

BOTS: Lady Panthers place third with wins over Walhalla, Polk

For the second-straight year, Murphy, NC spoils Union's hopes of reaching the finals

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Hiwassee - The 7th ranked Lady Panthers (11-2) won two-of-three at the Battle of the States to finish third for the second time in three years.

Union County's only loss came in the second round at the hands of undefeated Murphy, North Carolina, who jumped out to a 19-7 lead and never looked back, cruising to a 63-39 victory.

In Saturday's consolation game, the Lady Panthers rebounded from its second loss of the year with a 66-41 blowout of Polk County, Tennessee.

Union County was never challenged en route to its third-place finish, leading 19-6 after one and 40-16 at the break.

The tournament opened with another one-sided victory, this one a 75-38 rout of Walhalla, South Carolina that saw the Lady Panthers score 25, 21 and 23 points in each of the first three quarters, building a 69-29 advantage.

"If we can settle down and play our style of basketball, we're going to be just fine (when region play resumes)," head coach Crystal Beach said. "We are a difficult team to beat. We are long and fast and the only way that Murphy loss hurts us is if we don't learn from it and get better."

"(Against Polk) we were moving the ball again like we know how to do. And if we're able to take care of the little things, then we're going to be just fine."

Lady Panthers 66, Polk County 41 - All-Tournament Team selection Andelin Hill led the way with 15 points as Union County bounced back from an ugly loss to Murphy, NC in the second round.

Ava Hunter added another 15 points in the win, Brooke Dockrey finished with 10 and Kait McCarter had eight.



The Lady Panthers with their third place trophy following a 66-41 blowout of Polk County, TN in Saturday's Consolation Game. Photo/Todd Forrest

It was all Hill and Hunter in the first quarter as the duo combined to score Union's first 13 points. Dockrey got on the board with consecutive baskets before Hill and Hunter closed the period with one bucket apiece.

Leading 19-6, Union opened the second with a 9-2 run to open up a 28-8 advantage, less than three minutes in. After one bucket each from Hill and Hunter opened the frame, Riley Allison sank a triple and Ellie Cook took a steal the other way for a layup.

Polk momentarily cut the margin back to 18 at 28-10 but a conventional 3-point play by McCarter put the Lady Panthers back on top by 20-plus for good.

At the break, Union County held a 40-16 advantage behind 11 points from Hill, 10 from Hunter and eight more from Dockrey.

McCarter began the third

frame with a pair of baskets in the paint. Later, Cook hit a pair of free throws, Rebekah Chambers scored down low and Corinne Hill split a pair at the line to build a 54-24 lead.

Dockrey and Hunter capped off the third-quarter scoring for a 59-28 score entering the fourth.

With the starters resting and the quarter shortened to six minutes, Kyla Locklear put up five points and Chambers added two more as Union County took home third place with a 66-41 victory.

Locklear and Chambers each finished with 5 points, Cook added four, Allison had three and Corinne Hill scored one.

Lady Panthers 75, Walhalla, SC 38 - Union County turned in its highest-scoring game of the season during its first-round victory over the Razorbacks.

Hunter led all scorers with 17 points, three rebounds, two

assists, four steals and a block. Dockrey and Hill scored 13 points each while combining to shoot 11-for-15 (73%) from the floor.

Hill finished with two assists and two steals on 2-of-3 shooting from downtown. Meanwhile, Dockrey had a game-high nine assists and two steals on 1-of-2 from behind the arc.

Other Lady Panthers in double-figures were McCarter and Cook with 11 apiece. Cook finished 2-for-4 from long distance with two rebounds, an assist, a steal and a block.

McCarter was 1-for-2 from 3-point range with four rebounds, two assists and a block. As a team, Union County shot 6-for-11 (55%) from three and 30-for-52 (58%) overall.

The Lady Panthers jumped out to an 8-0 lead and never looked back, building a 21-2 advantage before Walhalla was able to slow the bleeding with a 10-4 finish to the opening frame.

Union opened the second with an 11-3 spurt, eventually outscoring the Razorbacks 21-6 in the quarter for a 46-18 halftime lead.

At the break, Dockrey, Hill and Hunter accounted for 31 of the team's 48 points with Hunter's 12 leading the way.

The third was more of the same as the Lady Panthers used a 23-11 outburst to build a 69-29 advantage.

In the fourth, Chambers scored four and Locklear had two as Polk outscored Union 9-6 over the mercy-rule shortened period.

Chambers and Locklear each finished with four points. Allison added two. Chambers had two rebounds and two assists; Locklear added five boards and a blocked shot.

Lady Panthers 39, Murphy, NC 63 - On the heels of its blistering shooting performance vs Walhalla, Union County went ice cold against the Lady Bull-

dogs.

The Lady Panthers finished 13-for-51 (25%) from the floor and 1-for-21 (5%) from 3-point range. In fact, they didn't connect on a basket from outside the paint until the fourth quarter. The first trey came with 19 seconds left after missing their first 20 tries from deep.

