

Sports

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Lady Panthers conclude perfect week with 25-point win over Towns

Layne Colwell scores 17 in Union's 17-point victory at Lumpkin earlier in the week

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The Union County Lady Panthers got into the win column with a pair of blowout victories over Lumpkin County and Towns County.

Union (2-3) traveled to Dahlonega on Tuesday for a rematch with the same Lumpkin County squad that edged the Lady Panthers 45-40, four days earlier in Blairsville. Senior Layne Colwell led her team with a season-high 17 points while sophomore Bailey Daniel added 15 in Union's 52-35 victory.

On Friday, the Lady Panthers hosted rival Towns County at The Pit in the 2015-16 "Throw-back Game."

Overcoming a sluggish first half that saw Union trail for a 3-minute stretch in the first quarter, the home team was unable to pull away until the second half.

Daniel finished with a game-high 19 points, while snagging 5 boards, dishing off 2 assists, and recording 2 steals. Sophomores Jillian Lawn and Grace Wishmeyer scored 9 points and 8 points, respectively. Lawn also grabbed 4 boards and Wishmeyer snared two.

The game's top performer was senior center Stephanie Busse who hauled in 25 rebounds and blocked 7 shots. She also led the team with 3 assists.

The Lady Indians won't have to wait long for the rematch as the Lady Panthers and Towns County square off this Friday at 7 p.m. in Hiwassee.

**Lady Panthers 52
Lumpkin County 35**

Dahlonega - Layne Colwell was red hot in the first quarter.

The senior knocked down a pair of threes and hit 4-of-5 at the line for 10 of her team's 17 points.

Colwell's outburst, along with a trey from Wishmeyer, a bucket by Daniel, and a pair of



Senior Stephanie Busse (right) wasn't afraid to hit the floor to secure one of her 25 rebounds vs Towns County. Senior Layne Colwell (right) vs Towns County in The Pit. Colwell led the team with 17 points in their win over Lumpkin on Tuesday. Photos by Todd Forrest

free throws from senior Stephanie Busse, gave the Lady Panthers a 17-10 advantage after one period.

And they would never look back.

The second quarter belonged to Daniel, who scored 8 points in the frame to help extend Union's lead to 35-18 at the half.

Lawn and senior Stephanie Busse scored 3 points each, while Wishmeyer and Fair added 2 points each.

The second half saw Union cool off, but the defense kept them firmly in control at 44-28 entering the final frame.

A trey and a deuce from Daniel, and one basket a piece from Layne Colwell and Busse would account for Union's third quarter scoring.

Then, eight points in the fourth quarter was more than enough as the Lady Panthers held Lumpkin to only 7 points.

Layne Colwell knocked down a trey during a 5-point quarter. Busse scored a bucket to give her 9 points for the game and Wishmeyer hit a free throw that gave the sophomore a 6-point game.

Lawn finished with 3 points and Fair added 2 points.

The Lady Panthers were exceptional at the charity stripe, hitting 12-of-14 (86 percent)

Union was without senior forward Kim Coyne due to a shoulder injury suffered vs Dawson.

**Lady Panthers 57
Towns County 32**



Leading 40-30 after three quarters of action in The Pit, the Lady Panthers showed no mercy to their rivals from Towns County and opened the final frame with an 11-0 run that became 17-2 before the final buzzer sounded and prevented Union from doing any further damage.

The 57-32 victory was Union's second win of the year and second-in-a-row. The Lady Panthers also extended their winning streak over Towns to six games - the longest streak in more than 20 years.

However, it was a different story in the first half as Union saw an 8-3 advantage evaporate thanks to an 8-0 Lady Indians run, midway through the opening period.

The home team regained the lead on a steal-and-score by Coyne, who returned to the lineup, still in obvious pain, gave it a go in the rivalry game and was very effective.

Up 13-12 entering the second frame, Towns tied things up at 13-13 but a Daniel trey connected after four offensive rebounds maintained possession for the Lady Panthers.

Less than 30 seconds later, Wishmeyer hit from downtown to stretch the Union lead to 19-13 with 5:15 left in the half. Ninety seconds later, another second chance trey by Daniel made it a 22-15 game.

At the 2:07 mark, Towns battled back to within a point at 22-21 but Daniel closed the half

by hitting 4-of-4 at the line to extend the lead to 26-21 at the break.

