

Panthers allow another one to slip away at Towns County

Rabun County fends off Union comeback bid, then pull away for 58-44 victory

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nganews.com

Hiwassee - The Panthers dropped their second straight to Towns County after leading by six with just over two minutes to play when the Indians exploded for a 14-1 to close out the game and steal the victory 67-60.

Union County led for 25 of the game's 32 minutes and held as much as a seven-point advantage with 4:43 to play when a Towns County lay-up trimmed the lead to five. The Indians feasted at the charity stripe and that turned out to be enough as Towns County was unable to connect on a single 3-point basket for the entire game.

The Indians made 27-of-42 from the line, including 12-of-15 in the fourth quarter while the Panthers hit 11-of-20 overall and 3-of-8 in the second half with all five misses coming while Union was trying to extend its lead and put the home team away.

After Towns moved to within five, junior Cole Wright hit 1-of-2 at the line to stretch the Panther lead back to six but the Indians responded with a 2-for-2 trip to the foul line to stay within four at 56-52 with 4:09 to play.

Junior Crawford Colwell, who battled foul trouble most of the night, scored two of his 19 fourth quarter points to put this team back on-top by six at the 3:43 mark. The two teams would exchange free throws with the Indians hitting 1-of-2 with 3:37 remaining and Colwell splitting a pair 57 seconds later.

An awkward exchange took place at the 2:13 mark when senior Lawson Baenninger tried to take a charge from Towns senior Will DeVries. Baenninger was whistled for a blocking foul, his fourth personal, then was slow to return to his feet after being struck below the belt. DeVries was issued a technical foul but still hit 2-of-2 free throws for the blocking call on Baenninger.

An injured Baenninger shot the technical free throws - hitting one to keep the Union lead at six with the Panthers inbound from midcourt.

The inbound pass went to Colwell who had a clear lane to the basket but as he went up for the lay-in, his shot was blocked from behind, sending Colwell crashing to the floor and Towns the other way on a 5-on-4 fast break.

The Indians misfired but with a man-down, Union was unable to secure the rebound and the Indians scored on the put-back with 1:58 to play. As the Panthers crossed midcourt, Towns was able to force a turnover that led to another quick basket on the other end and in a span of 8 seconds, the Indians shaved a 5-point deficit down to one.

Once again, Union attacked the basket on the other end and Wright was whistled for a charge - his fifth foul. Moments later, Towns County went inside for a lay-up and their first lead since the 1:30 mark of the third.

With a chance to regain the lead, the Panthers were unable to connect on the go-ahead bucket and were forced to foul the Indians with 34 seconds remaining. Towns hit both shots and trailing by three, Union went for the quick two with the defense guarding the perimeter but a lay-up attempt took an unfriendly bounce off the rim



Junior Crawford Colwell (left) and senior Lawson Baenninger (right) were the Panthers' top two scorers last week with Colwell going for 17 vs Rabun and Baenninger scoring 14 at Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Towns County would hit two more free throws then tack on a lay-up in the final seconds to take the 67-60 victory.

The Panthers went without a field goal for the final 3:43 and managed just two free throws during that same span. Baenninger, who led Union with 14 points, was held to one free throw over the final 8 minutes and Colwell, who scored nine of his 11 in the fourth, was also limited to one free throw after his fourth basket of the quarter came at the 3:43 mark.

Senior Parker McCombs also scored a season-high 11, Wright finished with 8 points and junior Riley Barrett added another season-high with 7 points but the majority of their scoring came in the first half when the Panthers led by as many as 10 points.

Marty Kronz scored 5 points while Pierson Allison and Cole Dockrey finished with two each.

The loss is similar to last season's second matchup between the two schools when Union held a late, two-possession lead with a chance to burn clock but mistakes allowed the Indians to storm past the Panthers - ending Union's 15-year winning streak.

However, the Panthers would get revenge in the rubber match when the two teams met in the Battle of the States.

As for a third meeting this season, it's not likely if history is any indication, Union and Towns rarely share a bracket in the Christmas Tournament. Last year's meeting came on the third day - the only day teams from separate brackets can meet.

A lay-up by junior Cole Dockrey accounted for the only Union points during the game's opening four minutes and Union found themselves in an early 7-2 hole until an 18-6 run put the Panthers in-control well into the second period.

