

Sports

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Panthers returning to State Tournament after five-year hiatus

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The Panthers are going back to State for the first time since the 2008-09 campaign and 15th appearance overall.

To make it taste even sweeter, Union County (15-12) dished out some long overdue revenge to Washington-Wilkes, 65-58.

The Tigers broke the heart of Union County and all of Panther nation last year when they pulled off a triple-overtime miracle to send Union's boys to the house.

Last month, Wilkes stormed back to defeat the Panthers in Blairsville, making it appear that they simply had Union's number.

However, that wasn't the case last week when the Panthers overcame a slow start to race past the Tigers during crunch time.

In the next round, Union was routed 75-41 by 7th ranked Jefferson thanks to a 26-0 Dragon run that spanned the second and third quarters.

On Monday, Union played Rabun County to determine the No. 3 and No. 4 spots in this weekend's Class AA State Tournament.

Since their last appearance, the Panthers have seen three coaches and even a 20-loss season.

Ironically, Union also lost 20 games during the season they last reached State, when the Panthers upset No. 1 seed Jefferson to secure a spot in the Top four. But before last place Union could shock Jefferson, they needed a miracle at Fannin County.

Trailing by a point, senior guard Brad Beise nailed a 26-footer at the buzzer and Union survived the play-in game, earning a shot at



Junior Kyle Hamby scored eight of Union's 15 first half points against Jefferson in the 8-AA Region semi-final. Photo/Todd Forrest

the Dragons where Union ended a six-year drought from State. With a winning record secured and a State playoff appearance guaranteed, the Panthers can claim 2013-14 as their most successful season since 2002-03 - the last time Union had both a winning record and reached State.

Awaiting the Panthers on Saturday is either a visit to Westminster or a trip to 12th ranked Greater Atlanta Christian, and that ranking isn't for Class AA or even Georgia. They are the 12th ranked team in the entire nation. The Spartans are currently sporting an undefeated record and have been the No. 1 ranked team in the state all year.

For results from Monday night's consolation game and Union's State schedule, you can

**Panthers 41
Jefferson 75**

Tiger - A trey by Kyle Hamby to open the game was the Panthers' only lead of the night.

Despite Hamby putting up 8 points in the first 8 minutes, Union still trailed 21-11 after a quarter.

Junior Thomas Danek scored in the paint with 6:54 before the half, then added two more on a put back 28 seconds later to bring Union within eight.

Unfortunately the next 26 points belonged to Jefferson and the top team in 8-AA led 45-15 at the break. They stretched the lead to 49-18 before Hamby heated up again.

The junior guard scored 7 points in the third to keep the



Junior Matthew Wasko (far left) looks on as sophomores Andrew Brown (center) and Chase Shook pursue a loose ball during the second half of the Jefferson game. Photo/Todd Forrest

Dragons from extending their lead beyond 31 points. Hunter Hughes would also chip in 7 points in the quarter but it wasn't enough to prevent the mercy rule from kicking in to start the fourth.

"I told the guys that Jefferson is ranked 7th and the defending Region Champ for a reason," Coach Casey Jones said. "You know that they are going to come out ready to play in a region semi-final game."

Hamby led Union with 15 points on 3-of-6 shooting from downtown. Hughes had 7 points, going 4-for-4 at the line with a trey and 3 assists. Tyler Odom scored 5 points with 3 boards, 2 assists, and a steal. Union's big men scored five each. Danek and Schuette both grabbed two boards and Schuette blocked a shot. Dylan Coyne and Lake Arnick had 2 points each and Lawson Baenninger added a free throw.

But the day wasn't a completely sour one. Junior post Ralston Drake returned to the court for the first time in 22 days after injuring his ankle.

**Panthers 65
Washington-Wilkes 58**

Tiger - Odom scored a team high 24 points, including 10 straight to open the third quarter to turn a 31-25 hole into a 47-43 advantage to start the fourth.

