

Sports

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Hunter's 37 isn't enough as Lady Panthers' rally falls short vs. Rabun

Union County bounces back on Friday with 57-44 victory at Banks County

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Union County senior Ava Hunter shattered her previous career-high (32) with a 37-point outing vs. No. 3 Rabun County (13-3, 1-0) on Tuesday, Jan. 11 in Blairsville.

Unfortunately, the Herculean performance came in a losing effort as the Lady Panthers dropped a 74-73 thriller to the Lady Cats.

Union County (11-6, 1-1) rebounded three nights later in a 57-44 win at Banks County -- the Lady Panthers' first region victory since the 2019-20 Region 8-AA Championship game, also against Banks. Additionally, last Friday's win came without the services of sophomore starter Lara Turner (ankle). The severity of her injury remains unknown as of Monday, Jan. 17.

The threat of winter weather canceled Saturday's Senior Night showdown vs. No. 1 Elbert County (17-2, 1-0). As a result, the UCHS Senior Night festivities have been rescheduled for Jan. 25.

Lady Panthers 57, Banks County 44

Four Lady Panthers scored in double figures and Union erased a 26-25 halftime deficit with a 17-8 third quarter.

Ahead 42-34 after three, the Lady Panthers outscored the home team 8-2 over the first four minutes of the fourth to put the Leopards (8-11, 0-2) away for good. Union eventually built its largest lead of the contest at 56-38, capping off a 14-4 run with just over a minute remaining.

Ariel McCarter poured in a career-high 17 points, including four free throws during the final frame. The freshman also led the way with a team-high four steals.

Hunter and sophomore Sofia McNabb added 12 points apiece with McNabb scoring 9 points in the third period and Hunter putting up nine during the second half.

Hunter also pulled down 12 boards and collected two steals. McNabb had three rebounds and two steals.

Senior Rebekah Chambers finished with 10 points, nine rebounds, three assists and two steals. Junior Corinne Hill had 6 points, three assists and two steals.

Banks County's all-region junior post, Kamryn Grier, led her squad with 17 points, nine rebounds and two blocked shots on 8-of-14 shooting.

Sophomore forward Carley Segars scored 12 points with seven boards. Sophomore guard



Ava Hunter scores two of her 37 points to move Union County within four points late in the fourth quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

Addison Hoard had 8 points and four steals and senior guard Kalyn Beasley added 7 points and five assists to round out the Banks County scoring.

Trailing 31-26 early in the third following a trey and a deuce by Grier, Union's second-half turnaround began with a pull-up jumper by McNabb at the 5:37 mark of the quarter.

After an uncontested Leopards' layup off an inbounds play, Chambers found McNabb on the wing for a 3-point basket. Later, the sophomore hit 1 of 2 at the line with 4:24 left in the third, then capitalized on a Banks' turnover by hitting another triple 13 seconds later off a one-handed pass from Hill.

Leading 35-33, Union's full-court press forced an errant Leopards' pass that was picked off by Hill, resulting in a 1-for-2 trip to the line by Chambers on the other end.

A Hunter putback and a Chambers steal-and-score extended the margin to 40-34 with 2:46 left in the third. Later, Chambers made it 42-34 when she ended a near-two minute scoreless drought by converting a dribble-drive layup from the high post with 50 seconds on the clock.

Chambers' drive would be the final points of the frame and the Lady Panthers took an eight-point edge into the fourth.

A little over a minute into the final frame, the pressure defense led to a McCarter steal and two free throws by Hunter. And following a Banks County miss from deep, Hill knocked down a pull-up jumper from 15 to open up a 46-34 advantage with 6:20



Sophomore Lara Turner keeps Union close, scoring off a steal with 3:38 left in the game. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers, however, won the points-off-turnovers battle, 21-17.

Lady Panthers 73, No. 3 Rabun County 74 - A hot-shooting Lady Cats squad did everything in their power to deliver the early knockout blow, and actually came as close as possible, jumping out to a 34-18 lead with under a minute left in the first quarter.

Down 34-21 after one, Union County battled back to within 45-43 late in the second, eventually trailing 49-45 at the break.

Hunter, who finished with 37 points and 11 rebounds, scored 20 points in the first half to keep the Lady Panthers in contention.

Union moved within a point at 51-50 early in the third but Rabun slowly inched ahead 65-59 by quarter's end. Hunter entered the final frame with 30 points - two shy of her career-best.

Rabun built a 72-61 advantage at the six-minute mark and remained out front 72-64 inside of four minutes. But a Turner steal-and-score at the 3:38 mark and a Hunter putback with 2:49 to play tightened things up at 72-68.

