

Panther bench sparks win over Polk

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Hiwassee - Both offenses took an extra day of Christmas break last Thursday in Union's 39-29 victory over Polk County, Tenn.

The only one who missed that memo was Zach Odom, as the senior scored nine of his 20 points during a 13-3 Panther run in the final 7:11.

Despite shooting just 16 percent (5-31) from 3-point range for the game, Union opened up a 19-11 lead early in the second quarter until Polk stormed back to go ahead 23-21. A free throw by Dylan Coyne and consecutive buckets by Hunter Hughes put Union back on top 26-23 entering the fourth.

"I don't think the long lay off had anything to do with our shooting," Coach David Tucker said. "We've just got to get out of second guessing ourselves. I told them, if you're open, shoot it."

Odom went to work in the fourth after Polk knotted things up at 26-26. The Panther guard scored 9 in a row, giving Union a 35-29 advantage with 1:21 to play. Odom's barrage began with a free-throw line jumper, followed by a corner jumper with 5:13 left. Two minutes later, Odom drove the lane for a deuce, before polishing off the Wildcats by nailing a turnaround from the corner, and a free throw at the 1:21 mark.



Zach Odom drives the lane for two of his 20 points in Union County's win over Polk County, Tenn. Photo/Lowell Nicholson.

Rhett McCombs sealed the win by going 4-for-4 at the line in the final 34 seconds.

"We'll live to see another day," Coach Tucker said. "When you get into one of these tournaments, I feel like if you can win one game it's a success, since we're getting ready for the Region Tournament." McCombs, who was battling an illness finished with 10 points, 4 steals, and 3 assists. At one moment during the second half, Coach Tucker sat Odom and McCombs and went with the sophomore duo of Hughes and Kyle Hamby in the backcourt. Union trailed 23-21 when Tucker went to his bench,

and when his two senior guards returned, Union was leading 26-23 and Odom ripped the Wildcats for 9 straight points.

"They hadn't really been sat out like that and I tried to jar them a little bit," Coach Tucker said about his senior guards. "Those are two highly competitive boys and I don't know if it made the difference or not. But Hunter (Hughes) and Kyle (Hamby) both came in and gave us a spark and did a good job."

Hughes added 4 points, and C.J. Byers had two.

Coyne scored 3 points and grabbed 10 boards in the win.

Lady Panthers pull away from Polk

By Todd Forrest
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Hiwassee - Lauren Zollinger put up 24 points in Union's opening round victory over Polk County, Tenn. on Thursday, giving the junior five 20-point games on the season.

The Lady Panthers trailed for most of the first quarter, as Zollinger scored all 7 Lady Panther points in the opening frame. The Union guard tied things up at 7-7 with a turnaround in the paint during the final seconds of the quarter.

Hannah Hughes' corner trey sparked an 8-0 Lady Panther run to open the second quarter. Hughes' shot was followed by two from Carly Adams and a 3-pointer from Zollinger to open up a 15-7 lead with 5:50 to play in the half. Polk responded with a 9-0 run to regain a slight lead but consecutive baskets by Jeanelle Arnold put Union on top. Another trey from Zollinger with 32 seconds left allowed Union to take a 22-20 advantage into the break.

Buckets from Arnold and Adams kept Union ahead early in the third but a 3-point play from Brooke Maddox allowed Union to open a 32-26 lead with 48 second left in the third. The Lady Wild Kittens nailed a trey but a 3-point play from Zollinger kept Union's 6-point lead safe entering the fourth.



Lauren Zollinger lays in two of her 24 points vs Polk County, Tenn. in the Battle of the States. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

A driving lay up by Zollinger and a free throw by Hughes gave the Lady Panthers a 38-29 advantage, less than a minute into the final period. Zollinger continued to penetrate into the lane and scored a pair of buckets, making it a 42-32 game with 5:42 to play. A trey from Madison Rich put the finishing touches on Union's win with 4:20 left. Arnold hit a late free throw before fouling out with a minute left. Ariel Maurer added 2 points and Adams hit a pair from the line in the final moments.

"We're starting to get

better," Coach David Tucker said. "Every win is a good win and we're in good shape. Maybe we've finally realized what we're supposed to be doing."

Zollinger had 2 assists to go along with a game-high 24 points.

Arnold scored 8 points, hauled in 4 boards, and dished off 2 assists. Adams had 6 points and 2 assists, Hughes scored 4, Maddox had 3 points and 3 steals, Maurer added 2 points and 4 boards, while Shawna Brown led the way with 9 rebounds.