The Tigers (17-9) rallied to knot it up 56-56 at the midway point of the fourth but the next four points went to the Panthers.

Leading 60-56 with 1:00 to play, Union hit five of six free throws to seal the deal and give

Washington-Wilkes a head start on planning a nice banquet for both of its basketball teams.

Coyne scored 14 points, Hamby had 11, Hughes added 10, Chase Shook had 4 points and Schuette scored 2 points.

Tiger sophomore DeAndre Harris scored a game high 26 points, including the game tying bucket at 56-56. However, Coach

Jones turned to Coyne and a box-and-1 defense to take Washington-Wilkes' two-sport star out of the offensive equation.

"Once we went box-and-1 on them, they never really adjusted and I'm not even real sure they figured out what was going on," Coach Jones said. "They are so used to him getting the ball that they didn't know what to do."

Local 12 year-old qualifies for State Swimming Championships

Young Harris resident, Brendan Bowman is off to the 2014 State 14&U Short Course Championships to be held at the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center, Feb. 21-23. Bowman, who is a member of the Blairsville-based North Georgia Rapids, recently qualified in 2 events: the 50 yard Freestyle and the 50 yard Breaststroke.

"I am so excited to have qualified for the State Meet. This is all pretty new to me, as I have only been swimming about a year and a half. I love this sport, and I have enjoyed training to get to this point," said Bowman. Coach Barry Gay is the coach of the Rapids and has been instrumental in teaching him the fundamentals of the sport during that time. A student at the Georgia Cyber Academy, Bowman travels to Daytona Beach often to see family. While in Daytona, he trains with the Daytona Beach Speed, coached by Olympian Ryan Lochte's dad and sister, Steve and Kristen Lochte.

Sports are a way of life in the Bowman household, as his mom, Lori Carroll-Bowman, attended the University of Florida on a track scholarship and his dad, Greg Bowman, played football and baseball at



Brendan Bowman
Yale University. "My mom trained at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, and I would love to do that as well, someday," said Bowman. "Coach Gay told me that if I continue to train hard and perfect my strokes that I can go far," Bowman continued.

All swimmers at the the 2014 Georgia 14&U Short Course Championships must be registered with USA Swimming and Georgia Swimming and must have achieved the required qualifying time standard in each event, since Feb. 22, 2013.



Junior Tyler Odom was named 2nd Team All-Region and sparked Union's comeback during their first round win. Photos/Todd Forrest



First Team All Region: Senior forward Dylan Coyne

Lady Panthers fall in Semis; on the road again to open State

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The good news: Union County is going to the State Tournament for the sixth time in seven years. The bad news: they were eliminated in the semi finals for the fourth consecutive season.

As expected, the Lady Panthers (16-9), handled Oglethorpe County 54-31 last Monday evening to secure a berth in Class AA's field of 32.

However, winter weather delayed the tournament 5 days and Union County was unable to thaw before the weekend. Jefferson held Union to a season-low 25 points - Union's lowest postseason scoring total since 2006.

On Monday, Union faced Greene County (who fell 50-43 to Rabun in their semi-final contest) to determine the No. 3 and No. 4 seeds from Region 8-AA. On Saturday, Feb. 22nd the Lady Panthers will visit the winner of a clash between superpowers: Greater Atlanta Christian vs Wesleyan. Regardless of the opponent, the Union will be competing in its 16th State Tournament and their streak of three consecutive appearances is the longest in school history since 1974.

For results from Day 3 of the 8-AA Tournament and Union's State Tournament foe, visit www.nganews.com

**Lady Panthers 25
Jefferson 38**

Tiger - The Jefferson defense put the Lady Panthers on lockdown during the second half of the Region 8-AA Semi Final contest last Saturday at Rabun County High School, holding Union to nine second half points in a 38-25 Jefferson win.

In the Lady Panthers' two regular season wins over Union County, Jefferson was able to limit the Lady Panthers to an anemic 30.5 points per game. On Saturday, Union found itself on pace for another scoring output in the low-30's as they trailed 25-16 at the break.