The Lady Cats converted an offensive board with 2:18 left but they missed two crucial free throws 49 seconds later, leaving the door open for Union County. And as was the case all night, Hunter delivered, driving inside for a bucket that kept the Lady Panthers within four at the 1:15 mark.

Each team traded turnovers but Rabun missed the

front-end of a 1-and-1 with 36 seconds remaining. Off the miss, Turner went on the attack, scoring on a baseline drive that moved Union within 74-72 as the clock ticked under 25 seconds.

Once again, Rabun couldn't hit the front-end of a 1-and-1 and Union called timeout with 12 seconds left.

Inbounding from the

frontcourt, the Lady Panthers

were unable to get the ball inside and Hill fired a 3 from the

top of the circle that didn't fall.

But Hunter pulled down the rebound and drew a foul on her shot attempt with four-tenths of a second remaining.

The senior would hit 1 of

2 and Rabun County escaped with the 74-73 victory.

McNabb scored nine of

her 12 points in the first half to

go with five rebounds and two

steals. Meanwhile, Turner scored

half of her 12 points during the

fourth quarter and pulled down

eight rebounds and dished out

two assists.

The Lady Cats finished

11 for 25 from long distance

with six 3s coming in the first

six minutes of their 34-point

opening frame.

Leading 11-10, Rabun

sank its third and fourth treys on

consecutive trips, resulting in a

17-10 advantage at the midway

point of the first. Rabun's fifth 3

built a 27-12 margin at the 2:27

mark and No. 6 made it 30-14 on

the very next possession.

With her team trailing

34-18, McNabb knocked down

a 3 in the final seconds of the

quarter to slice the margin to 13

after one.

Hunter and McNabb opened the second with baskets in the paint to move Union within single digits at 34-35. Later in the quarter, McNabb completed a fast break to cut the Rabun lead to 40-33 at the 4:41 mark.

A Hunter putback and a pull-up jumper by Hill off a Lady Cats' turnover made it a one-possession game at 40-37 just inside of four minutes.

After a Rabun County triple, Hunter and Chambers each scored down low for a 43-41 deficit. Two free throws by McNabb kept Union within a basket but the Lady Cats scored on consecutive trips to mount a 49-43 advantage. But with time running out in the half, Turner converted an offensive board that sent Union to the locker room down 49-45.

Hunter drilled a trey from the top of the key early in the third, trimming the Rabun lead to 51-48; then Chambers made it 51-50 with a baseline drive just shy of the six-minute mark.

The Lady Cats extended their lead to 58-52 but a 3-point play from Hunter cut the deficit in half. McNabb and Hunter kept Union within three until Rabun beat the third-quarter buzzer with a long trey to spot the visitors a 65-59 advantage.

Two free throws from Hunter kept Union within a half-dozen but a Rabun steal-and-score, followed by a 3-pointer, opened up a 72-61 Lady Cats' lead with 6:00 remaining.

But McCarter split a pair from the line and Turner scored off an inbounds play, moving Union back within single digits at 72-64.

Team Stats: Union County shot an impressive 57% (30 for 53) from the floor. Rabun County connected on 40% (29 for 73) of its shots.

The Lady Cats sank 44% (11 for 25) from long distance while Union hit just 2 of 7 (29%). At the line, the Lady Panthers were 11 of 15 (73%) to Rabun's 5 of 12 (42%).

Union out-rebounded Rabun 41-29 and nearly doubled-up the Lady Cats in points in the paint, 54-28.

The turnover battle tilted heavily in Rabun's favor, 23-11, resulting in 21 Lady Cats' points off of turnovers.

Up next: Both Union County teams are off Tuesday. The Union men return to action Friday with a Region 8-AA road trip to Riverside Military Academy.

Saturday features a full slate of games when Union County visits Lumpkin County at 4 p.m.



Sophomore Sofia McNabb attempts a floater in the paint during the second half of Tuesday's Rabun County loss. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Corinne Hill goes up for a layup during a Lady Panthers' fast break vs. Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Coach Mandy Hunter calls a play vs. Rabun. After Friday's win at Banks County, Coach Hunter said, "everyone was so coachable. Banks is a hard place to play and we're definitely coming together as a team." Photo/Todd Forrest

Union County opens Region 8-AA with losses to No. 9 Rabun, at Banks

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

The first week of Region 8-AA competition was extremely unkind to the Panthers, beginning with a heartbreaking home loss to No. 9 Rabun County (13-5, 1-0) followed by a 68-61 defeat three days later at Banks County (5-14, 1-1).

