

Sports

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Coach Tucker wins No. 700

Lady Panthers take care of business for their Hall of Fame coach

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Hiwassee - Union County Head Girls Basketball Coach David Tucker won the 700th high school basketball game of his coaching career on Saturday night when his Lady Panthers cruised to a 66-33 victory at Towns County - their 10th straight over the winless Lady Indians.

"I've been lucky enough to coach at great places with great kids, and that's the main thing," Tucker said.

When asked about getting to 800 wins and beyond, Tucker, a member of the Tennessee Wesleyan University Athletics Hall of Fame, admits that he wants to prove any, and all naysayers wrong.

"People say I'm too old, I'm not old. Maybe they're too old," he said. "I like this group of girls that I have, I like the parents, I like the school so I'm going just to keep-on, keeping-on."

Coach Tucker comes from a family of coaches, between himself and his two brothers, they have more than 1,700 combined high school basketball coaching wins. Their mother was recognized by the State of Tennessee for having the winningest family in state high school basketball history.

He also credits his family for his competitiveness.

"Having older brothers that never let me win at anything is



Coach David Tucker and his 2016-17 Union County Lady Panthers immediately following his 700th career victory - a 66-33 win at Towns County. Tucker has coached high school basketball in four different decades and has only with one losing season in 29 years. Photo/Todd Forrest

where my desire to win comes from," he said. "We also came from a school that didn't win much

so I always wanted to get into coaching."

And last Saturday, Tucker's current team, that relies heavily on freshman and sophomores, turned in its best all-around performance of the season. The Lady Panthers scored 66 points while hitting 10 treys - both season highs. They also shot a season-best 43 percent from the floor and 75 percent from the line.

Over the last two games, Coach Tucker's young squad has hit 18-of-40 (45 percent) from long distance after combining for just four treys (and shooting less than 10-percent from 3-point land) during the scrimmage at Hiwassee Dam and the season opener at Gilmer.

It wasn't just shooting where Union (2-2) shined on Saturday night, their 13 assists along with a turnover-to-assist ratio of 14-to-13 was the most productive of the year, so far. On the other side of the ball, the Lady Panthers limited Towns to two points in the first quarter and five points in the first half - both season lows for points in a quarter and in one half.

They also equaled their most larcenous performance of the season with 13 steals led by junior Bailey Daniel's five picks. Their other 13-steal outing came during the first Towns County game back on Nov. 22.

"These girls are coming along," Tucker said. "They're starting to buy in and I enjoy being around them. It might take us a little while and we're taking it one game at-a-time but we're getting better and we're going to keep getting better."

Daniel poured in a game-high 21 points with 20 coming in the second half. In the first half it was senior Ashley Fair and freshman Brooke Dockrey and Kait McCarter that guided Union to leads of 15-2 after one and 26-5 at the half.

Fair opened the game with a pair of treys for a 6-2 lead before a McCarter put-back made it 8-2 and forced Towns County Head Coach Jim Melton to burn an early timeout.

After the defense forced a stop coming out of the timeout, sophomore Adeline Dockrey nailed a turn-around jumper that was followed by a pair from the line by Brooke Dockrey on the ensuing possession.

McCarter went 1-for-2 at the charity stripe and Fair dropped in a short jumper with the clock winding down in the first quarter.

The second quarter was a bit unkind to the Lady Panther shooters but they continued to clamp down on the defensive end - holding Towns to one basket and one free throw.

Union managed just one bucket of their own in the second period - a 3-pointer by Brooke Dockrey at the 2:27 mark.

Thirty seconds into the quarter, McCarter was fouled after grabbing an offensive board and going back up for two. She knocked down both free throws to open up a 17-2 lead.

The Lady Indians hit the front-end of a 1-and-1 with 6:54 to play in the half before both teams fell victim to a three-minute-plus scoring drought.

Daniel eventually lifted the

lid off the basket with a free throw at the 3:27 mark. Brooke Dockrey went 2-for-2 at the line with 1:43 remaining in the period and sophomore Jordan Rogers went 3-of-4 during two trips to the foul line over the final 26 seconds of the half.

