

Sports

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Lady Panthers make their mark with 49-27 win over Towns

By Todd Forreest
North Georgia News
sports@nghanews.com

Junior Lisa Nalaschi scored a career high 19 points, leading the way in Union County's (7-1) third consecutive win over Towns County.

The junior forward hauled in 9 boards with six coming on the offensive glass, ripping 4 steals and dishing out two assists in the process.

The third straight victory over Towns is Union's longest win streak over the rival during anyone on the current Lady Panther roster's lifetime.

The final outcome of 49-27 is the Lady Panthers' largest margin of victory over Towns since the 2001 Region 8-AA Playoffs when Union took a convincing 50-25 victory over Towns - eventually propelling the Lady Panthers to the Class AA State finals.

However, not even that Union County squad was able to beat Towns three-straight. In fact, Union hasn't been able to claim more than a two-game win streak over Towns since 1994-1995. The Lady Panthers also handed Towns' 15-year Head Coach Jim Melton his first ever three-game skid to Union.

Coach Melton could have also taken out a warrant on Nalaschi and company for larceny with Union racking up 15 steals. The Lady Panthers' defense kept the visitors out of sync all game, forcing turnover after turnover, spearheaded by Union Head Coach David Tucker's patented 1-1-3 pressure defense.

The Lady Panthers turned up the heat and stayed in the face of the Lady Indians for four relentless quarters. When the dust settled, Union had held Towns



Junior Lisa Nalaschi (left) and Brooke Maddox got it done on both ends of the floor against Towns County. Photo/Todd Forreest

to its lowest point total since December 2004 when Jefferson limited them to 25.

Union tallied its highest steal total of the season with Nalaschi and fellow junior Kaitlyn Day leading the way with four thefts each. Two other juniors, Brooke Maddox and Ariel Maurer picked the Lady Indians three times. Senior Madison Rich added another takeaway.

"To go into the Christmas Holidays at 7-1 is unbelievable," Coach Tucker said. "I've been coaching a long time and it's impressive the way this team has come together. They're a joy at practice, it's a joy to be around them, and they just enjoy the game of basketball."

With 1:03 to play in the first quarter, Towns took its final lead of the contest at 10-9 but Union answered with an

8-0 run.

Maddox nailed a runner in the lane putting the Lady Panthers back on top for good.

Rich opened the second quarter with a steal and a lay up then hit a corner jumper 45 seconds later. Nalaschi added a put back with 6:42 to play in the half, forcing a timeout by Towns with Union leading 17-10.

A trey by the Lady Indians was answered with a trey from Rich, followed by a deuce from Maddox putting Union out front 22-13.

Towns rattled off four straight points but Day drove the paint for two then Nalaschi split a pair of free throws for the final point of the half. At the break Union held a 25-17 advantage.

Maddox began the third with a steal and score, opening up a 10-point lead. But once



Junior Kaitlyn Day comes up with a loose ball for one of her four steals during the contest. Photo/Todd Forreest

again, Towns scored on consecutive possessions to trim the Lady Panther lead to six.

Nalaschi went back to work and connected on a jump hook - sparking a 10-1 run. Day hit a jumper and Nalaschi scored off another offensive board.

A Lady Indians free throw was erased by another score on a Day dribble-drive. Nalaschi topped off the run and the quarter with another bucket in the paint - giving Union a commanding 37-22 lead after three.

The Lady Panthers continued to pull away with a 12-5 fourth quarter, kick started by a 15-footer by Day. Less than a minute later she entered the paint again and scored.

Nalaschi connected from downtown with 5:58 remaining and Maddox slashed her way to the basket for two more.

Holding a 46-25 lead, Nalaschi finished off the Lady Indians with another trey and the rout was officially on.

"Lisa (Nalaschi) is a very confident player and the girls have confidence in each other," Coach Tucker said.

Towns added a bucket at the 3:03 mark and that's when Union went to its stall offense. Yet this time, the call didn't come from Coach Tucker as the players made their own play call and proceeded to drain the remaining three minutes off the clock.

"I didn't call for the four-corners (offense), they did," Coach Tucker said. "I wanted to get the other girls into the game but we were able to hold the ball for three minutes. They knew what they were supposed to do in that situation and they did it."

In the scoring column behind Nalaschi was Day with 13 points and 2 assists. Maddox went for 10 points and 3 assists, Rich scored 7 points with 2 boards, Maurer grabbed 12 boards, blocked 4 shots, and dished out 3 assists, and Layne Colwell had 2 rebounds and an assist.

"These girls are not selfish, they like each other, they enjoy playing together and usually that creates wins," Coach Tucker said.

More good news rolled in for the Lady Panthers last week as reigning Region 8-AA Player of the Year Lauren Zollinger has been cleared to practice and hopes to return to the floor on Saturday, Jan. 11th when Union hosts Andrews, NC.

