

Sports

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Baenninger's game winner lifts Panthers over Rabun

Union improves to .500 with wins over Rabun and Washington Wilkes following loss at Riverside

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On the heels of its worst offensive performance of the season at Riverside Military Academy on Tuesday, Union County responded with its highest scoring output of the season during a thrilling 77-74 victory over Rabun County on Friday.

On Saturday, the Panthers showed no signs of a hangover as they traveled to Washington Wilkes and picked up a 64-51 victory, improving their season record to 8-8 overall and 4-1 in Region 8-AA.

With Social Circle (7-8, 1-2) coming to town on Saturday for Union's only region contest of the week, the Panthers and Riverside are tied for first as the only two remaining teams in 8-AA with just one loss.

On Tuesday, Union will visit rival Fannin County (7-7), looking to even the series after the Rebels knocked off the Panthers in Blairsville, last month.

**Panthers 77
Rabun County 74**

Lawson Baenninger posted a career high 35 points but no points were as important as numbers 34 and 35.

After rallying from a 10-point deficit with under 5 minutes to play, the Panthers took a 73-71 lead off a 3-point play by sophomore Crawford Colwell with 29 seconds left in the game.

With just under 16 seconds remaining, Rabun's deadly sharpshooter Matthew Addis nailed an NBA-range 3-pointer to put his Wildcats back on top 74-73.

With a timeout left in his pocket, Union County Head Coach Casey Jones decided to let his team play out the final seconds, and that decision paid off.

Baenninger received the



Lawson Baenninger connects on the game-winning jumper with less than 5 seconds remaining in the game. The Union County junior finished with a career high 35 points in the win. Photo/Todd Forrest

ball just outside the foul line, where he pulled up and hit the go-ahead jumper with less than 5 seconds to go.

"We had a timeout left but we had been playing well so Coach decided to let us

play," Baenninger said of his team's final offensive series. "We came down and it worked out. I trust everybody on my team, but yeah, I wanted the ball in my hands, and it worked out for the best."

"I knew we had the timeout in our pockets but when Lawson (Baenninger) got the ball, I felt pretty good," Coach Jones said. "If he got into trouble, I would have used the timeout."



Sophomore Crawford Colwell with two of his 7 fourth quarter points. He would finish with a career-high 25. Photo/Todd Forrest

With 4.3 seconds to work with, Rabun attempted a full-court inbounds pass that sailed over everyone and out-of-bounds. The Panthers took possession and the Wildcats immediately fouled senior Chase Shook, who calmly stepped to the line and hit 2-of-2.

With time running out, Addis attempted to quickly dribble up court, but he lost control of the ball at midcourt and Shook preserved the win by diving on the loose ball.

Union trailed 31-30 at the half and the third quarter saw Crawford Colwell score 12 points on 6-for-7 shooting at the line. He would go on to record a career-high 25 points with 19 coming in the second half.

Baenninger added 8 points in the period as the duo

combined for all 20 of their team's points.

However, Rabun shot the lights out in the third frame and outscored Union 26-20 for a 57-50 Wildcat advantage entering the fourth.

Sophomore Patrick Baggett connected on three treys for the Panthers, with his third coming in response to a Rabun try to open the fourth quarter.

The Wildcats would extend their lead back to 10 at 63-53 at the 6:16 mark but sophomore Candler Colwell went 2-of-2 at the line to bring Union within eight at 63-55, with 6 minutes left.

Crawford Colwell made it a 65-57 game with a layup at the 5:40 mark, but Rabun answered with a deuce.

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Lady Panthers rebound from Rabun loss with win at Wilkes

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The Lady Panthers broke even on the week after going to Washington Wilkes on Saturday and picking up a 41-26 Region 8-AA victory.

Union County will enter Tuesday's contest with rival Fannin County with a 9-6 record. The Lady Panthers will return to Region action on Saturday with a 3-1 record when they host Social Circle.

The one loss in Region 8-AA came last Friday night to Rabun, 57-34 after Union County was unable to keep up with Rabun's fast-paced pressure defense for four quarters.

Things only got worse for the Lady Panthers when leading scorer Bailey Daniel fouled out in the third quarter. She was later joined by fellow starters Kim Coyne and Ashley Fair.

**Lady Panthers 41
Washington Wilkes 26**

Washington - The Lady Panthers jumped out to a commanding 11-3 lead after one and continued to pull away at 27-14 entering the break.

The Lady Tigers remained within striking distance after outscoring Union 8-4 in the third quarter, but the Lady Panthers closed out the home team with a 10-4 fourth quarter.

In the final frame, Union hit 7-of-11 free throws to pull away from Washington Wilkes.

Senior Layne Colwell led the way with 10 points on 3-of-4 shooting from the line in the fourth quarter and sophomore Jillian Lawn added 8 points with a 2-for-2 trip to the line in the final period.

Senior Kim Coyne scored 6 points before fouling out, junior Ashley Fair added 6 points, and senior Stephanie Busse also chipped in 6 points.

Sophomore Bailey Daniel scored 5 points.

Leading the way in the



Senior Stephanie Busse (35) and junior Ashley Fair make life difficult in the paint for Rabun in the early going. Photo/Todd Forrest

rebounds category was Busse with 10 and Layne Colwell with nine.

Daniel, Coyne, and Fair finished with 4 boards a piece, and Lawn grabbed 3 boards.

Daniel and Layne Colwell finished with 2 assists each. Coyne, Fair, and Lawn had one each.

Defensively, Fair was tops on the team with 6 steals. Coyne finished with 5 steals and Daniel had four.

Busse blocked two shots and Daniel rejected one shot.

**Lady Panthers 34
Rabun County 37**

With under a minute to play in the first half, Union trailed by one at 19-18 but Rabun scored six points in the

final 44 seconds for its largest lead of the game at the half, 25-19.

Coyne drove for two early in the third to get her Lady Panthers within four at 25-21, but that's as close as Union would get.

The Lady Cats used a 12-3 run for a 37-24 with 3:02 left in the third quarter.

During the Rabun County run, Daniel, who was leading the team with 7 points, fouled out at the 3:07 mark of the third.

Busse hit a pair of free throws at the 2-minute mark, but 57 seconds later, Coyne recorded her fifth foul, taking her 6 points to the bench.

After Coyne fouled out, the Lady Cats immediately went on an 8-1 run over the



Senior Kim Coyne drives for two of her six points vs Rabun County. She would also finish with six points in the win over Washington Wilkes. Photo/Todd Forrest

final 63 seconds of the third for a commanding 45-27 lead entering the fourth quarter.

Layne Colwell went 4-of-4 at the line in the final frame to finish with a team-high 10 points.

Sophomore Grace Wishmeyer went 1-of-2 at the line in the fourth for a total of 4 points.

With 4:05 remaining, Fair became the third Union starter to pick up her fifth foul.

Busse added a basket on an offensive rebound and a putback with 3:57 to play. The senior center finished with 6 points.

Lawn hit a second quarter try to finish the contest with 3 points.



Senior Layne Colwell hits a free throw vs Rabun. She was the leading scorer with 10 in both games last week. Photo/Todd Forrest