

Sports

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Panthers take Warriors to the woodshed behind McCombs' 30

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Union County improved to 6-0 thanks to a season-high 30 points from Rhett McCombs in Union's 72-45 blowout victory over Class AAA's White County (3-2).

The senior guard hit four 3-pointers in the second quarter to give the Panthers a 38-17 lead at the break. Zach Odom scored 10 of his 16 points in the opening quarter as the Panther guards proved to be too much to handle for the Warriors.

The Panthers, who had only trailed a total of 46 seconds in their six games, led wire-to-wire thanks to a 20-9 opening frame that saw McCombs and Zach Odom combine for 17 total points and leave White County in a purple daze that the Warriors were unable to recover from.

McCombs opened the game with a driving lay-up followed by a corner trey from Zach Odom to give the Panthers a 5-0 advantage 95 seconds into the contest. Two free-throws from McCombs gave Union a 7-2 lead before the Warriors got to within two at 7-5 midway through the first quarter. A lay-in by Zach Odom and a trey each from McCombs and CJ Byers allowed Union to open up a 15-5 lead. White would answer with four straight points



Rhett McCombs shakes free from a White County defender before hitting a step-back 3-pointer during his 12-point second quarter last Tuesday. Photo/Todd Forrest

but Zach Odom quickly erased the Warriors' efforts with five straight to close the quarter. The senior guard scored on a driving lay up with 25 seconds left, then took advantage of a Warrior turnover and connected from long distance to put Union ahead 20-9 after one quarter.

The second quarter opened with a lay in by Dylan Coyne before White County momentarily stopped the bleeding with an old fashioned 3-point play. However, three consecutive 3-pointers from McCombs found Union looking at a 31-17 lead with 3:00 to play before the half. A put back by Jacob Rogers, a steal and

score from Zach Odom, and a grey at the buzzer by McCombs gave Union its commanding 38-17 lead at the break.

The Warriors would go to work inside, early in the second half, and White County's size produced two straight buckets but another driving lay-in by McCombs and a corner trey from James Rowe stretched the Panther lead to 43-21. The Warriors rattled off five-in-a-row but a baseline jumper from Coyne and a put back from Byers were topped off by a steal and score from McCombs that resulted in a 3-point play when McCombs sank the free-throw. Coyne would add a free



Nothing comes easy in the paint against Union County as CJ Byers and Dylan Coyne guard the basket in the Panthers victory over White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

throw later in the quarter but McCombs put an exclamation point on the third frame with another steal and score, giving Union a 53-34 advantage after three periods.

Two free throws from Zach Odom and a bucket from McCombs gave Union its largest lead at 57-34 with 6:20 left in the game. A top-of-the-key 3-pointer from Byers and another free throw from Coyne were followed by a steal by Zach Odom that he took the other way for two. Then McCombs became the beneficiary of another Warrior turnover, and added two more to give Union a 65-38 lead. A free-

throw from Byers at the 2:53 mark would be the final points scored by a Panther starter as Union turned to its bench for the remainder of the game.

Kyle Hamby sank two from the stripe at the 1:44 mark and Hunter Hughes hit two more with 1:28 to play. Two more free-throws from Hamby with 10 seconds left put the finishing touches on Union's convincing victory.

The Panther offense has already broken the 70-point plateau twice this season, something Union County only managed once during the entire 2011-12 campaign and twice during its 19-win season in

2010-11.

Once again the Panther backcourt put up some impressive offensive numbers, but Union County Head Coach David Tucker knows it's the defense that has been the catalyst in his team's undefeated start.

"With McCombs and Zach (Odom) applying pressure, and James (Rowe) and Dylan (Coyne) reading the passing lanes, we can be your worst nightmare," Coach Tucker said. "Not everybody likes our style of defense, but I'm telling you, it can drive coaches crazy. Our guys believe in it and that poor bunch of boys (from White County) didn't know what to do. That was a good win for us, I am pleased, and we'll get ready for the next game and just go with it."

McCombs added 5 steals and 2 assists en route to his 30-point outing. Zach Odom finished with 16 points, Byers had 9 points, 7 rebounds, and blocked a shot, Coyne scored 6 points and grabbed 7 boards, and Rowe scored 3 points, with 6 boards and a blocked shot.

Others contributors included, Hamby with 4 points, Rogers with 2 points, and Hughes with 2 points.

Earlier in the day the J.V. Panthers defeated White County 58-46.

