

Sports

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Allison and Hughes' hot shooting sparks 73-43 rout of Gilmer

Pierson Allison surpasses 1,000 career points; Lake Hughes hits seven-straight from downtown in second half

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Playing without senior starters Sawyer Drake and Kyle Morlock, Union County kyle a much-improved Gilmer squad with a 30-point blowout.

Senior guard Pierson Allison scored his 1,000th career point during the first quarter, but it Lake Hughes that stole the show in the second half. The sophomore guard came off the bench to hit seven treys after halftime (five in the fourth quarter), sparking the Panthers to a 44-17 onslaught over the final 11-plus minutes of the contest.

"Having guys like Lake (Hughes) and Landon (Cox) coming off the bench is big for us," Allison said. "Not only do they give the starters rest, they are capable of coming in and taking over themselves and that energizes the entire team."

Leading 25-19 at the break, Union County allowed the Bobcats to pull within three at 29-26, just beyond the midway point of the third. That's when Hughes would catch fire, scoring 21 points in 11 minutes on 7-of-7 shooting from long distance.

His first triple stretched the Panthers' lead back to six at 32-26 as the clock approached three minutes remaining in the third. Following a Kaston Hemphill free throw and a Gilmer deuce, a Pierson Allison trey and a Saw-



L-R: Pierson Allison sinks a pull up jumper vs Gilmer to reach 1,000 career points. Lake Hughes connects on one of his seven second-half 3-pointers in the win over Gilmer. The school record for 3s in a game is nine but seven in a half and five in a quarter are believed to be records. Photos/Todd Forrest

yer Brey jump hook gave Union its first double-digit advantage at 38-28. With a minute left in the third, Hughes' second 3-pointer opened up a 41-28 lead. Allison continued the barrage with another trifecta before Brey beat the buzzer with a lay-in to spot the Panthers a 46-32 advantage entering the fourth.



Leading 50-36 at the 6:25 mark, Hughes' third three gave Union a 17-point advantage. His fourth triple gave the Panthers a 55-37 lead with five minutes to play. The fifth 3-point bomb of the night pushed the lead to 21 at 58-37. No. 6 made it 68-43, then the seventh and final 3-point basket extended the margin to 30

at 73-43 - the final score.

After going 0-for-1 from beyond the arc in the first half, Hughes finished the game 7-of-8 with 23 points and two assists. With Hughes on the floor, Union was an incredible plus-36 over the Bobcats.

Allison ended up with 16 points on 2-of-5 from distance.

He also picked up four steals and four assists. Brey finished with a season-high 10 points and five rebounds; Kaston Hemphill turned in a career-high 10 points with three boards.

Entering the night with 996 points, Allison eclipsed 1,000 points with two early free throws followed by a pull-up

from 15-feet, helping Union County build an 11-9 lead after a quarter.

"I knew I was close (to 1,000) coming in but after I got it I was able to relax and play much looser on both ends," Allison said. "Getting this win gives us some momentum going into the Battle of the States and hopefully we'll be at full strength by then."

The margin would stretch to 21-12 thanks to four points from Brey and two apiece by Allison, Cayden Rich and Landon Cox. A steal-and-score by Allison made it 23-15 before Gilmer sliced the margin in half at 23-19. Hemphill would send the Panthers into the break on a high note, sinking a turnaround jumper in the paint for a 25-19 lead.

Cox finished with 6 points, a game-high nine assists, four rebounds and two steals. Rich added 6 points on seven boards and a pair of steals. Sophomore Kyler Robbins also got in on the action with 2 points and a pilfer.

After struggling from 3-point land (0-for-6) four days earlier at Social Circle, the Panthers turned in season highs for 3-pointers made (nine) and 3-point percentage (47% on 9-for-19).

Meanwhile, Gilmer was 3-for-21 (14%) from deep and committed 16 turnovers to only nine for Union.



Allison embraces Sawyer Drake after reaching 1,000. Photo/Todd Forrest



Panther teammates and coaches celebrate with Pierson Allison after he surpassed 1,000 career points vs Gilmer. Photo/Todd Forrest

BOTS: Panthers fall on day three following back-to-back nailbiters

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Hiwassee - Union County suffered an upset loss in the Battle of the States finals to host Towns County after battling its way through a bracket that featured last year's tournament champion and runner-up.

Fueled by an energetic home crowd, the hot-shooting Indians jumped out to 42-24, third-quarter lead before the Panthers battled back to within two at 63-61. Union would eventually fall short 67-61 thanks to four clutch Indian free throws and a costly Union turnover during the final 29 seconds.

Earlier in the tournament, the Panthers knocked off the defending BOTS champion Walhalla, South Carolina, 54-53 on a game-winning basket from Sawyer Drake.

Union trailed the entire second half, falling behind by as many as eight points, before rallying from six-down in the final 85 seconds to hand Walhalla its first loss of the season.

