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## Basketball: Panthers thrash Murray, overmatched at No. 2 Columbia

By Todd Forrest **Sports Editor** sports@nganews.com

The Union County men's 2022-23 basketball season concluded Friday night in the Class AA Sweet 16, following an 83-49 loss at second-ranked Columbia (29-1) in Decatur.

Friday's trip to Decatur came courtesy of the Panthers' 85-63 home victory over Murray County on Wednesday, Feb. 22 - the program's first state playoff victory since 2016. The win also marked Union County's most lopsided victory in a state tournament since a 74-51 win over Marion County during the 1971 Final Four.

"It was a good season and I'm proud of all the guys and I'm proud for the community," Union head coach Corey Garrett said. "I've heard from a lot of people that 'basketball is back in Union County' and you like to hear that. And I think you saw it, we had some pretty good crowds this year. So we have something to build on, it's just a matter of keeping it going.

After the Murray County win, senior Eli Underwood discussed what it's been like being the lone senior and team leader on a squad loaded with sophomores and freshmen.

"This year has been the most fun I've ever had on the basketball court,' he said. "Just being able to lead this team, play alongside these guys and be successful, the most successful we've been in a while, that means a lot to me."

Coach Garrett added, "I could not have picked a better leader for those young guys. It was awesome. The way Eli has handled everything, the way he's handled his whole high school career, but to see what's he's done this year has been incredible.

"He does everything you ask and he does it the right way - on the floor and off the floor. Everywhere he goes, he makes sure our program is viewed in a positive light. He's a great guy and an awesome teammate. I can't say enough about him. I love him to death and I believe everyone in that locker room feels the exact same way.'

Panthers 85, Murray County 63 - Sophomore Hayden Hughes and Underwood combined for 43 points as Union County blew things open early via a 21-0 first-quarter run.



"We were a little down after the Indians came to climbing

losing the region championship game] and our practices weren't all that great. But we just stayed focused on our goal and that was winning tonight's game and moving on to the Sweet 16."

Tied at 3-3 following a Murray County 3-pointer at the 6:50 mark, the Panthers uncorked a 21-0 run in four minutes, beginning with a bucket inside from Underwood and consecutive treys by Hughes.

Hughes ended the night with 23 points on six 3-point baskets -- setting a program record for a state playoff game. Underwood, meanwhile, poured in 20 points with a dozen coming before the break.

"I said last week if we could handle the press, we'd be able to hurt them in the halfcourt," Garrett said. "We handled the press, got them in the halfcourt and we hurt

Sophomore Maddox Young added to the 3-point barrage, opening up a 14-3 lead. Underwood scored on a putback, and sophomore Houston Henry drilled his team's fifth triple of the quarter to mount a 19-3 advantage. Sophomore Jude Ellis, who started the game with a trey, finished off the 21-0 assault on a dribble drive for two.

Murray County respond-Underwood said after the game. second, but that's as close as

inside single-digits as Young stopped the run by attacking the paint, and Henry turned a steal into a 3-point play and a 26-10

Hughes' third trey of the half came at the 5:28 mark before Underwood added three buckets, and Maddox converted an and-one to build a 38-15 lead with 2 minutes before halftime. Over the final 42 seconds,

Underwood scored in the paint and Ellis knocked down a corner jumper, but Murray tacked on a late 3-point play to slice its deficit to 42-25 at the intermission.

Hughes started the third by getting fouled in the corner, resulting in three free throws and a 45-25 score. An Underwood jump hook and a 1-for-2 visit to the line kept Union County in control at 48-27, until the Panthers delivered a furious knockout moments later.

After Young tagged the Indians with a body shot at the 5:47 mark for a 50-29 lead, Hughes landed three straight haymakers from 3-point land, busting things open at 59-29 near the midway point of the Ellis and Underwood

combined for five free throws over the final 2:55, helping Union County mount its largest "Coming in, we didn't ed with seven straight, moving lead of the night at 64-32 before

fense] is a little different from what we've seen, but we were moving the ball and finding the open guy, then Hayden got hot again and other guys started knocking down shots," Garrett said. "Inside they had no answer for Eli, so it was exactly what you want from a gameplan."

