# Sports 

Lady Panthers ride three-game win streak into the holidays
By Todd Forres
Sports Editor Sports Editor
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The Union County Lady
Panthers ( $(-5$ ) $n$ ter the ChristThe Union County Lady
Panthers (9-5) enter the Christ-
mas break on a three-game winmas break on a three-game win-
ning streak after handing North
Hal $(6-5)$ its third Hall (6-5) its third consecutive
loss -- $60-58$ nail-biter on Tuesday, Dec. 21 in Blairsville. Senior Ava Hunter scored
15 of her game-high 24 points 15 of her game-high 24 points
in the second half as Union in ounty led most of the contest and held off the Trojans down the stretch, never owning more
than a 3 -point lead over the than a 3-po
final 5:24. Despite trailing much of
the third period, the Lady Panthers opened up a $56-52$ advan tage when Hunter knocked down a pull-up jumper at the 7-minute
mark of the fourth. North Hall answered with a 3 inside of
$5: 30$ to move within a point, but 5:30 to move within a point, but both squads went ice cold over
the next two-and-a-half minutes the next two-and-a-half minutes hita floater in the paint with 2:56 remaining.
A Trojans' basket kept
the visitors within a point at the 2-minute mark but both offenses came up empty until Union regained possession with under a
minute left, nursing a 58 - 57 lead. A costly mistake sent Hunter to who had only one team foul in over seven minutes, was forced tocommit four consecutive fouls to move Union into the bonus Repeatedly stopping the clock
following four consecutive Lady Panthers' inbounds passes, the Trojans lost track of the foul
count and grabbed Hunter with count and grabbed Hunter with bonus.
The senior hit both of her free throws to grant the Lady Panthers a $60-57$ advantage with 37 seconds remaining. North
Hall missed on the other end, but freshman Ariel McCarte couldn't connect on the frontend of a Union 1-and-1 with 17
seconds on the clock. seconds on the clock
North Hall threw the ball out
of bounds, then fouled Hunter on the ensuing inbounds play,
sending her to the line for two sencts with 7 second for two shots with 7 seconds left. The
normally-reliable Hunter (who

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Significant changes are in sion 8-AA following the release of the Georgia High School Association s (GHSA) updated region
alignments earlier this month alignments earlier this month.
The most notable of 8-AA's alterations are the departures of Rabun County and Elbert County, both of which hav
dropped to Class A. Meanwhile dropped to Class A. Meanwhile,
Riverside Military Academy (RMA) will depart the GHSA for the Georgia Independent Athletics Association (GIAA), joining nearby Lakeview
way out the door.
With the GHSA's reshuf-
fling of the deck, Union County fling of the deck, Union County and Banks County remain the
only 8 -AA holdoyers when the changes take effect in August. changes take effect in August.
Joining Union and Banks are a slew of new faces, plus a couple old foes that Panthers
and Leopards haven't faced and Leopards haven't faced in
region competition since their region competition since their
8 -A days of the 1990s. First, Athens Academy and Providence Christian rejoin Union and Banks
after spending much of the 90s

## Region Alignments: Elbert and Rabun to Class A; Riverside goes indie <br> together in Region 8-A, albeit in

列


Sophomore Lara Turner (244) stuffs a North Hall shot attempt during the
second quarter of Union County's $60-58$ win. Photo/Todd Forrest Shooter) missed both tries, but $\begin{aligned} & \text { During the Lady Panthers' } \\ & \text { Union secured the offensive }\end{aligned}$ Nov. 30 loss in Clermont, North oard in the paint where the Tro- Hall shot the lights out, hitting $\begin{array}{lll}\text { jans immediately forced a jump } \\ \text { ball to seize possession with } 4.7 & 15 \text { of } 33 \text { from 3-point territory in } \\ \text { a } 78-49 \text { runaway. Last week in }\end{array}$ econds remaining.
Following a North Hall advanced the ball, the 3 -point trey at the buzzer firom th ight-wing as the Lady Panther elebrated the apparent victory.