Panther comeback efforts fall short

By Todd Forrest
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Hiwassee - Union County's undefeated season came to an end at the hands of the Murphy Bulldogs by a 73-68 score on Friday night thanks to a 12-2 Bulldog run that stretched Murphy's lead to 64-44 with 6:40 to play.

Trailing by 20, the Panthers came to life, sparked by 5 points from sophomore guard Hunter Hughes, thus turning a 20-point rout into a 3-point ball game with 2:05 remaining.

Seven different Panthers scored in the fourth quarter but unfortunately three points was as close as Union could get as Murphy cashed in off a Panther turnover with 1:20 left, making it a 69-64 game.

A free throw from Zach Odom pulled Union back within four but the Panthers were unable to get any closer. Two Bulldog free throws with 22 seconds remaining gave Murphy a 73-66 advantage and handed the Panthers their first blemish of the 2012-13 season.

"Sometimes your shots just don't fall," Coach David Tucker said. "We stayed after it though and never gave up and as long as we play hard and hustle, I don't have any trouble."

Murphy came out firing on all cylinders and put up 19



C.J. Byers awaits a pass as he makes his move to the basket during the second half vs Murphy. Photo/Todd Forrest

points in the opening frame, the most Union has allowed in a quarter all season. Trailing 19-13 late in the first, Dylan Coyne, and Thomas Danek kept Union County within striking distance.

An old fashioned 3-point play from Odom pulled Union within a point early in the second quarter, but the Bulldogs outscored Union 25-15 to take a 44-33 lead into the locker room.

Five straight points from Odom to open the third made it a six-point game but again, Murphy pulled away with a 13-6 run that put Union in a 13-point void at 57-44 entering

the fourth quarter.

"I would like say that I would have done this differently, or done that differently but Murphy is a good team," Coach Tucker said. "They wore us out over the summer so I thought we played pretty well."

Odom finished with a career-high 27 points to go along with 3 steals. Rhett McCombs added 16 points. James Rowe, Hughes, and Danek finished with 5 points, Tyler Odom scored 4 points and grabbed 7 boards. C.J. Byers scored 4 points and Coyne finished with 2 points, 7 boards, 4 steals, and a blocked shot.

Union Swim Team captures first win

By Todd Forrest
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Murphy, NC - The Union County Swim Team picked up its first team victory of the season in Murphy, NC.

The Boys 200-Yard Medley Relay went to Union with a time of 2:03.14. Tanner Gay, Joseph Mancuso, Austin Norton, and Brennan Wilkes held off second place Murphy and third place Andrews in the win.

Norton would pick up first place in the Boys 200-Yard Freestyle.

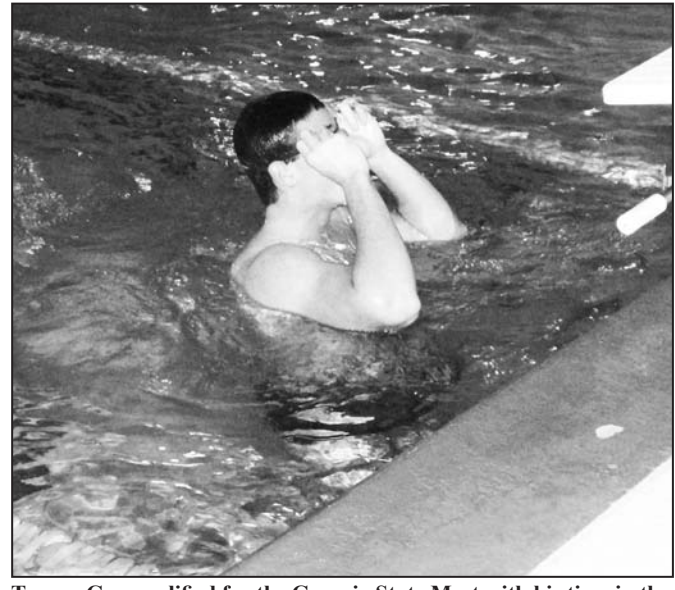
In Event Seven, the Girls 50-Yard Freestyle, Union County's Anna Knight and Nicole Gautieri picked up first and second place, respectively. Knight finished with a time of 27:10 and Gautieri in 27:29.

Gay and Wilkes did the same in the Boys 50-Yard Freestyle. Gay paced the field with a time of 23:48, while Wilkes clocked in at 25:65. Norton finished fifth with a time of 28:45

Through the first eight events, Union County held a combined lead of 63-28 over second place Murphy.

Union's men led 36-22 over Murphy and Union's women were in second, one point behind Hayesville at 28-27.

