

Sports

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Lady Panthers topple Andrews, NC; fall short to Gilmer County

Union opens Battle of the States with Swain County on Wednesday at 4 p.m.

By Todd Forrest
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Union County improved to 5-5 with a 39-29 victory over Andrews, NC, but a 46-40 loss to Gilmer County dropped them to 5-6 entering this week's Battle of the States Christmas Tournament at Towns County High School.

In the win over Andrews, freshman Kait McCarter scored 14 of her career-high 16 points in the final three quarters as the Lady Panthers led by 10 at the end of the last three periods.

Bailey Daniel scored six in the first as Union opened up a 13-5 lead after the first 8 minutes. McCarter scored six of her team's 9 points in the second as the Lady Panthers took a 22-12 advantage into the locker room.

The third period saw both squads struggle to put points on the board as a Daniel trey and a McCarter deuce was the only offense Union could muster.

However, the Lady Wildcats managed just five points themselves and the Lady Panthers maintained their 10-point edge going into the final frame.

McCarter and Daniel each poured in 6 points in the fourth to keep Andrews at bay. Daniel connected on 6-of-10 at the line and McCarter scored three buckets as Union prevailed in a low-scoring affair.

Against Gilmer, the Lady Panthers trimmed a 16-point deficit down to three with just over 3 minutes to play but were unable to close the gap as Gilmer scored the next four points to take a 44-37 lead with 2:37 remaining.

The Lady Panthers struggled from the field and at the line in the final minutes as Gilmer held on, 46-40.

After losing by 25 in Ellijay, the Lady Panthers appeared headed to another blowout loss at



Senior forward Ashley Fair (15) during a recent game. Fair had 8 points, 9 rebounds, 2 assists and 2 blocked shots during Union's 46-40 loss to Gilmer County. Photo/Todd Forrest

the hands of the Lady Cats when they found themselves trailing 25-9 with 5:35 left in the first half. Junior Bailey Daniel scored the next six Union points and freshman Brooke Dockrey hit 3-of-4 at the line to pull within nine at the 1:16 mark of the second. A free throw by sophomore Adeline Dockrey and a jumper by senior Ashley Fair kept the Lady Panthers within 10 going into the break.

A pair of treys by Fair and a put-back by freshman Kait McCarter made it a five-point game after Gilmer missed 6-of-7 free throws to open the third. A scoring drought of more than three minutes prevented Union from narrowing the 5-point margin but the Lady Cats were unable to counter either — scoring just one basket during the Lady Panthers' cold-stretch.

A Daniel trey to open the fourth, a Gilmer turnover, and a free throw by sophomore Jordan

Rogers made it a three-point game at the 7-minute mark. With a chance to pull within one, the Lady Panthers came up empty at the foul line, but two more Lady Cat turnovers kept the score at 36-33 until the 5:18 mark when a Gilmer lay-up made it 38-33.

Twenty-three seconds later, a Lady Cat free throw extended their advantage to six at 39-33 until two free throws by Daniel cut their lead to 39-35 with 4:34 left. Two more misses at the line by Union were followed by a 1-of-2 trip by Gilmer.

A 3-point play from Daniel pulled the Lady Panthers within three at the 3:24 mark. Unfortunately, Union wouldn't score until less than 50 seconds to play — a jumper by Daniel that stopped the bleeding and keeping the deficit at five.

Trailing 46-39, Adeline Dockrey hit a free throw with 17 seconds left for the final points of the game.

Daniel finished with 24 points on five treys before fouling out with 30 seconds left. Fair had 8 points and Brooke Dockrey added 3 points.

Rebounding leaders were Fair with nine and Adeline Dockrey with eight.

Daniel, Fair, and Adeline Dockrey each handed out 2 assists for Union while Daniel and Grace Wischmeyer led the way with 2 steals each.

Adeline Dockrey finished with a season-high four blocked shots and Fair rejected two Lady Cat shots.

In the Junior Varsity game, Union fell 36-32 despite 11 points from Mary Wischmeyer and 10 from Maddie Sutton.