The Lady Indians opened the third with a 7-2 spurt that pulled them within 16 but a Bailey Daniel trey capped off a 7-0 run that pushed the lead back to 23.

Towns answered with a 7-0 run of their own to make it a 33-17 game until Adeline Dockrey nailed a jumper and Daniel hit from long distance. Brooke Dockrey connected on a three from the top-of-the-key and McCarter scored on a put-back at the buzzer for a 43-20 Union County lead after three.

Daniel began the fourth with her third trey of the game and McCarter went to work inside for a bucket on the first two possessions of the quarter.

Daniel converted an old-fashioned 3-point play at the 6:53 mark and Brooke Dockrey buried a pull-up jumper with 5:46 remaining. Daniel blew things open 42 seconds later with another three that made it a 30-point game. Then her fifth trey came at the 4:30 mark - putting Union on-top 59-26.

With 4:05 left, Coach Tucker turned to his bench with his team up 33 and Rogers continued the 3-point barrage with a corner-trey at the 3:02 mark before scoring in the paint just inside the 2-minute mark.

Coach Tucker made another mass substitution with 1:22 to play and freshman Megan Bright connected on a 15-footer to double-up the Lady Indians at 66-33 with less

than a minute left.

Brooke Dockrey chipped in a career-high 14 points and 5 assists, McCarter finished with 9 points, 6 boards and one blocked shot, while Fair added 8 points, 6 boards and 3 steals.

Another career-high came from Rogers, who scored 8 points and hauled in 5 rebounds. Adeline Dockrey had 4 points to go with 2 steals and a team-high 9 rebounds.

Bright finished with 2 points and one board, junior Maggie Stuart grabbed 3 boards and dished off one assist, while fellow junior Grace Wischmeyer had 2 rebounds, and freshman Mary Wischmeyer added an assist.

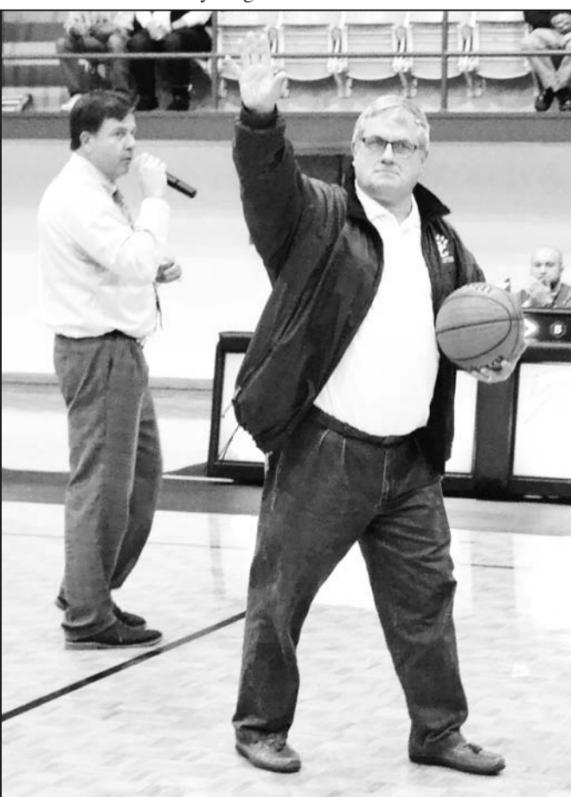
Senior Brittany Thornton recorded a steal and freshman Andelin Hill snagged one rebound.

Up next for the Lady Panthers is another rival school on Tuesday when Fannin County travels to Blairsville for a 6 p.m. showdown to open Region 7-AAA action for both squads.

Fannin is also coming off a blowout win over Towns County, 60-22 last Tuesday night in Hiwassee.

While Union may have dominated the series this decade, this year's Lady Rebels' squad is much improved over last season. They currently own an overtime win vs Hiwassee Dam and a one-point loss to Gilmer - two teams that easily handled the Lady Panthers.

On Friday, Union visits Rabun in a rematch from last week's contest that saw the Lady Cats prevail 60-47 in Blairsville.