In Event 11, the Girls 100-Yard Freestyle Knight and Gautieri were once again atop



Tanner Gay qualified for the Georgia State Meet with his time in the 50-Yard Freestyle. Photo/Todd Forrest

the standings with Ansley Garrison coming in fourth place.

In the Girls 200-Yard Freestyle Relay Union County captured two of the top four spots with Knight, Gautieri, Garrison, and Lindsey McCann picking up first place. The team of Azalieg Harkins, Raphaela Aleman, Amelia Turner, and Amy Brumley came in fourth place.

The quartet of Gay, Mancuso, Norton, and Wilkes was up to their old tricks in the Boys 200-Yard Freestyle Relay capturing first place, 17 seconds ahead of second place Murphy.

Event 17, the Girls 100-Yard Backstroke, McCann finished second and Bauman

came in fourth. Brumley came in second in the Girls 100-Yard Breaststroke, while Lacey Hedger came in fourth place.

Gay cruised to a first place finish in the Boys 100-Yard Breaststroke, 12 seconds ahead of second place. Mancuso was fourth and Wilkes fifth for the Panthers.

At the end of the day, Union County finished first with a combined team score of 144 points. Murphy was second with 100, Hayesville third with 72, and Andrews fourth at 47 points.

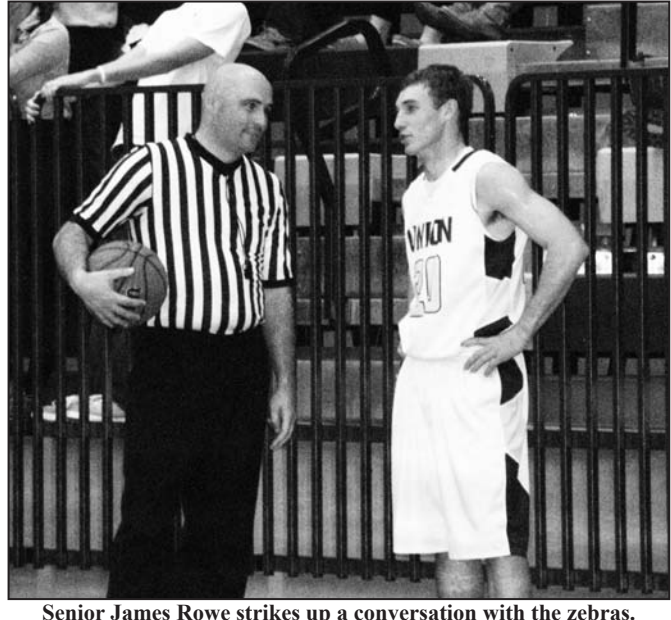
The men and women both took home first place and Gay qualified for the Georgia State Meet with a time of 23:48 in the 50-Yard Freestyle.

Sights from the first half of the basketball season

Photos by Todd Forrest



Sophomore Brooke Maddox is all smiles during a Union victory.



Senior James Rowe strikes up a conversation with the zebras.



Shawna being Shawna: Shawna Brown and Madison Rich.



Sophomore guard Hunter Hughes ponders a free throw attempt.

UC Basketball Scoring Leaders

Lady Panthers scoring - with season highs

Zollinger 15.9 ppg, 28 points vs Fannin Co.
Hughes 7.7 ppg, 15 points @ Towns Co.
Arnold 7.1 ppg, 14 points vs Dawson Co.
Maddox 5.2 ppg, 20 points vs Hiwassee Dam, NC
Adams 4.3 ppg, 11 points @ Lumpkin Co.
Brown 4.1 ppg, 8 points vs White Co.
Rich 2.3 ppg, 12 points @ Andrews, NC
Maurer 1.0 ppg, 4 points vs Hiwassee Dam, 9 blocks @ Lumpkin

Panthers scoring - with season highs

McCombs 17.3 ppg, 30 points vs White Co.
Z. Odom 17.1 ppg, 29 points vs Hayesville, NC
Rowe 8.2 ppg, 18 points @ Andrews, NC
Byers 4.3 ppg, 10 points vs Towns Co. and @ Towns Co.
Coyne 3.8 ppg, 9 points @ Towns Co.
Hughes 3.0 ppg, 9 points vs Andrews, NC
T. Odom 2.3 ppg, 9 points vs Andrews, 7 rebounds vs Murphy
Hamby 2.2 ppg, 7 points vs Andrews, NC
Drake 2.1 ppg, 6 points and 7 rebounds vs Andrews, NC
Danek 1.2 ppg, 5 points vs Murphy, NC



The Panthers enter the arena with cheerleaders and Pit Crew.