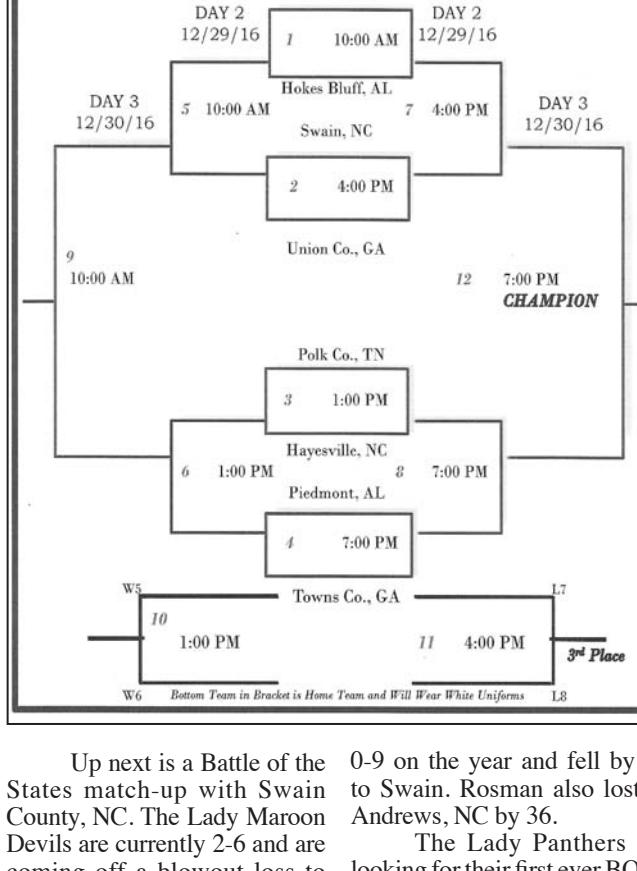
McCarter scored 6 points in the first quarter before sitting the remainder of the contest so she would be available during the varsity game.

Brianna Hemphill added 2 points for the Lady Panthers.

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Up next is a Battle of the States match-up with Swain County, NC. The Lady Maroon Devils are currently 2-6 and are coming off a blowout loss to Murphy, NC, 63-36.

The Lady Panthers are looking for their first ever BOTS Championship and will have their hands full with any team they face on their side of the bracket.

If Union County should survive the first two rounds of their bracket, Hayesville, NC would be the likely favorite to emerge from the other side of the brackets.

Meanwhile, Rosman is

0-9 on the year and fell by 37 to Swain. Rosman also lost to Andrews, NC by 36.

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Panthers fend off Gilmer on the heels of upset loss to Andrews, NC

Union opens the Battle of the States with unbeaten, tourney favorites Swain County, NC on Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

By Todd Forrest
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Following a 13-point loss to Andrews, NC on Monday, Dec. 18, Union County Head Coach Casey Jones decided to shake up the starting five during Thursday's rematch with Gilmer County.

With three first-time starters, the Panthers were able to pull away thanks to a 9-0 run that turned a tied game into a 46-37 Union lead with 90 seconds left.

During the first meeting in Ellijay, the Panthers led for the majority of the game before a furious Bobcat rally forced Union to come-from-behind in the final minutes. This time around, the Panthers and Bobcats were almost dead-even for three quarters until a pair of technical fouls were issued to Gilmer during the opening minute of the fourth period.

The first technical was given to a Bobcats player before the head coach received a T for arguing the technical that was awarded to his player.

As a result, Union's 31-30 lead became 36-30 with 7:07 to play when junior Crawford Colwell hit 3-of-the-4 technical free throws and Lawson Baenninger scored on a put-back. Gilmer (2-7) responded with a trey, followed by a 2-point jumper to pull within a point at the 6:30 mark.