Not so fast. County fou on the Trojans' last-ditch shot attempt sent North Hall to the charity stripe for three attempts
with 3-tenths of a second put back on the clock.
The shooter sank the first
shot but missed the second shot but missed the second, all
but securing the Lady Panthers' but securing the Lady Panthers
victory. Hunter pulled down the forced-miss on the third try as the buzzer sounded on th
season's first half McCarter finished with McCarter finished with 9
oints. McNabb and senior Rebekah Chambers scored 8 points each. Sophomore Lara Turner hill added 5 poind junior Corinne Hill added 5 points -- all coming
in the first quarter -- to round out Blairsville, however, the Trojans find their range from downtown as Union built a 23 -15 secondquarter advantage.
But North Hall quickly heated up, hitting five treys
over the final $5: 26$ of the half, ver the final $5: 26$ of the half,
including three straight during a 9-1 runt thateraseded the Lady Panhers' eight-point advantage. Tied at 24-24, Hunter
cored consecutive baskets before the Trojans responded with a triple for a 28 -27 score at the
$1: 50$ mark of the 1:50 mark of the second. Mc-
Carter answered with a trey of Carter answered with a trey of pace, connecting from downtown with 87 seconds before the intermission.
Chambers hit two from the line near the one-minute
mark and North Hall scored inside with 18 seconds left, sendng Union into the break with a A North Hall 3 to begin
he third handed the Trojans their A North Hall 3 to begin
he third handed the Trojans their of 4points from Hunter over the
irst lead since 12-9, but Cham- final 43 seconds.

Ava Hunter takes on four Trojans in the paint during the second half. The Union County senior scored 15 of

her game-high 24 after halftime despite being the focal point of North Hall's defense. Photo/Todd Forrest bers tied it back up with a drive | the hoop 16 seconds later. |
| :--- |
| Stilltied | Hall trey followed by two free

throws handed the visitors their hrows handed the visitors their
largest lead at $42-37$ with $4: 53$ left in the period. The Lady Panthers countered with 5 5-0 spurt,
sparked by a Hunte sparked by a Hunter jumper.
Approaching the midway point Approaching the midway point
of the third, Turner knotted the score, sinking a corner trey for 42-42 tie.
Three fr
attempts by the Trojans put Union in a $45-42$ deficit until McCarter scored on a coast-tocoast layup. Still behind 47-44
at the 3 -minute mark, the at the 3-minute mark, the Lady
Panthers regained the lead for Panthers regained the lead for
good, $48-47$ on two Hunter free throws and a Chambers' deuce. Both Hunter and McNabb split a pair at the line to open a
$50-47$ advantage that became $50-47$ advantage that became
$54-51$ at quarter's end, courtesy


$\begin{array}{ll}\text { alongside Woody Gap. How- } & \text { Academy and Lovett, who both } \\ \text { ever,TCHS Athletic Director Jim } \\ \text { made the jump to Class }\end{array}$ ever,TCHS Athletic Director Jim
Melton filed an appeal to exit a jump to Class AAAA.
Meanwhile, longtime-softball Metton filed an appeal to exit a
private-school heavy Region 7 Meanwhile, longtime-softball
powerhouse Heard County is on that includes Bowdon, Christian its way to Class A.
 Pinecrest, , Woody Gap and nine
non-football private schools. non-football private schools.
As for Rabun County and
with the additions of Pickens
and Wesleyan, along with the As for Rabun County and and Wesleyan, along with the
Elbert County, they are now departures of East Hall, North members of Region 8-A (D1) Hall and Cherokee Bluff to Class where they will compete against the likes of Athens Christian, Barrow (non-football), Com-
merce and Tallulah Falls (nonfootball).

While Rabun and Elbert Region 8umping two classes to
Rranklin Hart, While Rabun and Elbert
Region 8-AAA (Franklin, Hart, County (especially in football and girls basketball) at the region and girls baskebalf) at he region
level, the Panthers will no longer