Ellis' and-one and a fastbreak layup from Hughes extended the margin back out to 32 early in the fourth, but Murray responded with a 10-0 run, prompting a Panthers timeout.

Freshman Cade Dockrey attacked the basket off the dribble to suspend the Indians run. Then, deuces by Underwood and Young, along with three Henry free throws, made it 78-55 near the 3-minute mark.

Union County capped off the scoring with late free throws from Henry, Ellis and junior Van Marevka. During Marevka's trip to the line, Underwood departed the contest to a standing ovation from hometown fans.

On the heels of his final home game, Underwood reminisced on his playing days at UCHS, and talked about what he'll remember most from his "Just the support from

the fans, the community and my teammates," he said. "I'm thankful to coach for leaving me in a little longer at the end [of the game] so I could enjoy those last few moments. Then

"I knew their 2-3 [de-being able to walk off the court one last time, that was a really special moment."

After his Panthers fell in

to bookend a heartbreaking loss in the Battle of the States title game, Underwood entered last Wednesday's contest prepared to carry his team across the finish line if necessary. "I did not want to go out tonight," he said. "I was going

consecutive region title games

to do everything in my power to keep the season going as long as I can." Young finished with 14 points, Ellis had 13 and Henry

scored 12 - each connecting on

one 3-point field goal. Dock-

rey's night ended with 2 points; Marevka added a free throw. No additional stats were available from last week's

Panthers 49, No. 2 Columbia 83 - Union County (19-9) held its own for much of Friday's Sweet 16 contest, but at the end of the day, couldn't match the size and speed of Class AA's No. 2 team for the entire 32 minutes.

Trailing 19-16 in the second, and with two early fouls on Columbia's 6-foot-9 senior Terrell Wright, the Panthers seemed poised to keep things competitive into halftime. But said. "I'm so proud of the entire with their big man on the bench, program. It was enjoyable year the Eagles' smaller, quicker and I hate it's over, but we're all lineup took over and sparked a 20-2 run.

"We knew coming in that we couldn't guard them [in man-to-man], but even in zone, they can split those gaps so quickly," Garrett said. "They were super-athletic and I'm very interested to see if they end up winning it all.

"We saw on film they had a couple guys who could hit some 3s if you leave them open. but the fact that they were able to hit so many mid-range jumpers is what stood out to me.'

Union refused to go away as Ellis, Underwood and Young scored the final three buckets of the second period to keep their team within striking distance at 43-27 at the break. Hughes' third triple of the

night moved Union within 15 at

45-30, but Columbia answered with a 7-0 spurt to push the score to 52-30. The Panthers last surge came late in the third when a pair of dribble drives by Dockrey and an Ellis steal-and-score trimmed the margin to 52-36. But Columbia heated up in a hurry, scoring on 14 of

its next 15 possessions, resulting in a 29-7 run that put the visitors away at 81-43 with 3:15 In his final appearance

with the Purple and Gold, Underwood went out with his team's last six points of night to finish with a game-high 17.

They had some big guys but Eli kept doing what he's done all year," Garrett said. "I was interested to see how he would do against that size and I was really happy that he was able to have success. But I know he would have gladly traded his individual success for a win." Hughes hit a trio of

points and end his season with a program-record 92 treys. Ellis added 9 points to give the 2023 region honorable mention selection 641 for his career (374 this year), placing him on the 1,000point watchlist for 2023-24. Henry, who re-aggravated

3-pointers to finish with 9

a lingering hamstring injury vs. Murray County, scored 4 points in limited minutes at Columbia. Region 8-AA honorable mention selections, Dockrey and Young, added 4 points each for the Panthers.