In Friday night's road loss, Union County limped into Homer fresh off surrendering a 12-point second half lead to Rabun. And in the first period at Banks, the Panthers immediately fell into a 20-7 hole, eventually trailing 22-10 at quarter's end.

Down 32-17 in the second, Union closed the half with a 15-0 run to even the score at halftime. The Panthers went on to grab a brief 36-34 lead early in the third, but the Leopards responded with a 11-0 run and never trailed again.

Panthers 67, No. 9 Rabun County 72 - With 2:30 left in the third, Union County matched its largest lead of the night when senior Landon Kight handed the Panthers a 51-39 advantage.

But Rabun County closed the quarter with a 12-1 run, capped by a two-handed slam to beat the buzzer and cut the margin to one-point for the first time since Union led 22-21.

The Wildcats' rally began with back-to-back corner 3s followed by a mid-range jumper. Senior Caleb John hit 1 of 2 at the line with 58 seconds left but Rabun answered with a layup on the other end, followed by a buzzer-beating dunk that saw the Wildcats go the length of the floor in under 7 seconds.

Clinging to a 52-51 lead to start the fourth, senior Austin Taylor put the ball on the floor and sank an off-balance runner while drawing the foul. His free throw was unsuccessful but Taylor's basket halted Union's near-three-minute scoring drought.

Taylor scored again on another dribble-drove, then a John steal resulted in a layup and a 58-53 lead with 6:48 to play. But Rabun needed less than a minute to even things up at 58-58, beginning with two free throws, followed by a trey at the 5:50 mark.

The Wildcats moved in front at 60-58 with a putback just inside of five minutes -- their first lead since 9-7 with 3:53 left in the opening frame.

With Union still trailing 62-60, freshman Jude Ellis knocked down a 3 from the wing



Freshman Houston Henry scores on a drive to the hoop during the early stages of the third quarter vs. Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

to put the Panthers back in front 63-62.

But that would be their final lead of the game.

Consecutive Rabun baskets awarded the visitors a 66-63 advantage at the two-minute mark, but Lake Hughes converted an offensive board to keep the Panthers within a point.

Rabun hit 2 of 2 at the charity stripe with 40 seconds left but Kight picked up his fifth foul 16 seconds later. The Wildcats would miss the front-end of a 1-and-1, and following a mad dash for the rebound, Ellis came up away with the loose ball.

A step-back 3 by Hughes was too strong but Union kept possession when the ball bounced out of bounds off Rabun County with 10 seconds left.

Out of a timeout, the Panthers set up an inbounds play for Hughes, who came open in the corner and was hacked across the wrist, resulting in three free throws. The senior missed the first attempt but hit the next two, cutting the margin to 68-67 with 9 seconds remaining.

On the ensuing inbounds, Rabun County threw the ball away and Union regained possession with 9 seconds on the clock.

Once again, the Panthers went back to Hughes, who took the inbounds pass on the wing and drove the lane, missing a one-handed floater in the paint before pulling down his own offensive board. On the rebound, Rabun County was whistled for a foul, sending Hughes back to the line with 4.4 seconds left.

Shooting a 1-and-1, Hughes' free throw bounced off the back-iron, forcing Union to foul with 2.8 seconds remaining. Rabun made both free throws and the Panthers threw away the inbounds pass, forcing Union to foul once again.

Hughes hit 3 of 6 from 3-point territory, finishing with a team-high 17 points and seven rebounds. Junior Eli Underwood had 10 points and seven boards while hitting 2 of 3 from long distance.

Kight pulled down a team-high nine rebounds to go with 8 points while foul trouble limited the senior post to just 16 minutes.

John added 9 points and a team-high three steals; Taylor scored 9 points and Ellis had 8 points, three rebounds and two assists on 2 of 5 from deep.

Freshman Houston Henry led the way with three assists while scoring 6 points and coming up with two steals on 1-of-2 shooting from 3-point range.

During the first quarter, Union grabbed early leads of 5-0 and 7-2 en route to an 18-16 edge after one thanks to last-second tip-in by John.

Underwood scored six of his 9 first-half points in the second frame, including a dribble-drive that provided the Panthers a 30-23 advantage.

Henry knocked down a transition 3 to open up a 36-28 lead in the final minute of the half as Union held a 36-29 half-time edge.

Henry opened the third with a drive to the hoop, award-



A Wildcats player receives an earful from the UCHS Pit Crew during last week's Region 8-AA opener. Photo/Todd Forrest

ing the Panthers a 38-29 advantage, but Rabun rattled off six straight to pull within three.