## gion 4-AA.

Who's who in the new-look Region 8-AA
Athens Academy: Vol leyball - State runner-up in Class A Private with a 42-3 record.
Football - lost $56-7$ to Eagles Landing in the second round of State. Boys Soccer - Area Champ
and 10-3 record in 2021. Lost 5-1 and $10-3$ record in 2021 . Lost 5-
to Atlanta International in Class A Private Final Four. Girls Soccer - Area Champion and 11-2 record in 2021. Defeated Lovett 2-1 in
the regular season. Lost $1-0$ (OT) to Paideia in Class A Private Elite Eight. Baseball - finished 13-14 in the regular season and third in
Region 8-APrivate; swept by He Region 8-APrivate; swept by He-
bron (3-0,13-12) in the first round bron (3-0, 13-12) in the first round
of State. Girls Cross Country -fifth at State; junior Sarah Harrison - 12th place at $21: 03$. Boys
Cross Country - fouth at State. Cross Country - fourth at State;
junior Jackson Scruggs - fourth junior Jackson Scruggs - fourth
at $16: 55$. Wresting - sent three underclassmen to State.
East Jackson: Girls Basketball - currently ranked 7th in
Class AAA with an 11-1 recrd Class AAA with an 11-1 record. 8-AA, swept by LaFayette in the first round of State by a combined
score of 13-3. Boys soccer -

10-0 to Coahulla Creek in the
second round of Class AAA playoffs as No. 2 seed from Region to Westminster occer - lost 10-0 to Westminster in the first round
of Class AAA playoffs as a No. 4 of Cass AAA playoffs as a No. 4
seed. Girls Cross Country - 15 that State. Boys Cross Country - ninth at State; junior Isael Guerra-Baca
27that 18:12. Wrestling 27that 18:12. Wrestling-qualified five underclassmen for State; one
top-four finisher. Fellowship Christian: Football - reached the Class A Private Final Four and ended
with a 12-2 record; lost $38-28$ with a 12-2 record; lost 38-28
to Prince Avenue Christian. Vol leyball - swept by Tallulah Falls in first round of Class A Private State Tournament. Boys Soccer
lost $5-2$ to Athens Academy in the lost 5-2 to Athens Academy in the second round of Class A Private
playoffs as a No. 2 seed. Beat Darlington 3-2 in the first round. Boys Cross Country - 24th at
State.Baseball-lostin State Final Sour with a $25-8$ record Providence Cristian
Boys Basketball -currently ranke Boys Basketball - currently ranked 9th in Class A Private at $7-5$ Softball - qualified for State with
a No. 23 ranking in Class A Pria No. 23 ranking in Class A Pri-
vate Power Ratings. Swept in the first round by No. 10 ELCA by a
combined score of $28-0$.

Panthers' late surge falls short despite Austin Taylor's career-high

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Un Short of its third consecutive (5-8) came victory, struggling for the first
three-plus quarters of three-plus quarters of a $58-50$
home loss to North Hall ( $9-2$ ) on Tuesday, Dec. 21 Senior guard Austin Tay
lor led Union County with
career-high 14 points career-high 14 points - nine
after halftime -- however it proved too little, too late a
the Panthers' 21-7 run wasn't enough to overcome a
fourth-quarter deficit.
 matched a game-high with three steals, but shot just 4 of 13 from
the floor and 1 of 5 from 3-point range. Senior Caleb John scored
seven of his 9 points in the fourth while pulling down five boards
and dishing out two assists.
Meanwhile, senior Lake Hughes was unable to get on
track offensively after going to track offensively after going to
the bench with three fouls less
than 70 tick than 70 ticks into the second
frame. The Panthers' leading 14 points per game) finished
with 5 points and matched Ellis' game-high three steals on 1-of-6 overall).
Late in the third frame North Hall all but put Union County away, using a $7-0$ run
that culminated in the game's that culminated in the game's
first 20 -point margin at $46-26$
with 40 seconds left in the quarter.
Ellis converted a 3-point
play on the ensuing Panthers play on the ensuing Panthers
possession, but the Trojans
closed the period with a deuce and a 48-29 advantage. Facing a 51-29 deficit
nearly 9 seconds into the fourth, the water, but to their credit the water, but to their credt',
head coach Corey Garrett's
squad continued battling until squad continued battling until
the final buzzer.
With 5.47 remaining, With 5:47 remaining, se-
nior Lake Hughes picked off a
pass on the perimeter and started pass on the perimeter and started
a Union break that ended with Henry sinking two free throw
after drawing a foul on a layu
 The Panthers cut the mar-
gin to 15 when John put back a
Taylor miss, resulting in Taylor miss, resulting in a $51-$ end presence eelt on the defensive
end, defting a cross-court
pass, then chasing down the
oose ball under the 36 score with 4:47 to play. But laying it in for a 58 -48 score with
North Hall immediately wiped out any momentum by racing laying it in for a $58-48$ score with
$1: 22$ remaining.
Despite having the clock down the
the foul.
Un Union County refused to
go away as John canceled out the go away as John canceled out the
Trojans' and-one when he drew a foul on a double-clutch layup, keeping Union within 15 on h
free throw at the $4: 29$ mark free throw at the $4: 29$ mark.
North Hall capitalize on its side, North Hall fired off a hen missed a putback, allowing Union to regain possession 1:08 to go as a bewildered Trojans' head coach Miles Kendall
threw his hands into the air hrew his hands into the air.
Kendall would breathe