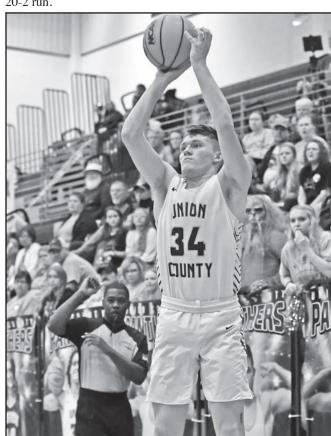
"It was a great year, we got to 19 wins, and yeah, 20 would have been nice, but we did a lot of things the program hasn't done in a while," Garrett excited for what's to come



ing Friday's Sweet-16 matchup at Columbia. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore region honorable mention Jude Ellis drives into the paint during the second half at No. 2 Columbia. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Hayden Hughes added another 3-point record to his resume with his six treys vs. Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest **Sports Editor** sports@nganews.com

Chatsworth - No. 8 Murray County (22-4) raced out to an 11-0 lead and never looked back in a 59-39 victory over Union County (14-14) in the first round of the Class AA State Tournament on Tuesday,

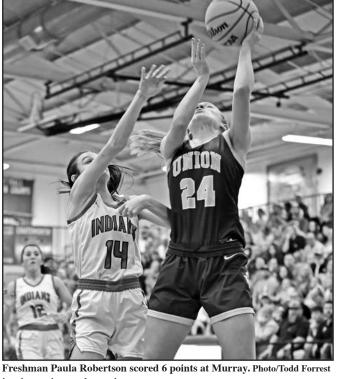
Senior Corinne Hill led the way with 19 points in her final game.

A free throw from Hill and two Lara Turner jumpers got the Lady Panthers on the board past the midway point of the first quarter, but they had no answer for Murray County on the defensive end.

Leading 23-5 after one, the Indians built a 27-5 advantage until Hill and sophomore Ariel McCarter kept Union County within 20 at 31-11. Hill added a breakway layup and scored inside off the dribble, while McCarter hit two from the charity stripe. Freshman Paula Rob-

the 2:10 mark, and Hill added a deuce and a trey for a 36-17 deficit with under a minute un-

ertson split two free throws at



in the paint to keep her team scored six of her team's nine within 19, but Murray beat the fourth-quarter points. buzzer for a 40-19 halftime

even in the third at 11-11 with McCarter and Robertson Brown and freshman Mady knocking down 3s and Hill til halftime. Robertson scored converting an and one. Hill Junior Kamryn Mull had one.

Robertson finished with 6 points, McCarter had five The two squads broke and Turner scored four.

Sophomore Katelyn Adams added 2 points each.



Senior Corinne Hill led all scorers with 19 during last week's trip to No. 8 Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Brown's 8.8 a night.

were available for last week's

McCarter and Turner end the year as First-Team All-8-AA selections. Brown earned an honorable mention

Heading into the State

aged a team-high 14.2 points leading the team with 0.5 and 2.3 steals per game. Mc-blocks a game. Her 1.6 assists Carter's 2.1 assists were second to Hill (2.3), while her enough for third. 5.8 boards were third on the team behind Turner's 6.0 and leading 8.8 boards, Brown

No additional stats Tournament, McCarter aver- was second at 9 points while and 1.6 steals were both good Along with her team-

finished at 4 points, 1.2 steals As for Turner, the junior and 1 assist a night.

### Soccer: Panthers extend winning streak to five with perfect week Lady Panthers draw with No. 3 Dawson County in first game featuring full squad

By Todd Forrest Sports Editor sports@nganews.com

The Union County men capped off a 3-0 week with victories over Fannin County, Dawson County and White County. Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers went 1-1-1 last week, notching an 8-0 win at Fannin County before battling Class AAA's No. 3 Dawson County to a 1-1 stalemate and falling 3-0 to Class AAA's fifth-ranked White County.