The scoring outburst began with a free throw and a pull-jumper from Wright to make it a two-point game then Baenninger answered a Towns County deuce with a trey from the top-of-the-key.

An Indian free throw

made it 10-8 but Wright tied the game with another pull-up jumper from 15-feet. Baenninger gave Union its first lead of the game with a dribble-drive for two and Barrett made it a 13-10 game with a free throw at the 1:59 mark of the first frame.

Barrett went back on the attack and converted an and-1 to give his team a 16-10 lead with under a minute left in the period. He would add another free throw on the ensuing Union possession to make it 17-12. The Indians answered with a free throw on their next series but McCombs closed the quarter with a corner-trey that put the Panthers on-top 20-13 after one.

A 2-for-2 trip to the line by Barrett followed by McCombs' second trey gave Union its largest lead of the game at 25-15. Towns would quickly pull within six but a Baenninger trey stretched the lead back to nine. The Indians refused to go away and stormed back with a 6-0 run until McCombs a floater found the bottom of the net with 1:33 left before halftime.

Towns continued answering every Union basket, then a 1-for-2 trip to the line by the Indians sliced the Panthers' advantage to two with 1:04 to play in the second. Freshman Pierson Allison was perfect during a trip to the charity stripe with 12 seconds remaining but the Indians were awarded with one more trip to the line with three-tenths of a second showing on the clock. They would hit one to get within three of Union at 32-29 as the teams headed to the locker rooms.

The second half saw the Indians regain the lead momentarily after a basket by Colwell and a trey from McCombs allowed Union to open up a seven-point advantage just two minutes into the third.

The Indians would see Union's 5-0 spurt and raise them an 8-0 run to snatch the lead away at 38-37, midway through the period. However, Wright was able to drive into the paint and knock down a short jumper to put the Panthers back-on-top until Towns returned to their happy place (the free throw line) and hit a pair to take a 40-39 lead.

Both teams went scoreless for nearly 90 seconds until junior Mary Kronz drilled a three for another lead change. The Indians were sent back to the line where they pulled within a point at 42-41 but Kronz answered again with a running one-hander in the lane.

Towns went inside for two but a Baenninger trey with 23 seconds left made it a four-point game, then Baenninger came up with a steal and drove in for an uncontested lay-up at the buzzer to send Union into the fourth with momentum and a six-point lead.

The final frame opened with a pair of misses at the line for the Panthers and consecutive trips to the line for Towns - where they hit 3-of-4. Colwell scored on a put-back to push the lead back to five but the Indians continued to wear out a path to the foul line (along with the refs wearing out the hardwood in front of the scorer's table) and they hit two more to stay within a basket at 51-48. With 5:20 left, Colwell's work in the paint continued as he converted close to the basket on back-to-back possessions to open up a seven-point Panther lead.

Towns also went back inside for two before Wright hit 1-of-2 at the line with 4:26 to play. The Indians converted 2-of-2 on another trip to the foul line to keep pace until Colwell pounded his way to the rim for his team's final field goal at the 3:43 mark.

Rabun County 58, Union County 44 - Towns County isn't the only rivalry game that has turned in favor of the opposition, Rabun County has also had the Panthers' number, albeit for a little long than the Indians.

Since 2010, Union has managed just three victories over the Wildcats after owning the boys in red throughout the previous decade.

From 2000 to 2009, the Panthers won 19-of-22 meetings over Rabun and even tore off 18 straight from 2001 through 2008.

Now after decades of battling for region and sub-region supremacy, the two rivals are in different classifications so the two teams were simply

playing for bragging rights and the Wildcats were able to take round one with a 58-44 victory in Blairsville.

Union trailed for most of the contest but continued storming back time-after-time but each Panther run was met by a Rabun County run that stretched their lead back to double-digits.

The struggle at the foul line continued as Union shot 14-of-30 while the Wildcats made 14-of-20.

Colwell led the Panthers with 17 points and Baenninger added 14.

Following a back-and-forth first period, Rabun found a little breathing room in the second with a 9-2 run to open the period.

Trailing by six, Union had opportunities at the line but missed four-of-five. With 13 seconds to play before halftime Panthers' Head Coach Casey Jones received a technical foul following a philosophical difference with an official over the in-

terpretation of a specific ruling. The two technical free throws, combined with a buzzer-beating trey gave the Wildcats a 29-19 advantage at the intermission.