The third quarter opened with a putback from Busse and a Wishmeyer three. Layne Colwell hit two at the stripe and Coyne scored on an offensive board to make it a 35-24 game with 3:40 left in the third.

A three from the wing by Lawn and two free throws from Daniel put the Lady Panthers up by 14 at 40-26, but Towns scored the final 4 points of the quarter.

The fourth quarter onslaught began with a corner trey by Fair. A free throw each by Coyne and Daniel was sandwiched around a Daniel layup off a perfectly executed inbound play.

Another trey from Lawn and a 1-for-2 trip to the line by Coyne capped the 11-0 run.

A Lady Indians free throw got the visitors on the board in the fourth quarter but a free throw from Fair, and a Layne Colwell steal-and-score put Union firmly in control at 54-31.

Towns hit another free throw before Busse scored in the paint and Layne Colwell hit 1-of-2 at the stripe to put the finishing touches on a 17-2 quarter and a 57-32 victory.

Layne Colwell had 7 points to go with 5 steals, 4 boards, and 2 assists.

Coyne added 6 points, 3 boards, and 2 steals while Fair had 4 points, 10 rebounds, 2 steals, and a blocked shot. Busse scored 4 points and Maggie Stuart had 2 boards.

Union's free throw percentage was significantly lower than their 86 percent performance at Lumpkin, hitting 14-of-27 (52 percent) from the foul line.

The Lady Panthers hit nine treys vs Towns, two more than the seven they hit at Lumpkin.

Union will visit Lakeview on Tuesday beginning at 6 p.m. The JV teams will be in action at 3:45 and 4:45 p.m.

The JV will tip at 4 and 5:30 p.m. at Towns County on Friday.

Panthers rally from 19-point deficit to knock off Towns by 13 in The Pit

Four days after 29-point loss to Lumpkin, Panthers and Indians go down to the wire in Dahlonega

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For a quarter-and-a-half, it looked as if those in attendance at The Pit on Friday were going to witness something that hasn't happened since Bill Clinton was in the final days of his presidency.

The Panthers (2-3) received quite a scare from the rival Towns County Indians and were on the verge of becoming the first Union County guys team to lose to Towns County since mid-January of the year 2000.

The final score of Union 76, Towns County 63 looks like the Panthers had their way with the Indians, but that was hardly the case.

The Panthers responded from deficits of 17-2, then 24-9 after one quarter, before digging themselves into holes of 31-12 and 34-15 at the 5:14 mark of the second quarter.

From there Union would outscore the Indians 15-6 for the remainder of the half to get within 10 at 40-30 entering the break.

After trailing 54-48 after three, the fourth quarter belonged to the Panthers as they outscored Towns 28-9 thanks to solid free throw shooting down the stretch.

The win ended a three-game losing skid that reached its pinnacle following a 52-51 defeat at Lumpkin on Tuesday.

The loss came on the heels of a brutal 76-58 rout that the Indians laid on the Panthers four days earlier in Blairsville after Union held the lead at halftime.

This time around it was all Lumpkin in the first half, taking a 28-18 lead into the break.

Trailing 38-28 after three quarters, Union mounted a furious rally that saw senior center Chase Shook score 12 of this team-high 23 in the fourth quarter.

Senior Matthew Rich nailed a pair of treys in the final frame, sophomore Patrick Baggett got in on the action, knocking down a trey to cap



Junior Lawson Baenninger (34) led the team with 27 points while sophomore Crawford Colwell (24) had 18 vs Towns. Photo/Todd Forrest off a career-high 10-point performance.

**Panthers 76
Towns County 63**

The Pit opened in 1970 and has been the venue for many classic Union County basketball games.

Some of the greatest moments in Union County basketball history took place in that gym, and when the Panthers or Lady Panthers were on a roll, and that gymnasium, when filled to capacity (and perhaps beyond capacity on some occasions) it was like being in a sardine can that was inside of a microwave oven.

The Pit officially closed its doors to high school basketball following the 2001-02 season but when former player and Coach Alan Ross disciple Casey Jones was named Head Basketball Coach, he reopened The Pit for one night a year.

The first year saw the Panthers take down an overmatched Andrews, NC team.