Through the first six games, the Class AA Lady Panthers (2-3-1) have faced four of AAA's top-seven squads in No. 2 Lumpkin County, No. 3 Dawson, No. 5 White and No. 7 Coahulla Creek. The Union men (5-1) have met two: No. 6 Coahulla Creek and No. 8 Lumpkin County.

Panthers 6, White County 1 - The Panthers won their fifth straight match, racing out to a 4-1 halftime lead during a home rout of White County on a rainy Friday night.

Antonio Solario and Evan Bohms scored two goals each while Bohms handed out three

Senior Wilson Walker added a goal in the 32nd minute; Zuriel Mancillas notched a



Junior Zuriel Mancillas during a recent game. Photo/Todd Forrest hms, Solario and Walker. Bohms, corner of the net. alongside Benton Gregory and

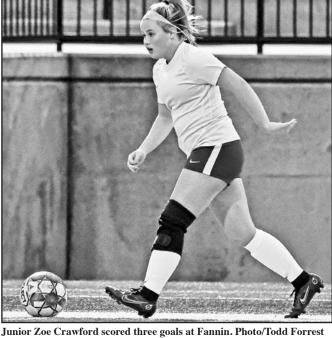
for the Panthers.

corner-kick assist in the 58th via recorded four saves in the win. Union struck first in the the deficit in half. Panthers 3, Dawson second minute when Gregory's

Bohm's free-kick made

Joel Mendoza, added one assist it 2-0 in the 19th, bending the shot inside the right post from Despite getting out-shot 26 yards out. Dawson County 14-10 by the Tigers, Union's answered in the 31st minute, senior goalkeeper Trent Baker sending a left-footed shot into the net from 30 yards away to slice

County 2 - Union County held cross into the box resulted in the break when Bohm launched a four goals and turning a 1-1 tie on following a 3-1 halftime Solario's shot off the keeper's lengthy pass toward the Dawson into a 5-1 drubbing on advantage behind goals from Bo-right leg that found the back-left goal, allowing Walker to gather Feb. 21 in Blue Ridge.



possession just outside the box before blowing past his defender and slipping the shot past an attacking keeper.

The Tigers added a late goal in the waning seconds to bring the final tally to 3-2. On the restart, sophomore Zuriel Mancillas booted a shot toward the Dawson County goal as time

Panthers 5, Fannin County 1 - Union blew things Union countered before open in the second half, scoring

Walker scored the first of

his two goals in the 11th minute, before capping the game's scoring in the 74th via a feed from Mancillas. Mancillas, who collected

two assists, added a goal in the 69th courtesy of Kooper Ashcraft's second helper.

Solario notched one assist. Bohms and Nick Depalma tacked on unassisted goals.

County 0 - The Lady Rebels on Thursday, March 2, where the proved no match for the Lady Lady Panthers are rewarded with into a 5-1 drubbing on Tuesday, Panthers as both squads entered a trip to fourth-ranked Athens shorthanded with their respec- Academy at 5:30 p.m.

tive basketball teams advancing

Zoe Crawford and Italia Salazar each recorded a hat trick as Union County scored five goals after halftime.

Two of Crawford's goals came in the first 25 minutes, then a feed from Adison Meeker to Salazar sent Union into the break up 3-0. Kaylee Helton found

Crawford for a 4-0 score in the

49th. Meeker made it 5-0 two minutes later, then Salazar added her second goal in the 64th. Salazar's hat trick came via an unassisted goal in the 72nd

minute. Naomi Gelinas scored in Lady Panthers 1, No. 3 Dawson County 1 - Union County welcomed its basketball players back to the pitch and responded by playing AAA's third-ranked team to an 80-

Union's lone score came via freshman Kennedy Daniel's first high school goal - a secondhalf equalizer after Dawson led most of the night.

Lady Panthers 0, No. 5 White County 3 - Union County yielded three second half goals to the fifth-ranked Warriors on Friday, Feb. 24 in Blairsville.