Leading the way for Union's J.V. were Hughes with 14 points and Rogers with 13, with Hamby adding 10.

Panthers survive at Lumpkin

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DAHLONEGA - The 6-0 Union County Panthers faced its toughest test of the season on Saturday night and left with a 7-0 record thanks to a 50-44 victory over Lumpkin County (3-5).

The Panthers broke open the 37-34 game by holding the Indians without a point for a six-minute span in the third and fourth quarters before Lumpkin stormed back.

A 3-pointer from Rhett McCombs gave Union a 33-24 edge with 5:54 to play in the third quarter but Lumpkin continued to chip away and made it a 33-30 game just over a minute later.

A Dylan Coyne bucket and two from the line from Zach Odom put Union up 37-30 at the 3:30 mark of the quarter.

The Indians made it a 37-34 game but a 15-footer from Thomas Danek gave Union a 39-34 lead entering the final frame.

Free throws from Zach Odom, James Rowe, and Coyne put Union firmly ahead at 46-34 with 3:20 to play. The Indians, however, stormed back with an 8-0 run in 83 seconds that left Union clinging to a 46-42 lead that had the Lumpkin County faithful reenergized.

"We didn't take care of the basketball during that span," Union County Head Coach David Tucker said. "We made a couple of bad passes and took a bad shot but to come in here and leave with a win is always a good thing."

The Panthers caught a break when they coughed up the basketball and Lumpkin took it the other way for a score, but the basket was waived off for an offensive foul and Union's two-possession lead remained safe.

"I'm glad they made that call because one of their kids grabbed one of our guys and that was a huge call," Coach Tucker said. "The two young officials weren't going to call it but the other one did. It's a win on the road and I'll take it."

Zach Odom was fouled with 51 seconds left and hit the second of two free throws for a 47-42 Panther lead.

After a Lumpkin miss, Coyne sank one-of-two from the stripe to stretch Union's lead to 48-42 with 36 seconds remaining.

An Indian bucket with 29 seconds to go was the last of Lumpkin points for the evening as McCombs sank two from the line with 11 seconds left to secure the win.

The senior guard finished with 21 points, 8 rebounds, 4 steals, and 2 assists. McCombs' backcourt



Rhett McCombs dribbles the final second off the clock as James Rowe looks on during Union's win at Lumpkin. Photo/Todd Forrest



Zach Odom takes it in for a lay up following a steal by Union's senior guard during the second half at Lumpkin. Photo/Todd Forrest

mate, Zach Odom finished with 11 points - 9 coming from the foul line.

Rowe and CJ Byers were both battling foul trouble for most of the evening but still came through for the Panthers during their limited action. Rowe scored 8 points and Byers added 2 points and led the way with 7 boards.

Coyne had four while Ralston Drake and Thomas Danek each added a bucket.

"We had a lot of people that had to play tonight," Coach Tucker said. "They came in and helped us out."

Until the trip to Lumpkin, Union County hadn't seen a game where the opposition was within eight points at anytime during the fourth quarter. But Coach Tucker is proud of how his team responded to a hard fought finish in a hostile environment.

"I like the way we stayed after it and kept our composure," Coach Tucker said. "We had a lot of things go against us but we kept our cool."

Early on you could tell that the Panthers were in for a fight when Lumpkin nailed a 3-pointer 14 seconds into the game. Byers put Union on

the board with an offensive rebound and put-back. Zach Odom's lay-in at the 5:22 mark of the first quarter gave the Panthers a 4-3 lead.

The Indians took a 6-4 lead but a three-point play from McCombs gave Union a 7-6 advantage. A short jumper from Rowe knotted the game at 9-9 before Rowe drilled an open trey from the top-of-the-key for a 12-9 lead and Union never trailed again.

Two consecutive long-range buckets from McCombs put Union in front 18-11. Lumpkin continued to hang around until a Drake put-back and trey from McCombs in the final seconds gave Union a 28-20 lead at the break.

The Panther JV squad knocked off Lumpkin 57-41. Drake led the way with 12 points and Kyle Hamby added 9 points.

Union now turns its attention to a home contest with Lumpkin on Friday before the Panthers go for their 30th straight win over the Towns County Indians on Saturday. The girls tip-off at 7 p.m. on Friday, while the Towns games tip at 6 p.m.

Lady Panthers fall to White in OT

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The Union County Lady Panthers (4-2) came up short 46-45 to Class AAA's White County (4-1) in a wild overtime finish last Tuesday evening.

