

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Ellijay - The Lady Panthers were unable to overcome a stagnant first half on the offensive end as the Lady Bobcats of Gilmer County opened up a 31-15 lead at the break and cruised to a 58-36 victory on opening night.

Union County managed just two baskets in the first half with one coming in each quarter as two-thirds of their points came from the foul line, where they shot 10-for-14 over the first two periods.

Junior Bailey Daniel knocked down an early trey before hitting 1-of-2 at the line, sophomore Jordan Rogers connected on a pair from the stripe, and senior Ashley Fair added one free throw but the Lady Panthers found themselves in a 15-7 hole after one.

Freshman Mary Wischmeyer provided the only Union bucket of the second quarter and Daniel connected on 3-of-4 at the line. Freshman Brooke Dockrey hit 2-of-2 and Rogers went 1-of-2 from the charity stripe in the second but the Lady Bobcats continued pulling away, 31-15.

As for Gilmer, they attempted only four shots from the line but did most of their damage from the floor as they hit three shots from beyond the arc and nine from close range.

Daniel opened the third quarter with her second trey of the game to trim the deficit to 13 but the Lady Bobcats responded with a 7-0 run before Brooke Dockrey stopped the bleeding with a 3-point play, that made it a 38-21 game with 4:57 left in the period.

A put-back by Adeline



Brooke Dockrey drives to the basket at Gilmer. Photo/Todd Forrest

Dockrey then a steal-and-score from Brooke Dockrey kept Union within 15, but Gilmer used a 9-1 spurt to extend its advantage to 23 after three. A free throw from Rogers was the only offense the Lady Panthers could muster over the final 96 seconds as the Lady Bobcats broke Union's back with a 49-26 lead entering the final frame.

A Gilmer basket 14 seconds into the fourth extended its lead to 25 before a scoring drought of nearly six minutes allowed the Lady Panthers to climb back within 15 with 4:13

remaining.

The 10-0 Union run began with a corner-three by Adeline Dockrey at the 7:15 mark. Just over a minute later, Grace Wischmeyer hit 2-of-2 at the line and Daniel nailed her third trey of the evening with 4:36 to play.

Brianna Hemphill capped off the run with a short jumper off a Lady Bobcat turnover that made it a 51-36 game with 4:13 left.

Unfortunately, the final seven points of the contest belonged to Gilmer as it was Union's turn to go ice-cold over



Union's returning scoring leader Bailey Daniel uses a screen from Adeline Dockrey to find room to operate. Photo/Todd Forrest

the final four minutes.

Daniel led the Lady Panthers with 12 points to go along with 4 rebounds and a pair of steals.

Brooke Dockrey finished with 7 points and team highs in assists (3), steals (3) and blocks (1).

Adeline Dockrey added 5 points, and team highs in rebounds (9) and blocks (1).

Rogers added 4 points, 2 boards, and one steal. Mary Wischmeyer scored 2 points, grabbed two boards, and came up with one steal. Grace Wischmeyer also scored two and

added a steal.

Hemphill finished with 2 points and a steal, while Fair had one point, six rebounds, and one steal.

Union County finished 3-for-25 from 3-point territory and is a combined 4-for-44 from long distance in two games - if you include the scrimmage at Hiwassee Dam, NC.

At Gilmer, the Lady Panthers finished 8-of-43 from the floor with 17 turnovers to four assists.

Up next is a Tuesday matchup with rival Towns County in Blairsville. The

youthful Lady Indians are looking for their first win of the season and their first victory over Union since 2012.

Like the Lady Panthers, Towns' youngsters have been unable to settle into a groove offensively so Union will be anticipating a breakout game when they host a rival school in their home opener.

Towns County lost 71-36 to Lumpkin County last Friday and to Robbinsville, NC 56-35 in a scrimmage last Monday. Their early season struggles come on the heels of losing four key players prior to the season.

One played varsity as a freshman at Towns but moved to Banks County for her sophomore season. She was expected to return home following a stellar sophomore campaign as a Lady Leopard, unfortunately for Head Coach Jim Melton and his Lady Indians, she will continue to play her basketball in Homer this winter. Three more players that were expected to contribute this season decided not to play at all. Two are seniors and the other is a talented sophomore.

Against Lumpkin, senior Kristen Henderson led Towns with 9 points, junior Madison McClure had eight, sophomore Kristen Byers and senior Kirsten Ledford scored 6 points each, while sophomore Lexi Ledford rounded out the scoring with one.

In the scrimmage loss to Robbinsville, Byers led the Lady Indians with nine, freshman Sophia Shook finished with seven, McClure had four, while sophomore Kenzee Denton and freshman Shelby Turner added 3 points a piece.

Henson, Ledford, and sophomore Taylor Cornett chipped in 2 points each.