Morlock earns All-American recognition following breakout sophomore campaign Kendall would breathe
a sigh of relief moments later a sigh of relies moments later
when Hughes' step-back trey from the corner was too strong,
forcing the Panthers to stat exforcing the Panthers to start ex-
tending the game with under 40 tending the ga
seconds left.
Two Union County fouls
later, North Hall missed the front-end of a 1 -and-1, and
Taylor's runner in the paint Taylor's runner in the paint
connected as the game clock ap-
proched 15 seconds. and 9.5 seconds remaining, the Trojans muffed another 1 -and- 1
attempt while the Panthers' final attempt while the Panthers' final
3-point try drifted wide as time expoint try drifted wide as tim The Trojans scored the
expired game's first four points en route to a 20-6 advantage after one on a mismatch in the post to
build a $56-39$ advantage but the Panthers continued to fight, beginning with a steal by Joh
that popped into the hands of that popped into the hands
Henry, who quickly passed ahead to John for the layup with Coft
Cons Consecutive Trojan turn-
overs led to a $56-43$ score when
Ellis took Ellis took advantage of a traveling violation by sinking a floater
from 12 feet at the $2: 30$ mark.
North Hall North Hall kept Union at
arm's length, popping a pull-u arm's length, popping a pull-up
15-footer from the elbow with
$1: 50$ on the clock ate 1:50 on the clock after the Pan
thers couldn't secure a herss. couldn't secure a Trojans Hughes kept hope alive


Hughes and senior Hayden Senior Caleb John used Payne kept Union within 8-6 a dribble-drive in the final sec-
in the early going but North onds to keep Union within
 Hanct closed the quarter with 12 at he break, but coming out of
unanered. North Hall needed just Ellis connected on his hal seconds to open up its largest
anly 3-point basket to halt the lead of the night at 37 -20 only 3 -point basket to halt the
North Hall run at the 620 mark orth Hall run at the 6:20 mark
of the second but Union County of the second but Union County
struggled to find consistency on both ends of the floor.
Trailing $25-11$ follow-
ing a basket from junior Eli ing a basket from junior Eli Underwood, Taylor rattled off
five straight, driving inside for a deuce, then connecting from the corner to move the Panthers
within single digits at $25-16$ with within single digits at $25-16$ with
$2: 39$ left in the half. North Hall, of 6 from deep in the first half, connected from behind the arc 19 seconds later to extend the margin to a dozen. But Ellis
needed only 12 seconds to relead of the night at $37-20$.
Snow scored down on consecutive possessions, then
Taylor kept the Panthers within Taylor kept the Panthers within
13 on a pull-up jumper from the baseline. With Union continuing to hang around, the Trojans used
seven unanswered to mount 46-26 advantage during the latter stages of the third. Henry's night ended with points, a team-high three assists, two steals and a game-
high two blocked shots. Taylor, meanwhile, matched Henry's team-high with three dimes to go with three boards and one steal
in 26 minutes off the bench. 26 minutes off the bench.
Show chipped in 4 points d three rebounds. Underwood

## NASCAR 2021

## Ty Dillon getting another chance






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202 Nanctars. Alft free of



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$; \begin{aligned} & \text { Rogers } \\ & \text { ahead of } \\ & \text { this wee } \\ & \text { T }\end{aligned}$


$$
\begin{aligned}
& \text { the entire infield of the historic } \\
& \text { stadium and provide a quarter- } \\
& \text { mile track that will host practice }
\end{aligned}
$$