As a result, Murphy jumped out to a 19-7 lead in the second and held a 28-15 advantage at the break.

Any hopes of a second-half comeback were dashed when the Lady Bulldogs scored the first eight points of the third quarter en route to a 13-2 run. Union finished the third without a field goal as Murphy was in complete control at 44-21 through three.

Baskets by Hunter, Cook and McCarter pulled Union within 20 at the 5:15 mark but that's as close as they would get. Any chances of making it interesting went out the window as Murphy scored the next five points to stretch its lead back to 53-28 with 4:25 to play.

Hunter led Union with 11 points despite getting blanked in the first half. She would finish with a double-double, pulling down 10 rebounds while recording two assists, two steals and a blocked shot.

Hill finished with 10 points, connecting on her team's only three of the game. She also grabbed five boards, dished out three dimes and blocked two shots.

McCarter had 7 points and three boards while Allison added 3 points and a steal. Dockrey, Cook and Locklear all chipped in 2 points apiece. Locklear had two rebounds and two blocks; Dockrey finished with two assists and a steal while Cook had one assist and a steal.

Up next - Union County plays host to No. 3 Rabun County on Friday, Jan. 3 at 7 p.m. before paying a visit to No. 8 Putnam County at 3 p.m. the following day.



Andelin Hill was named All-Tournament Team. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers survive Gilmer's fourth quarter surge

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Leading by as many as 11 in the third quarter and 10 in the fourth, the Union County Lady Panthers held off a late Gilmer rally to improve to 8-1 entering the Battle of the States.

Senior Andelin Hill sank two free throws with 6:32 remaining to open up a 42-32 Union County lead before the Lady Bobcats stormed back to within a point at 48-47.

After the Lady Panthers missed the front-end of a 1-and-1, Gilmer had an opportunity to take the lead with 58 seconds to play but misfired on a pair of free throws to keep Union on top, 48-47.

The Lady Panthers were unsuccessful on another 1-and-1 attempt but an offensive rebound kept the possession alive and Hill knocked down 2-of-2 to give her team a three-point lead with 46 seconds remaining.

Gilmer sank a short jumper to stay within one but Brooke Dockrey hit two clutch free throws for a 52-49 advantage at the 21-second mark. The Lady Bobcats missed a game-tying 3-point attempt, and with 7.8 seconds left, Dockrey put the game out of reach at 54-49



Freshman Ellie Cook led the Lady Panthers with 14. Photo/Todd Forrest

with two more from the charity stripe.

With a second left, Gilmer connected from long distance, however, there wouldn't be enough time remaining to get the ball back.

Ellie Cook finished with a team-high 14 points on 3-of-8 shooting from downtown. Hill scored 12 points with seven rebounds, three steals, two assists and a blocked shot. Ava Hunter added 11 points, nine boards and a block.

Despite the double-digit leads in the second half, it wasn't all Union County as Gilmer held a 10-9 advantage

before Cook capped off the run with a corner-trey.

Baskets by Hill and Kyla Locklear kept the lead at double-digits before Gilmer trimmed the margin to six at the 2-minute mark.

Dockrey scored in the paint to push the advantage back to eight but the Lady Bobcats answered to stay within six at 36-30 after three quarters.

Cook began the final frame with a 3-pointer from the corner, then the freshman guard split a pair at the foul line to push the difference back to 10 at 40-30.

Five-straight points by Gilmer cut the margin in half before Hill sank a pair of free throws. Just inside of five minutes, McCarter converted a put-back to preserve the seven-point lead at 44-37.

Clinging to a 44-42 advantage with 2:45 remaining, Hill took a Gilmer miss and went coast-to-coast for a layup. On the ensuing Lady Panthers' possession, the senior forward went back inside for two more - extending the lead to 48-42 with 2:12 to play.

The Lady Bobcats refused to go away, answering with another 5-0 spurt, making it a one-point game with 71 seconds remaining.

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4-of-7 from beyond the arc; Morlock added 11 points, five assists, five steals and four boards.

Drake finished with 4 points, five rebounds and four assists, Rich chipped in 4 points and four boards while Hemphill had 2 points and a block.

Landon Cox ended up with three assists and a steal.

Union outrebounded the Indians 31-26 and won the turnover battle 23-19. The two squads were almost dead-even from the floor with the Panthers shooting 46.3% to Lumpkin's 45.8.

The Indians doubled up Union from 3-point range, hitting 10 treys to Union's 5-of-15 (33%) performance. Lumpkin was also very efficient at the line, sinking 7-of-8 (88%) to Union's 9-of-18 (50%). It's also worth mentioning that the Panthers were 0-for-6 at the stripe until the final 85 seconds when Lumpkin was forced to foul. Under pressure, Union made 9-of-12 (75%).

Panthers 61, Towns County 67 - An 18-point third-quarter deficit was too much to overcome as Towns County held on for its first Battle of the States title in 26 tries.