Still up 40-37, John sparked a 9-0 run that awarded Union its first 12-point lead of the night. The spurt was aided by a Kight layup and a John steal-and-score and was punctuated by a Hughes' trey.

A Wildcats' tip-in ended the run at the 3:30 mark of the third, but Kight scored a minute later, extending the margin back to a dozen.

Team stats: Rabun County shot 55% (28 for 51) from the field to Union County's 38% (24 for 63) performance.

The Panthers went 9 of 18 (50%) from downtown and Rabun hit 5 of 17 (29%). Union shot 58% (10 for 17) at the free throw line; Rabun sank 11 of 22 (50%).

Union out-rebounded the Wildcats 43-28 but Rabun out-scored Union 44-28 in the paint and won the turnover battle 17-13. The Wildcats also held a 23-11 margin in points off turnovers.

Panthers 61, Banks County 68 - Union overcame first-half deficits of 20-7 and 32-17 but couldn't muster one final comeback as Banks County held on at home.

With Banks fresh off a 68-62 loss at Elbert County combined with Union's loss to Rabun, both squads entered looking to avoid an 0-2 start in Region 8-AA. And in the early going, it was all Leopards, jumping out front 20-7 before taking a 22-10 lead into the second behind

an 8 for 12 shooting performance during the opening frame.

Facing a 32-17 deficit, the Panthers finally snapped out of their slumber and closed the half with a 15-0 run, knotting the score at 32-32 heading to the break.

The rally started with a step-back 3 from Hughes at the 3:39 mark of the second. On the next Union possession, Hughes hit two free throws then an Ellis steal led to a John layup that sliced the margin to single digits at 32-24.

With 2:06 left in the half, John scored and drew a foul on an offensive rebound, trimming the Banks' lead to 32-27 after the free throw. Almost a minute later, Taylor made it a two-point game, connecting from the corner with 1:10 on the clock.

Underwood tied the game 20 seconds later when he crashed the boards and went up strong under the basket, sending the squads to the locker room tied at 32-32.

Still even at 34-34 early in the third, the Panthers' only lead of the night came via an Underwood layup that was set up by John's dribble penetration.

The Leopards answered back with three consecutive 3s, and when the dust settled on what was eventually an 11-0 run, Union found itself trailing 45-36.

Ellis finally stopped the bleeding with consecutive treys - the second coming with 34 seconds left in the third to move the Panthers within 45-42 after three.

Still behind 49-46 in the fourth, Union surrendered a costly putback, followed by a triple just shy of the five-minute mark.

Eight answered with a 3-point play then John finished a fast break with a double-clutch layup, moving Union County back to within three at 54-51.

A Hughes 3-pointer with 3:25 to play made it a 58-56 game, but that's as close as they would get as Banks answered with a trey of its own just 14 seconds later.

Banks extended its lead to 63-56 with 2:24 to play but Henry drilled a long trey 23 seconds later to keep the Panthers within four.

With under 40 seconds to play, Union missed two shots in the paint that would have trimmed the difference to two points. Instead, Banks pulled down the rebound and the Panthers immediately fouled.

The Leopards hit 1 of 2 with 24 seconds left and the Panthers misfired from 3 on the other end. Banks County put the game out of reach with two free throws that awarded the home team a 66-59 lead with 14 seconds left.

Hughes led Union County with 14 points to go with six boards and four assists. Ellis had 10 points, four rebounds, two steals and two assists.

Kight added 9 points and eight rebounds; Underwood finished with 9 points and seven boards.

John had 7 points and two assists. Taylor scored 6 points with two assists. Henry chipped in 6 points and four assists. Senior Daniel Snow pulled down one rebound in 11 minutes action.

Team stats: Banks County shot 50% (21 for 42) from the field and 56% (9 for 16) from 3-point range. The Leopards also hit 17 for 18 (94%) at the free throw line.