After a week off, the Lady Panthers visit Social Circle on Jan. 17th with a trip to defending Region 8-AA Champion Rabun County looming on Jan. 21st.

Games with the weaker Andrews and Social Circle teams should provide Zollinger and the Lady Panthers with a pair of tune-up games before facing Rabun, Washington-Wilkes, Jefferson, and the heart of the Region schedule.

On Thursday, Dec. 26th the Battle of the States Christmas Tournament tips off at 4 p.m. for the Lady Panthers as they face a former region foe in the form of the Dawson County Lady Tigers.

The meeting is also a rematch from the 2012 Battle of the States Championship Game, which Dawson County won handily.

Win or lose, Union could face Towns for the third time this season on Saturday, pending the outcome of the Lady Indians vs Gordon Lee game.

Short-handed Panthers use early surge to race past Towns

By Todd Forreest
North Georgia News
sports@nghanews.com

With three starters on the mend, Union County (5-3) came out with guns blazing resulting in a 33-7 outburst to open the contest.

Senior Eliyah Ryals and juniors Hunter Hughes and Thomas Danek were each missing but it didn't hinder the Panthers as they cruised to their 32nd straight win over the Indians in a 60-30 romp.

Juniors Tyler Odom and Kyle Hamby were in the zone early, connecting on two treys each and pouring in 10 points and 8 points respectively, in the first quarter.

Junior Lake Arnick hit from downtown and fellow junior Ralston Drake scored twice in the paint and Union held a 25-7 lead after a quarter.

Odom's second trey found the mark as the buzzer sounded to end of the opening frame.

"Pre-game, we talked about getting out to a fast start and putting them away early," Union County Head Coach Casey Jones said.

The second began with junior Matthew Wasko knocking down a corner jumper, Tyler



Junior Lake Arnick shakes a defender and fires a jumper during Union's win over Towns. Photo/Todd Forreest

Odom got an easy two off a turnover, Drake powered his way inside for a deuce, and Arnick hit a 17-footer to give the Panthers a 33-7 lead.

"We shot the ball really well tonight. Probably the best we've shot it this year," Coach Jones said. "And we didn't turn it over. We only had four turnovers in the first half. We're starting to finally do some things that we've

been trying to teach all along, but overall, I thought we played probably our best game."

A putback by junior Grant Schuette put the Panthers on top at 35-10 with 1:20 to play before the break before Towns hit in the final seconds to reach a dozen points entering the intermission.

The third quarter actually belonged to the Indians as they outscored Union 10-9, sparked



The Union County Pit Crew and Union County's cheerleaders were in high spirits during the sweep of rival Towns Co. Photo/Todd Forreest

by a 7-2 spurt after the Panthers took a 40-15 lead. A trey by junior Kyle Hamby and a steal and lay up by senior Dylan Coyne gave Union its 25-point lead.

An Indian bucket was answered by a lay in from Drake but Towns scored the next five points. Finally a pull up jumper by Hamby with 5 seconds left in the third put Union back on top by 22 at 44-22.

"We came out and slowed down a little bit in the second half but we were trying to work on some things that we haven't had an opportunity to work on in game-type situations," Coach Jones said.

Odom knocked down a 15-footer on the heels of an Indian trey. Coyne followed suit with another jumper from the elbow and Drake hit a free throw

- putting the Panthers ahead 49-25 at the 5:12 mark of the game.

Not to be outdone, Schuette showed his range and knocked down a 15-footer with 4:27 to play.

An Indian trey was canceled out when Hamby dialed up a jumper from long distance. Coyne was good from the baseline, and Schuette went to the jump hook and the Panthers were on top by 30.

Sophomore Andrew Brown got in a late lay up to preserve the 30-point Panther victory.

Hamby led the charge with 16 points and Odom finished with 14. Drake scored 9 points, Schuette and Coyne had 6 points each, Arnick added 5 points, while Wasko and Brown chipped in 2 points a piece.

The Panthers will meet a bitter rival from back in Coach Jones' playing days in the opening round of the Battle of the States. Union will face Dawson County at 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 26th in Hiawassee.

The Panthers will take on either Gordon Lee or Towns County on Friday, Dec. 27th at 8:30 p.m. or 2:30 p.m.

Hughes and Danek are expected to return for the Christmas Tournament, while Ryals remains doubtful.