In the early-going, Union County held an 11-7 lead with all of its points coming in the paint. But that would be the Panthers'

final lead of the game as the Indians scored the next nine points to take a 16-11 lead, early in the second frame.

The duo of Drake and Morlock combined for 16 of Union's 19 first-half points, but the two-man show wasn't enough to keep pace with a highly-motivated Indians' squad, who built a 27-19 halftime lead.

Following an Allison three on Union's first possession of the third, Towns responded with a 15-2 run to build a 42-24 lead with under four minutes to play in the quarter.

Union would outscore the Indians 17-8 over the final 3:08 of the third to pull within nine entering the fourth. And just when it seemed the Panthers were about to make the final eight minutes very interesting, Towns County halted the rally and kept Union in a nine-point hole well beyond the four-minute mark.

The Indians' ability to break even over the first half of the third quarter forced the Panthers into desperation mode. And by the time Union was able to start chipping away, there was under three minutes to play.

The too-little, too-late comeback began with a Drake three that pulled the Panthers within seven. A Towns turnover

led to two Allison free throws at the 2:40 mark as Union found itself down 59-54.

Morlock answered a Towns basket with one of his own as the clock hit two minutes. With 1:01 remaining, Morlock scored again to make it a one-possession game at 61-58.

After Towns sank two huge free throws on a 1-and-1 trip, a Hughes trey made it 63-61 with 29 seconds left. The Indians would hit two more free throws and the Panthers coughed up the ball and Towns turned it into a game-clinching layup on the other end.

Morlock scored 13 of his team-high 19 in the second half. He would finish the game 9-for-14 with six rebounds and five assists. Drake added 18 points on 8-of-15 shooting with six rebounds and four assists. However, he would struggle at the line, making just 1-of-6 while turning it over six times.

Allison finished with 10 points on 3-of-14 shooting and 2-of-12 from downtown. Union County's all-region duo of Drake and Allison would combine for a dozen turnovers.

Hughes added 8 points on 2-of-5 from 3-point range; Rich scored 4 points to go with seven rebounds and two assists; Larissey had 2 points and a steal; Brey

chipped in two rebounds.

The Indians shot 50% from the floor and 42% from 3-point range while Union was 46% overall and 23% from distance.

The Panthers dominated the boards 36-25 but 20 turnovers were too much to overcome. After three days of somehow finding a way to survive, Union had nothing left in the tank after coming out of the bracket that forced teams to play three competitive games.

Towns County's Kolby Moss led the way with 23 points. Only a junior, Moss could potentially pass Zach Davenport and Eddie Rushton atop Towns' all-time scoring list. Coincidentally, Rushton was on hand to officiate Saturday's BOTS title game.

Up next - Union County will resume region play on Friday, Jan. 3 when they host Rabun County in a rematch of last year's 8-AA Consolation Game. The girls game is scheduled for a 7 p.m. tip with the guys to follow.

On Saturday, the Panthers are back on the road for another region showdown at Putnam County, where they needed double-overtime to survive their last visit.

The girls tip-off is scheduled for 3 p.m. Saturday with the guys to follow.

Wrestling: Amicalola Classic

Dawsonville - Union County Wrestling placed a handful of wrestlers in the top four at Dawson County's Amicalola Classic last weekend.

In Friday's duels action, the shorthanded Panthers forfeited multiple weight classes due to missing several players over the Christmas holidays.

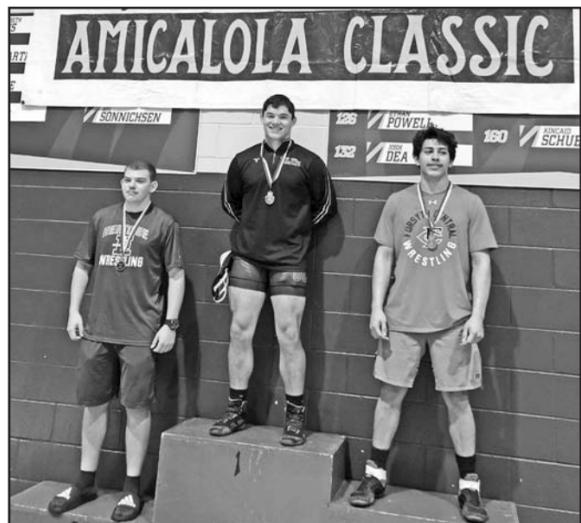
Entering Saturday's individual matches, Union County was near full strength and they brought home five top-four finishes, highlighted by Cristian

Martinez's first-place performance at 182 pounds.

Brady Guild and Trevor Guild each took home third place in their respective weight classes.

Coming in fourth for Union County was Kanon Abercrombie and Sean Phillips.

Up next is the Cherokee, North Carolina tournament on Saturday, Jan. 4. Wrestlers are scheduled to hit the mat beginning at 9 a.m.



Cristian Martinez atop the medal stand at the Amicalola Classic