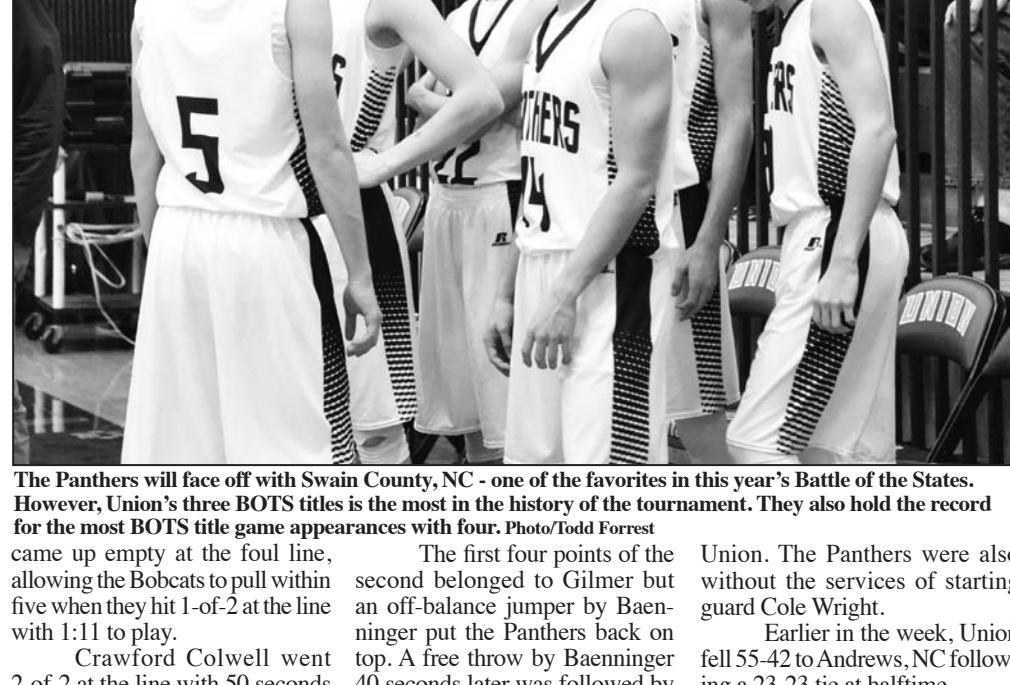
A 1-for-2 trip to the line by Baenninger was answered by two Bobcat free throws to tie the game as the clock ticked under the 5-minute mark.

Junior RJ Banton, who was making his first start of the season, put Union (4-7, 1-2) back on-top when he drove to the basket for two. Junior Cole Davis took a charge on the other end — one of six charges taken by the Panthers in the second half.

Junior Candler Colwell, making his season debut, drove into the paint to give his team a 4-point lead at the 3:17 mark. Inside of 3-minutes to play, Gilmer came up empty when they missed the front-end of a 1-and-1 attempt, and on the ensuing Union possession, Candler Colwell penetrated before pulling up and banking in an 8-foot jumper that put the Panthers in front 43-37 with 2:38 remaining.

A Bobcats' 3-point shot was off the mark and freshman Pierson Allison responded with an old fashioned 3-point play when he drew the foul on a driving lay-up with 1:37 left. The free throw gave Union its largest lead off the night at 46-37.

Gilmer nailed a trey 11 seconds later and the Panthers



The Panthers will face off with Swain County, NC — one of the favorites in this year's Battle of the States. However, Union's three BOTS titles is the most in the history of the tournament. They also hold the record for the most BOTS title game appearances with four. Photo/Todd Forrest

The first four points of the second belonged to Gilmer but an off-balance jumper by Baenninger put the Panthers back on top. A free throw by Baenninger 40 seconds later was followed by a Riley Barrett free throw that gave Union a 15-11 lead.

Two Bobcat free throws and a lay-up from Banton kept it a four-point game until the final seconds of the half when a Gilmer steal led to a lay-in at the buzzer to trim the Union lead to 17-15 in a low-scoring first half.

Two free throws by Crawford Colwell broke a 17-17 tie early in the third but his third foul sent him to the bench with 6:45 to play in the quarter. Sophomore Caledon Daniel made his varsity debut and gave Union a 21-19 lead with a lay-up before he took two consecutive charges on the defensive end.

Candler Colwell and Banton crashed the offensive boards and converted rebounds into points — putting the Panthers ahead 25-19 at the midway point of the period. However, like the first meeting, a barrage of treys put Gilmer back on top.

Three-straight shots from beyond-the-arc, sandwiched around a Barrett free throw, pushed the Bobcats ahead 28-26.

With just over a minute left in the third, Parker McCombs connected from downtown — putting Union back on top before a Baenninger tip-in at the buzzer sent the Panthers into the fourth with a 31-28 advantage.

Candler Colwell finished with 7 points — five coming in the fourth quarter. Banton added seven and Allison had four for

Union. The Panthers were also without the services of starting guard Cole Wright.

Earlier in the week, Union fell 55-42 to Andrews, NC following a 23-23 tie at halftime.

Baenninger led Union with 14 and Crawford Colwell chipped in 10 points.

The loss by the Panthers is the first to Andrews in more than ten years. Union's last home loss to Andrews was unknown as of press time but it's been at least 20 years.

Andrews connected on 9-of-13 shots from 3-point land while hitting 18-of-23 at the line.