The dramatic conclusion began when Union spotted the Lady Warriors 10 points and trailed 28-18 with 6:44 to go in the third quarter. The Lady Panther defense would go to work, holding White County scoreless for more than an eight-minute span, allowing Union to take a 29-28 lead early in the fourth quarter. The Lady Warriors responded with consecutive buckets to take a 32-29 lead but a Shawanna Brown trey quickly tied things up at 32-32 with 4:35 to play.

White County regained its 3-point lead thanks to a bucket and a foul but Union answered right back with a trey from Jeanelle Arnold. A put-back basket from Brown tied things back up with 2:57 remaining in the game, but two free throws by the Lady Warriors put the visitors ahead.



Senior Jeanelle Arnold vs White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Trailing by two, Union's Hannah Hughes took a White County turnover and was fouled on her lay up attempt but the call was overruled by the official trailing the play, resulting in the foul being changed to a charge on Hughes, and negating what should have been two Lady Panther free-throws with 1:52 to play. White added another free throw with 71 seconds left, giving the Lady Warriors a 40-37 lead. Union missed a game-tying trey, giving the ball back to White County. A quick Lady Panther foul sent White

to the line where they missed the front-end of a 1-and-1, but an offensive rebound resulted in another trip to the foul line. The Lady Warriors would miss again with 20 seconds remaining setting the stage for Brown.

The Lady Panther senior knocked down a trey from the top-of-the-key, tying the game at 40-40 with seven ticks on the clock. The Warriors last second shot went astray and the game appeared to be headed for overtime.

Not quite. As the buzzer sounded, Union was whistled for a shooting foul. The officials put three-tenths of a second back on the clock and awarded White County two free-throws.

"I asked the ref why they did that, and he told me, 'there is nothing I can do,'" Coach Tucker said. "The quarter should have been over, that's why I told him you don't call that foul."

Luckily, both Lady Warrior free throws were unsuccessful and the game was headed to overtime.

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Lady Panthers respond at Lumpkin

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DAHLONEGA - The Union County Lady Panthers (5-2) laid into Class AAA's Lumpkin County (2-6) on "Old School Night" at the old Lumpkin County High School gymnasium on Saturday.

Union County was coming off a two-game losing skid and decided to take out its frustrations on an over matched Lady Indians squad by the score of 58-32.

Union jumped out to a 13-5 first quarter lead thanks to two treys from Carly Adams and another from Lauren Zollinger. The Lady Panthers continued pulling away in the second quarter thanks to 7 points from Zollinger and 4 points from Hannah Hughes. Union tore off a 10-2 run to close the half with a commanding 29-13 advantage.

Zollinger opened the second half with two consecutive driving lay ups that were followed by a trey from Hughes to give Union 36-15 lead - less than two minutes into the half.

The Lady Indians would take advantage of two old fashioned 3-point plays to narrow the gap to 18 points at 42-24, but three points from Jeanelle Arnold - a free-throw, and a lay-in - in the final 21 seconds of the quarter put Union in the catbird seat at 45-21 entering the fourth.

Two Lumpkin buckets early in the quarter were canceled out by a put back from



Carly Adams drives for two of her 11 points at Lumpkin Co. on Saturday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Shawna Brown, a free throw from Arnold, and two free-throws from Ariel Maurer giving Union a cozy 22-point cushion with 3:30 to play.

The Lady Indians became unraveled late in the game when Lumpkin's head coach was called for a technical foul while arguing a blocking call that sent Kaitlyn Day to the line. The basket counted and Day hit the free-throw to complete the and-1. Day sank both technical free-throws for a five-point play at the 1:20 mark of the game. Madison Rich and Camryn Carter each added a late free throw as Union ran away with their fifth win of the season.

Following two disappointing losses, Union hopes to get back on track after routing the same Lumpkin team that finished within 10 points of



Shawna Brown launches a 3-pointer at Lumpkin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

White County and five points of Dawson County.

"We're starting to put it together," Union County Head Coach David Tucker said. "We've just got to keep practicing, keep working, but winning can take care of a lot of things."

Tucker's Lady Panthers were led by the guard play of Zollinger, Arnold, and Adams. Zollinger posted team-highs with 16 points and 4 assists. Adams finished with a career-high 11 points while hauling in 7 rebounds and 3 steals. Arnold scored 9 points, grabbed 7 boards, and nabbed 3 steals.

"The ones who are handling the ball are starting to learn their roles," Coach Tucker said. "In case anyone hasn't noticed, we're a pretty good ball

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