On day two, the Panthers held off a 3-point barrage from a Lumpkin County squad that entered the tournament fresh off an 85-67 win over Class AA's third-ranked Banks County.

Lumpkin's 3-point shooting quickly erased an 11-point second-quarter deficit and a seven-point margin with under three minutes to play. With his team 40-for-6 at the foul line up to that point, Allison kept Union County in front by hitting 6-of-6 at the line over the final 1:25. Morlock would also deliver at the charity stripe, hitting 3-of-4 down the stretch despite entering the contest as a 37% free throw shooter.

Panthers 54, Walhalla 53 - After missing the previous five games to injury, Drake's late-game heroics sent Union County into the second round after trailing for the majority of the contest.

Down 56-50 with 1:25 to play, sophomore Lake Hughes



A disappointed Panthers team in the locker room with their BOTS second place trophy. Photo/Todd Forrest

nailed a make-or-break three that kept hope alive for the Panthers. On the defensive end, Sawyer Brey swatted a Razorbacks' layup attempt that could have iced the game. Instead, Union moved within a point on a pull-up jumper from Allison.

Clinging to a 53-52 lead, Walhalla missed two free throws with 29 seconds left, setting up Drake on the other end.

Holding the ball at the top of the key, Drake went to work with under 10 seconds to play. Matched up one-on-one with his defender and the entire right side of the court cleared out, Drake dribble-penetrated to his right, using a stutter-step to get to the baseline. And with one foot in the paint, he elevated and dropped a fadeaway jumper onto the front iron, using just enough touch to get the friendly rebound and the win.

"Our plan was to run the clock out and hopefully get the last

shot," Drake said "I was supposed to take my (defender) one-on-one and if the other guy slid over to double me, I was going to drop it off to Kyle (Morlock)."

Drake's game-winner marks the third time in the last two years he's won a game on a last-second isolation. When asked how he continuously does it, Drake laughed and said, "I don't know. But I just hope (our opponents) don't catch on."

With 4.3 seconds left, Walhalla got off one last shot from 25-feet but the would-be game-winner fell short of the rim and into the hands of Drake, who rushed into the arms of Bryson Lariscy as his team mates raced onto the floor.

Allison finished with 15 points and three assists; Morlock had 11 points and four rebounds. Cayden Rich added 7 points and four steals, while Kaston Hemphill and Drake chipped in 6 points

apiece.

Trailing 5-0 out of the gates, Union battled back for an 11-9 edge before the undefeated Razorbacks closed the first with six-unanswered. Following a brief 17-17 tie, the second was all Walhalla as they built a 30-23 advantage, eventually taking a 35-30 lead into the intermission.

The Razorbacks opened up their largest lead at 38-30, less than 30 seconds into the third. Fortunately, Rich began to heat up, scoring inside and drilling a corner-trey to slice into the deficit, 38-35.

A free throw and a trey pushed the Walhalla margin to 42-35 but an Allison floater sparked an 8-0 run to put the Panthers on top 43-42.

The run was all Allison and Morlock as each contributed four points. Trailing 44-43, Allison finished off the third by splitting a pair of free throws to even the

from the floor and 43% to 19% from 3-point range.

Additionally, Union County won the free throw battle 69% to 47% while committing one less turnover than the Razorbacks.

Panthers 64, Lumpkin County 61 - Union County overcame the Indians' 10-for-24 performance from long distance to advance to its fifth Battle of the States final since 2000.

On three different occasions, the Panthers appeared on the verge of blowing out Lumpkin County, but each time, the Indians heated up from 3-point land and erased the Union advantage.

Leading 28-17 in the second, the Indians closed the half on an 11-0 run thanks to three consecutive 3-pointers. In the third, the Panthers used a 14-4 run to build a 44-37 lead before Lumpkin closed with an 8-2 spurt, getting within two to start the fourth.

With under three minutes remaining, Union was pulling away at 53-46 before a Lumpkin three kept them alive. Approaching the two-minute mark and clinging to a 55-49 lead following a basket from Rich, the Indians knocked down another triple to cut the margin in half.

Nursing a slim edge of 55-54 with 1:38 to play, Allison sank two free throws but Lumpkin answered with two on the other end. Once again, Allison was sent to the line, this time for a 1-and-1, where he calmly sank both attempts with 52 seconds on the clock.

Still up three with 32 seconds left, Morlock sank the all-important front-end of his 1-and-1 trip to push the lead to 60-56. Following another Lumpkin miss, Morlock sank 2-of-2 for a 62-56 advantage.

The Indians had one last trey left in its bag as they pulled within three at 62-59 with four seconds remaining. Allison would finally seal the deal with two more free throws to cap off his 20-point double-double, finishing with a game-high 21 points, 10 rebounds, five dimes and two steals.

Hughes had 14 points on

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