Two quick baskets by Rabun to open the third put Union in a 14-point hole. Colwell responded with a pair of buckets sandwiched around two Baenninger free throws to slice the Wildcat lead to eight.

Following a Rabun score, Wright hit 2-for-2 at the line and Barrett went up-and-under for a reverse lay-up off a nice feed from Baenninger - trimming the margin to six.

Union came up empty at the line with 4:31 left in the third but the Wildcats fell into a scoring drought - going more than three minutes without a field goal.

Colwell pulled Union within four by knocking down two at the line at the 3:15 mark but they would get no closer as another 0-2 visit to the free throw line prevented the Panthers from turning it into a one-score game.

A turnover led to an easy Rabun basket that sparked a 9-1 run to close the third. When the fourth quarter got underway, Union found themselves trailing by a dozen.

An 3-point play from Baenninger brought the Panthers to within eight at the 4:04 mark. After a free throw made the score 49-40, Baenninger nailed a trey to make it a 49-43 game with 3:30 left.

Unfortunately, the Wildcats closed on another 9-1 run to take the 58-44 victory.

Wright finished with 5 points, Barrett scored four, Allison had two, McCombs scored one and junior RJ Banton had one point.

The Rabun rematch will be Friday in Tiger with the girls tipping off at 7 p.m.

On Tuesday, the Panthers open region play by hosting another rival school, Fannin County, who is also coming off a loss to Towns County.

The Rebels have posted similar scores to Union and both teams appear evenly matched. Fannin lost at Towns by nine. They beat Gilmer 56-53 and handled Hiwassee Dam 61-42.

Tuesday's girls game will tip at 6 p.m with the boys to follow.

Underwood sets PR at Nike SE Regional with 15th place finish



Union County cross country runner Lance Underwood participated in the Nike Cross Nationals Southeast Regional at the WakeMed Soccer Complex in Cary, North Carolina on Saturday, November 26th. Over 1,100 high school runners from all over the southeast took part in the event. In the Boys Open Invitational race, Lance finished 15th out of 309 runners with a personal record time of 16:38.

UCRD to host three days of youth basketball for good cause

The Union County Recreation Department invites you to join us December 8, 9 and 10 to see some great youth basketball and aid those in need of nourishment this Holiday Season. Season opens for all teams from ages nine through twelve. Entry into either gym is a donation of any nonperishable food item or any monetary donation you would like to make. All food and money collected will go to help stock the shelves of the Food Bank during this Holiday Season.

- Thursday 12-8-16**
Rubber Gym - 310 Wellborn St.
5:30 - 12UB Maniacs vs Jawgaboys
6:30 - 12UB Wolfpack vs Raptors
7:30 - 12UB Eagles vs Warriors
Rec Gym - 302 School Circle Rd.
5:30 - 10UB Hawks vs Lakers
6:30 - 10UB Bucks vs Warriors
7:30 - 10UB Heat vs Dark Knights
- Friday 12-9-16**
Rubber Gym - 12U Girls
5:30 - Lady Wildcats vs Fannin Co.
6:30 - Nothing But Net vs Panthers
7:30 - Jawgaboys vs Clay Co.
Rec Gym - 10U Girls
5:30 - Hot Shots vs Hoop Makers
6:30 - Lady Storm vs Crushers
- Saturday 12-10-16**
Rubber Gym - 12U Boys
10 - Eagles vs Wolfpack
11 - Warriors vs Jawgaboys
12 - Maniacs vs Raptors
Rec Gym - 10U Boys
10 - Dark Knights vs Bucks
11 - Warriors vs Hawks
12 - Lakers vs Bobcats

Blairsville Pickleball Club teaches sport to Girl Scouts



L-R, back row: Coaches Bud Patrick, Cathy Berggreen, Karen Staffins, Kathi Patrick
Twenty Girl Scouts, from 4th grade through high school, enjoyed learning about the fast growing sport called Pickleball. The Fannin County troupe, under the guidance of Leader Teresa Watkins, met on November 10th at the Fannin County Recreation Center in Blue Ridge, GA. Blairsville Pickleball Club volunteers taught them the basics of the game, including paddle use, ball control, and a variety of shots. The game is easy, fun, quick, and great exercise for all ages.