The third quarter saw the Wildcats pull away by outscoring Union 16-7 and taking a 39-30 lead into the fourth.

Baenninger and McCombs combined to hit three treys in the fourth but it wasn't enough as Drake was the only other Panther to score in the final period. McCombs finished with 6 points and Wright had five.

Behind Enemy Lines: On Wednesday, the Panthers open with another North Carolina team, but unlike 3-3 Andrews, the 8th ranked Maroon Devils enter with an 8-0 record, while outscoring its opponents 82-to-63.

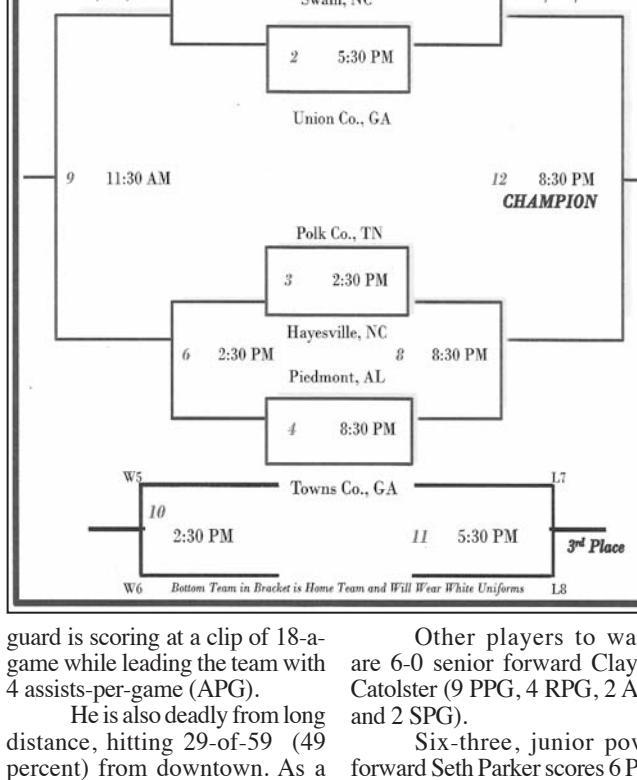
Swain County, who is known for football dominance, is led by two seniors that combine for nearly 40-points-per-game.

Six-foot-1, senior forward Phinehas Little is pouring in 20 points-per-game (PPG) while grabbing 4 rebounds-per-game (RPG), recording 3 steals-a-game (SPG) and shooting 41 percent on treys and 80 percent at the line.

Evan Bradley, a 6-2 senior

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guard is scoring at a clip of 18-a-game while leading the team with 4 assists-per-game (APG).

He is also deadly from long distance, hitting 29-of-59 (49 percent) from downtown. As a team, Swain shoots a remarkable 41 percent from beyond-the-arc and 70 percent at the line. Bradley leads the team at 85 percent from the charity stripe.

Meanwhile, 6-5 sophomore center Zeke Bradley is scoring 12 PPG and grabbing a team-high 5 RPG and blocking one shot per-game.

The big man is also a superb passer, ranking third on the team at 2.5 APG. He's also second in steals at 2.5 SPG.

Finally, 6-2 junior guard Brier Younce rounds out the Maroon Devils averaging double-digits in the scoring column.

Youce is averaging 10.3 PPG, 3.6 rebounds, and 2.9 assists. Younce has connected on 8-of-14 (57 percent) from 3-point range and 77 percent from the line.

As a team, Swain is shooting 52 percent on the year. In their last game, a 90-82 win over Franklin, NC, Swain had three players top 20 points while shooting 53 percent from three and 54 percent overall.

Other players to watch are 6-0 senior forward Clayton Catolster (9 PPG, 4 RPG, 2 APG) and 2 SPG.

Six-three, junior power forward Seth Parker scores 6 PPG and blocks 1 shot per-game.

Senior guard Darren Blanks averages 3 PPG, 3 RPG, and 2 SPG. Six-four junior power forward Nolan Arkansas, senior guard Brett Treadway, and junior guard Tanor Parton round out Swain's top 10 scorers.

Win-or-lose, the Panthers will face either Region 7-AAA foe Lumpkin County or Hokes Bluff, AL in the second round.

Currently Lumpkin sits at 6-6 on the year and are coming off a 71-52 win over Towns to avenge an earlier 3-point loss to TCHS.