 mile track that will host practice
and races, during he Busch Light
Clash at Coliseum over the
weekend of Feb $6-7$. Speedway as well as Nashville
Superspeedway, a 1.33 -mile con-
$\qquad$ Superspeedway, a 1.33 -mile con-
crete oval about 35 mile from the
city. Neither Nashville facil-
ity would have more than 40,000
$\qquad$ Neither Nashville facil-
ity would have more than 40,000
seats, and the fact they are two seats, and the fact they are two
very different track gives cre--
dence to the idea that there could dence to the idea that there could
be two Cup races in Nashville. NASCAR has a four-year
deal through 2024 to race Cup at
Nashville Superspeedway, though Nashville Superspeedway, though
as the track operator, Speedway as the track operator, Speedway
Motorsports likely could end that
deal early if it wanted. Speedway Motorsports
controls 15 Cup dates. It owns controls 15 Cup dates. It owns
Attanta (two Cup dates), Bristol
(two) Charlote (two), Dover Atlanta (two Cup dates), Bristol
(two), Charlotete (two) Dver (two), Las Vegas (two), Nashville
(one),
(one), New Hamphirs (one),
Sonoma (one), Texas (two in-
(tur Sonoma one), Texas (two, in-
cluding all-star) and the lease to
have a Cup race at Circuit of the have a Cup race at Circuit of the
Americas. The company, owned
by Bruton Smith and his family, by Bruton Smith and his family,
also is looking into revitalizing
North Wilkesboro (North Caro lina) Speedway, which it owns.
Can Speedway Motor sports take a race from Atlanta
where it it string to get appoval
for an entertainment complex and for an entertainment complex and
casino, or ore of its Texas events,
where certain tax incentives make where certain tax incentives make
having three races financially benThose are questions that still need to be answered, though
not immediately. A lot of work remains before the green flag waves
again for NASCAR major series at the historic facility.
Racing Joke: Jeff was in the middece of a deep pleep, when
his wife nudged him and said, "I his wife nudged him and said, "I
can't sleep. I keep thinking ther can't sleep. I keep thinking
is a mouse under the bed."
Jeff thought Jeff thought for a moment,
and said "Statr thinking there is
a cat under the bed and get bat
to sleep." Racing Trivia Question: Alan Kulnicki Tried on onestion: 1 ,
1993, as a result of a plane crash while traveling to a racee at Brasis-
tol. What year did he win his only Cup Series championship?
Last Week's Question: How many NASCAR Question championships did Lee Pettyy win?
Answer. He was NASCAR's first
three-time three-time champion, winning the
tile in 1954,1958 , and 1958 . Gerald Hodgesthe Rac
ing Reporter is a syndicated NA-
NR writer and author. You may
SCAR writer and hauthor. Qou may
e-mail him at: hodges race500.

Payne added 2 points and thre
rebounds.
Overall, North Hall outOverall, North Hall out-
shot the Panthers $43 \%$ ( 24 for shot the Panthers $4 \%(24$ for
56 ) to $38 \%$ ( 21 for 55 ) from
the field and $36 \%$ ( 5 for 14) to the field and $36 \%$ ( 5 for 14) to
$19 \%$ ( 4 for 21) from 3-point range. Union County won the
turnover battle 18-14 in turnover battle 18-14, in spite of
the Trojans' relentless full-court
pressure defense bl pressure defense, but North Hall points in the paint (36-26). Neither squad was par
ticularly effective at the charity
stripe stripe with Union sinking 57\%
(4 of 7) and North Hall making $50 \%$ ( 5 of 10 ).
The Trojans' leading scorThe Trojans 'eading scor-
er, senior Robert Terry (14 ppg)
finished with game-highs of 16 points and 13 rebounds. Sopho-
more Andrew Bales added 12 points on 2-of-4 shooting from
deep. Senior Elijah Gaddy had points and five boards; sopho-
more Luke Sanders chipped in 6 points and a game-high four
assists while hitting 1 of 2 from 3ssists while hitting 1 of 2 from
3-point land.
. previous career-high came dur ing the 2020-21 season when he
scored 12 in the Region 8 -AA tournament vs. Rabun County, He also recorded a career-high
three assists in that contest feat he has matched twice this
season, including the recent Landon Kight update: If all goes according to plan,
Union County's injured allregion senior has missed his the court when the Panthers resume their 2021-22 campaign in January. As of Wednesday, Dec.
15, Kight was looking at a one 15, Kight was looking at a one-
week (approximate) timetable for return after suffering a hand injury during a late-November practice