Still clinging to a 9-point deficit at 27-18, senior Lauren Zollinger hit a corner jumper to



Junior Ariel Maurer (10) blocks a Jefferson shot. Photo/Todd Forrest



Madison Rich (21) & Lisa Nalaschi



Senior guard Lauren Zollinger

bring Union within seven at 27-20 with 3:41 to play in the third quarter.

That would be the final basket for the Lady Panthers in the contest. A lid was placed over the basket during a drought that spanned 11:41 where Union was limited to just five free throws (on six attempts), and the Lady Dragons opened up a 14-point lead with just over 4 minutes to play, during an 11-3 run to close out the Lady Panthers.

For the contest, Jefferson harassed the Union shooters into 6-of-37 (16%) shooting and 3-for-16 (19%) from long distance.

Following Zollinger's pull up jumper, junior Lisa Nalaschi hit 2-of-2 from the line, bringing Union to within five at 27-22

with just under a minute left in the third, capping a 6-0 spurt that erased an 11-point Lady Dragon advantage earlier in the quarter.

However, just 12 seconds after Nalaschi's perfect trip to the stripe, Jefferson nailed a trey from the wing, sticking a dagger into Union's comeback hopes.

Clinging to life, down 30-22, the Lady Panthers saw their spot in the Region Championship game evaporate when Jefferson choked Union with a 6-0 run to start the fourth, and more importantly burning almost 4 minutes off the clock in the process.

Junior Kaitlyn Day hit 1-of-2 at the line with 2:43 remaining for the Lady Panthers' first point of the final frame. Down 36-23, Brooke Maddox



Sophomore Layne Colwell dribble-penetrates. Photo/Todd Forrest

knocked down 2-of-2 with 1:29 to play for the final Union points of the game.

Nearly 2 minutes into the contest, Day connected on a jumper for Union's first and only lead. Jefferson responded with 10 unanswered before Maddox nailed a trey with 1:22 to play in the first.

In an early sign of things to come, Maddox's three was countered 16 seconds later by a Jefferson trey, their third of the first quarter. After one Jefferson was on top 13-5.

The Lady Dragons extended their lead to 19-7 in the second quarter as free throw shooting accounted for 10 of Jefferson's 12 second quarter points. A deadly accurate 12-for-12 performance from the line in the first half compared to Union's three freebies and three treys, accounted for the Lady Dragons' 25-16 halftime edge.

Maddox led Union with 9 points on a trey and 4-of-4 shooting from the stripe. She included 4 steals, 3 assists, and a block to her box score. Nalaschi snagged 6 boards, recorded a steal and also went 4-of-4 at the line for all of her 4 points. Layne Colwell had a trey and a free throw in the second quarter to give her 4 points, 3 rebounds, and 3 steals for the game.

Meanwhile, Day and Zollinger were the focal point of Jefferson's smothering defensive

**Lady Panthers 54
Oglethorpe County 31**

Tiger - The Lady Panthers raced out to a 13-0 advantage to take control just 5 minutes into the game, but were unable to put the Lady Patriots away until the third quarter.

Oglethorpe managed to weather the storm and outscore Union 11-10 in the second quarter.

With a 27-16 halftime advantage, the Lady Panthers used a 15-7 third and a 12-8 fourth quarter to earn Union's three seniors at least three more games.

Maddox led the charge with 15 points, 8 assists, and 6 steals. Nalaschi poured a double-double: 12 points and 10 boards. Day shot 5-of-9, going 2-of-5 from distance for 12 points. Rich had 5 points, 5 rebounds, and 3 assists. Maurer scored 4 points, grabbed 8 boards, and denied 5 shot attempts.

Colwell finished with 2 points and 3 boards, meanwhile Kim Coyne and Allie Stroman scored 2 points each.

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Dizzy Dean - "It aint braggin if you can back it up."