Union County shot 36%

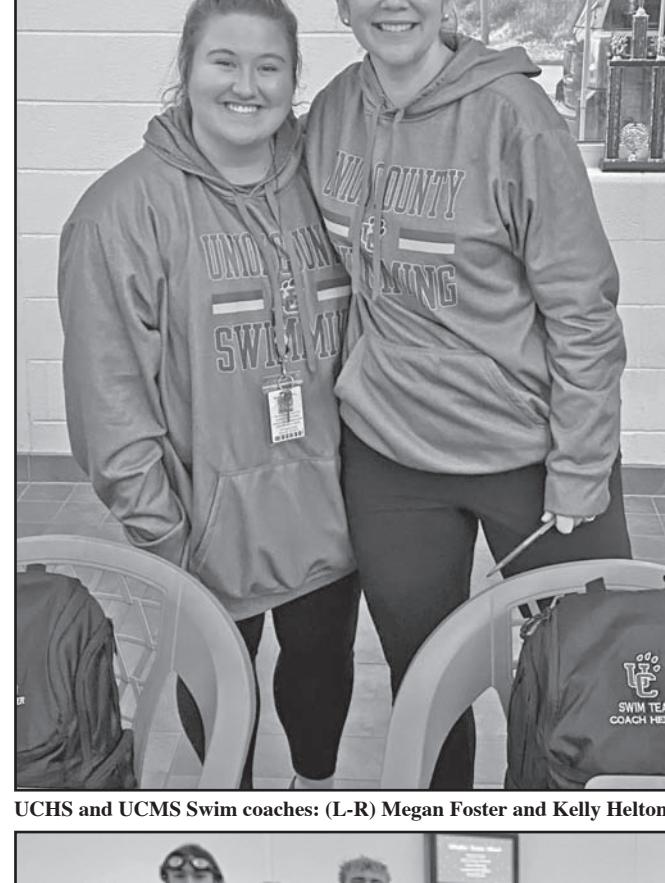
(22 for 62) from the field and 27% (9 for 34) from downtown.

The Panthers hit 8 of 11 (73%) at the line.

Union out-rebounded Banks 32-29 and held a 26-22 advantage in points in the paint. The Panthers also won the turnover battle 16-11, but the teams finished an even 11-11 in points off turnovers.

Up next: Union County is off Tuesday then visits winless Riverside at 6 p.m. Friday. The Panthers will travel to Lumpkin County on Saturday with the girls tipping off at 4 p.m.

Swimming: Nov. 13 results at TFS



UCHS and UCMS Swim coaches: (L-R) Megan Foster and Kelly Helton



zmierzak - 24th; Brown - 25th; Flowers - 26th.

UCMS Boy's Results:

200 Medley Relay: Third place

200 Freestyle Relay: Fifth place.

100 Freestyle (26 competitors): Gabriel Panter - 23rd.

100 Breaststroke (13 competitors): Michael Leird - seventh

100 Backstroke (18 competitors): Nicholas Nushtayev - seventh; Preston Perren - 10th.

50 Freestyle (35 competitors): Nushtayev - third; Leird - 13th; Perren - 14th; Panter - 22nd.

UCHS Women's Results:

500 Freestyle: Lily Helton - first; Rachel Reid - third.

200 Medley Relay: Fourth and sixth place.

200 Freestyle (23 competitors): Helton - seventh.

200 Freestyle Relay: Fourth and sixth place.

100 Backstroke (26 competitors): Courtney Foster - seventh; Anniston Howse - eighth; Lilly Collins - 13th; Cassie Flowers - 19th.

100 Freestyle (39 competitors): Olivia Loyd - fifth; Howse - ninth; Meghan Cory - 12th; Hannah Kazmierzak - 14th; Brooklyn Brown - 16th.

100 Breaststroke (20 competitors): Helton - fifth; Reid - sixth; Cory - eighth; Loyd - 10th.

50 Freestyle (37 competitors): Foster - 12th; h Ka-



Wrestling: Pace Academy edges Union County 39-38 in State Duels first round



With winter weather bearing down on North Georgia, Union County wrestling made the trip to Atlanta where they met Pace Academy in the first round of Saturday's Class AA State Duels tourney. The Panthers went on to drop a narrow 39-38 decision to second-seeded Pace Academy. Union will now focus on the individual Area Tournament later this month. Pictured: Freshman Eli Smith-Foot during a recent match. Photo/Todd Forrest

Soccer registration is open at the Union County Recreation Department

January 11, 2022- February 18, 2022 for ages 5-12.

Age you will be September 1, 2022 determines age group you play in. Season will begin in March.

We are happy to announce Chris Robbins will be overseeing Rec Soccer.

Fee is \$55.00

Please register online at unioncountyga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center located at 519 Industrial Blvd.

Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

Union County Recreation Department Baseball and Softball Registration

Registration for baseball and softball opens at the Union County Recreation Department January 4, 2022 thru February 18, 2022 for ages 5-14.

Age you will be September 1, 2022 is the age group you will play in. Fee is \$55.00. Please register online at unioncountyga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center located at 519 Industrial Blvd.

Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