Last year, Union stunned Hayesville, NC in The Pit in what was one of the more memorable games of the year.

But this year, The Pit hosted one of the great comebacks in Union County basketball history. After losing 35-straight to



the Panthers, it seemed as if the Purple and Gold was inside the heads of the Indians. And with many of the players not even being born when Towns last beat Union in mens basketball, it was if losing to the Panthers was imprinted in the DNA of those who decided to suit up in the Blue and White.

And for Union, beating Towns was a given. Just show up, get the W, move on.

However, this years Indians squad decided to buck the trend and go against the grain.

With an outsider coaching the Indians for the first time in many years, someone who wasn't there for the 35-straight losses proved to be a shot in the arm for this year's Indians team.

It also helps that Towns is fielding the most talented and experienced team in 10 years. They came into The Pit on Friday night and those in attendance got to witness something that was usually a given when Union and Towns got together in The Pit. An instant classic.

The Panthers took the court on Friday and appeared to be sleepwalking for the first 14 minutes of the game.

Maybe they assumed Towns would just roll over and it would be an easy win.

Unfortunately for the Panthers, this Indians team came to



Panthers Head Coach Casey Jones during the late stages of the game when his team is seconds away from an incredible come-from-behind victory. Photo/Todd Forrest

play and came into The Pit and punched the home team square in the jaw, not once but twice. Union County was on the ropes and Towns was on the verge of scoring an early TKO, but midway through the second quarter, Coach Jones called a timeout, calmed his team, and they went on to outscore the Indians 61-29 over the next two-and-a-half quarters.

"During the timeout I told them that we were fine and that we would go on a run eventually," Jones said. "We needed to pick up the intensity on defense because that will lead to buckets, and that's what we did."

Trailing 34-15, the Panthers defense began forcing turnovers that led to layups by Lawson Baenninger and Crawford Colwell, who went on to lead the Panthers with 27 and 18 points, respectively.

With Towns on top 40-26, Union added two baskets in the final minute to trim the lead to 40-30 at the half.

"We may have been down by 10 at halftime but it still felt like we had momentum," Coach Jones said.

In the third, Matthew Rich nailed a pair of treys and Baenninger hit a three to go along with a deuce.

Crawford Colwell led Union with 7 points on 3-of-4

shooting from the line.

That trio sparked the Panthers' to an 18-7 run to open the quarter and Union had its first lead of the game at 48-47 with 1:43 left in the third.

The Indians refused to roll over and countered with a 7-0 run of their own to close the quarter and take a 54-48 advantage into the fourth.

The Panthers opened the quarter on a 14-1 run for a 62-55 lead at the 3:51 mark.

The Indians answered with a 5-2 spurt to get within four at 64-60 with 1:49 to play but free throws by Matthew Rich, Baenninger, and Lance Rich sealed the Panthers' 36th straight win over Towns.

Shook was limited to just 3 points while Matthew Rich had 11 and Lance Rich added 9 points.

You can expect the Indians to be out for revenge when they host the Panthers on Friday, in what should be another intense Union vs Towns game.

The girls tip off at 7 p.m. in Hiwassee on Friday.

As much as we all want Union to win and keep the streak alive, it's great to have our arch-rivals back. When Union and Towns are both competitive, basketball in the mountains doesn't get any better than when those two teams get together on the hardwood.

And there was nothing more nostalgic that watching the Panthers and the Indians go at it in The Pit and revive a rivalry that will give the current generation a taste of what it was like this series once was, and can be again.

**Panthers 51
Lumpkin County 52**

Dahlonega - Shook's 12 fourth quarter points weren't enough to overcome a 10-point deficit as Lumpkin County held on to a 52-51 lead.

Following a 28-point loss to the Indians just four days earlier in Blairsville, where Union led at the end of the first and second quarter, the Panthers went to Dahlonega with nothing to lose and almost pulled the upset.

Lumpkin's Jack Howard hit all 10 of his free throw attempts in the fourth quarter to finish with a game-high 32 points.

The rest of the Indians were a combined 2-for-6 at the line in the final frame.

Crawford Colwell added 6 points for the Panthers while Brown, Mancuso, and Baenninger had 2 points each.

On Tuesday, Union will travel to Lakeview Academy for a non-region contest.

The girls will tip at 6 p.m. with the guys to follow.