Battle of the States Christmas Tournament tips on Thursday

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

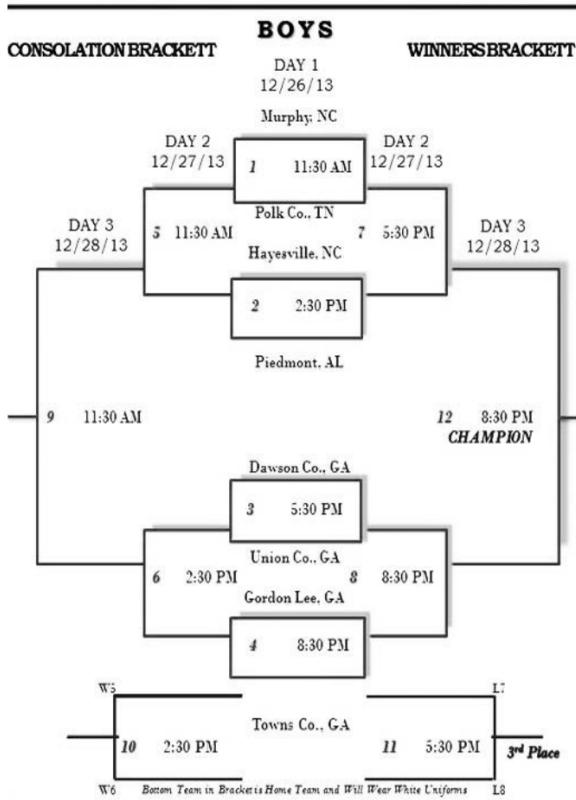
The 20th Annual Battle of the States Prep Basketball Tournament is scheduled for Thursday through Saturday, Dec. 26-28, of this week in the Towns County High School Gym.

Eight games will be played each day, beginning at 10 a.m. and continuing until around 10 p.m. The Tournament has become a most respected sporting event, drawing interest from fans and teams over much of the Southeast, as evidenced by the fact that teams from six different states have made appearances during the first 19 years the event has been held.

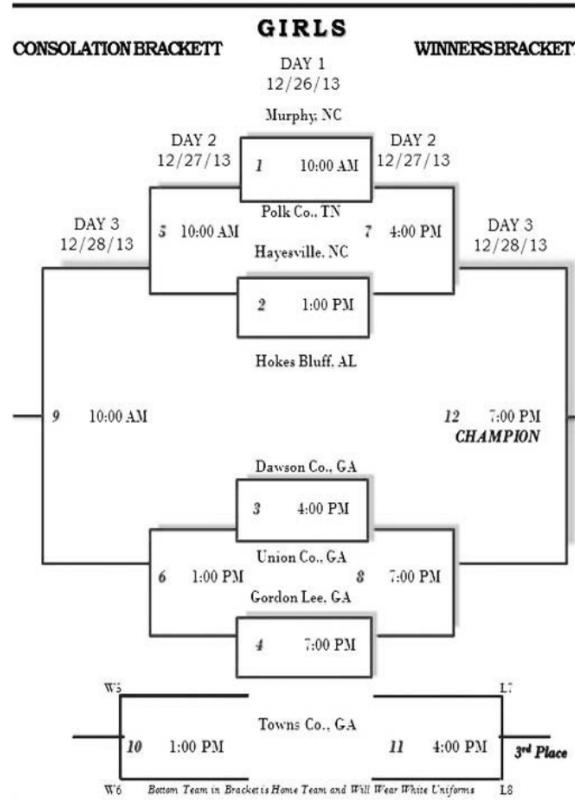
All girls and boys teams from the 2012 Battle of the States will be returning for this year's tournament. The schools represented will be the Dawson County (Georgia), Gordon Lee (Georgia), Hayesville (North Carolina), Murphy (North Carolina), Polk County (Tennessee), and Union County (Georgia) Boys and Girls Teams; the Hokes Bluff (Alabama) Girls; and the Piedmont (Alabama) Boys; along with the host Towns County. Polk County and Towns County are the only two schools to have appeared in all 19 previous tournaments.

The girls field for this year proves to be most interesting as three of the four Georgia teams made it to the state final four in

2013 CHRISTMAS TOURNAMENT BATTLE OF THE STATES



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their classification last year with the Gordon Lee girls claiming the Class A Public State Championship, the Battle of the States Champion Dawson County girls finishing second in the state in Class AAA, and the Towns County girls falling to Gordon Lee in the state semi-finals.

The Gordon Lee girls had earlier taken a 70-69 victory in overtime on the last shot over Towns County in the third place game in last year's Battle of the States and then extended a 36-34 lead after three quarters for a 57-49 win in the state tournament.

The Gordon Lee dominated the then top ranked Randolph-Clay girls for most of the championship game, leading by 25 points in the third quarter and 50-30 after three quarters before Randolph-Clay rallied near the end in a 61-56 win by Gordon Lee.

Union County's girls won the Region 8-AA Regular Season title en route to its fifth State Tournament in six years.

This year's tournament features a Georgia bracket and an out of state bracket for the first two rounds with the Gordon Lee and Towns County girls squaring off in the first round as will last year's Battle of the State finalists Dawson County and Union County in the second round. The Union County girls sport a 7-1 record, including two wins over the Towns County Girls.

Following is our annual See Tournament, Page 13A