Up next: Both Union Lady Panthers 8, Fannin clubs begin Region 8-AA play

### Baseball: Panthers drop all three last week; reinforcements on the way from the hardwood

By Todd Forrest **Sports Editor** sports@nganews.com

Jasper - The Panthers (0-8) were dealt three shutouts away from home, suffering a 10-0 loss at Pickens followed by two neutral-site losses to Woodland and Hampton by scores of 8-0 and 7-0, respectively.

Union County hosts Dawson County at 5 p.m. on March 1. The Panthers welcome rival Fannin County on March 3 - varsity action gets underway after the 4 p.m. JV contest. Panthers 0, Hampton 7 -

With the conclusion of basketball on Friday night, sophomores Hayden Hughes and Kaden Combs moved outdoors during Saturday's finale of last weekend's Pickens tournament.

Hughes went 1 for 3 in his diamond debut; Combs finished 0 for 3 with a pair of ground-

The Hornets scored two in the first, three in the fourth and two in the sixth while limiting the Panthers to only three hits in the

Maddox Patton and Holton Fleming turned in a 1-for-3 day for Union County. Will Duncan and Bo Brown added two walks apiece.

The Panthers stranded a pair in scoring position during the bottom of the first when Patton and Hughes both singled and Duncan drew a free pass. Brown walked in the second and Fleming reached via a third-inning single - his team's final hit of the game. Duncan walked in the

sixth; later, Eli Sosensky drew a hit by a pitch and Brown earned a base on balls in the seventh.

Gunnar Akins worked 3 1/3 innings on the bump, allowing six hits, four earned and three walks while fanning four. Fleming surrendered five hits, one



earned run, two walks and struck out two in 1 2/3 innings.

Brayden Sweat went 1 1/3, walked one and recorded three

Panthers 0, Woodland **8 -** The Wolfpack got four in the fifth and two in the sixth to put Union County away on Friday, Eli Gwynn went 2 for 2

with a pair of doubles and a walk. Patton and Mayo Collins-Spiva each went 1 for 3; Hunter Fleming stole a base. Patton tossed three in-

nings, allowing three hits, three walks and two earned runs while striking out three. Gwynn allowed eight hits and six earned over three frames; Duncan fanned two during a 32-pitch scoreless seventh. Union County put two

aboard to begin the fifth when Gwynn doubled and Collins-Spiva singled. Gwynn and Akins each walked with one away in the seventh.

Panthers 0, Pickens 10 -

Feb. 21 contest early courtesy of a 5-spot in the bottom of the

Sosensky, Duncan and Hunter Fleming notched one single apiece. Patton added a double and Akins tripled. Sweat worked a two-out walk in the sixth. Holton Fleming swiped his first bag of the year.

Union left the bases juiced in the first after Patton doubled, Hunter Fleming walked and Connor Swanson was hit by a pitch. The Panthers stranded another runner in scoring position in the second following Akins' two-out triple. Duncan and Hunter Flem-

ing reached on back-to-back singles in the third. During the fifth, Sosensky singled to left field and Duncan followed with a base on balls.

Akins allowed six hits, four earned runs and three runs while striking out five over 3 2/3 innings. Duncan gave up three hits and four earned in 1 1/3; Gwynn tossed 2/3 of an inning, The Dragons ended the Tuesday, surrendering two hits and a run.



The 12U girls won the District basketball championship at White County. Coaches: Megan Henry and Megan Brown. Players: Kamryn Brown, Bristol Davis, Lennon Ellis, Scout Henry, Mya Jordan, Kinsley Kendrick



The 10U boys placed second and are coached by Krista Fox and assistants Jack Lance and Tim Mason. Players: Abel Bass. Bentley Burgess, Parker Dillinger, Sawyer Fox, Zayne Helton, Ethan Liberatore, Adrian Mason Jacob Nichols, Coltyn Sandler. Asher Wentland is not pictured. *The 12U boys team will be featured next week.*