There are 1,035 high school basketball wins between these two men. In the ultimate show of class and respect, Towns County Lady Indians Head Coach Jim Melton, who has 335 wins himself, makes an announcement between the first and second quarter of the boys game to congratulate Coach Tucker on his 700th victory and present him with the game ball. "I never like losing, but if I have to, there is no other coach that I'd rather lose to more than this man right here," Melton said while addressing a packed Bill Kendall Gymnasium on Saturday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union hits 53-percent of 3's but loaded Lady Cats still too much

Lady Panthers battle Rabun County on both ends; hang tough in 60-47 loss

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Last Tuesday, Union hosted three-time defending Region 8-AA Champion Rabun County, who returns an experienced squad led by last year's Region Player of the Year Savannah Scott and were fresh off a pair of dominating victories over East Hall and Dawson County - the top two teams from 7-AAA in 2015-16.

The Lady Cats mauled East Hall by 46 and Dawson by 24 and came into Blairsville expecting to do more-of-the-same to their former region-rival.

However, the Lady Panthers managed to hang around despite battling foul trouble and Rabun County's best efforts to turn 36 Union turnovers into another ugly, one-sided blowout.

Since Tucker's arrival, the great equalizer against teams with superior athletic ability has been the 3-point shot and Tuesday was no different. Despite a vicious full-court press from Rabun that forced three-dozen turnovers, the Lady Panthers hit 8-of-15 shots from downtown for a season-high 53-percent, with Bailey Daniel doing most of the damage herself during a 6-for-9 outing from long range.

Following a 12-6 first quarter, the Lady Cats opened the second by stretching its ad-



Sophomore Adeline Dockrey and the rest of the Lady Panthers refuse to back down against a Class AA state title contender. Photo/Todd Forrest

vantage to 24-11 at the midway point of the period but Union responded with a put-back by freshman Kait McCarter and a trey from Daniel. With their lead trimmed to eight, Rabun used a 6-0 run to open up a 14-point lead until junior Grace Wischmeyer knocked down a corner-three and freshman Mary Wischmeyer scored on a put-back to keep the Lady Panthers within striking distance at 34-21 entering the break.

Less than three minutes into the second half, Union's lone senior starter Ashley Fair

was sent to the bench with her fifth foul while sophomore Adeline Dockrey and freshman Brooke Dockrey were each plagued with four fouls.

With the home team severely crippled, Rabun used a 9-0 run to open its largest lead of the contest at 43-21. Then with 4:28 to play in the third, Adeline Dockrey joined Fair as the second starter to foul out. The ensuing foul sent the Lady Cats to the line where they knocked down 1-of-2 to pull ahead by 24.

Grace Wischmeyer halted



Junior Bailey Daniel sinks the three and draws the foul. This 4-point play helped her become the game's high scorer with 26 points on six treys. Photo/Todd Forrest

the Rabun County run at 10-0 with a 16-foot jumper, then sophomore Brianna Hemphill hit 1-of-2 free throw attempts, and Daniel nailed a three and later connected on a free throw to bring Union within 18 after three quarters.

Junior Maggie Beth Stuart followed a Rabun trey with a short jumper, Daniel went 1-for-2 at the stripe, then with 4:46 to play, she was fouled on made 3-point basket. Daniel would convert the 4-point play to keep her team within 18.

Another McCarter put-

back and a lay-up by Daniel trimmed the deficit to 14 before Rabun extended its lead back to 18.

With the Lady Cat starters still on the floor, McCarter, once again worked the offensive glass for two points. A Rabun trey with 1:50 remaining made it a 60-43 game but Daniel drilled back-to-back treys over a 34-second span that brought the final score to 60-47.

Daniel scored 15 of her season-high 26 points in the second half as she connected on six 3-point field goals. She

also finished with 2 rebounds, 2 steals, and 2 assists.

McCarter added 8 points and 9 boards, Grace Wischmeyer chipped in 5 points and Mary Wischmeyer scored 4 points to go with 7 boards.

Adeline Dockrey grabbed a team-high 10 boards and blocked 2 shots while she and Stuart (who hauled in 4 boards) finished with 2 points each. Hemphill and Brooke Dockrey both had one point, 3 boards and 2 assists.