

Sports

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Henry's 25 lifts Union County into BOTS semis

Panthers survive Franklin, NC's comeback bid in 70-66 victory

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Hiwassee - Union County watched its 17-point second-half lead evaporate into a 63-62 deficit with just over a minute to play until junior Houston Henry scored the next 6 points, putting the Panthers over the top in a 70-66 win.

Henry moved Union (10-2) out front to stay with a go-ahead 3-pointer near the 1-minute mark, then drew an offensive foul on the other end with 40 seconds left.

Henry's 3 came by way of his offensive rebound after the Panthers missed an in-bounds layup. Henry grabbed the board, tip-toed the baseline then escaped a Franklin double team in the corner. Henry found sophomore Cade Dockrey, who immediately fired back to Henry for the go-ahead trey.

On the ensuing Franklin possession, Henry drew an offensive foul on a baseline drive. After Henry advanced the ball across halfcourt, he was sent to the line, hitting both tries.

Henry split two at the stripe with 9 seconds remaining but Franklin's pull-up 3 with 4 seconds left trimmed the Union lead to 68-66. But the Panthers attacked the full-court pressure defense with a baseball pass to Dockrey for a game-sealing layup.

In the early going, Union jumped out to an 11-3 lead following Jude Ellis' 3-point play, Kaden Combs' putback and a Henry steal that turned into a Hayden Hughes layup.

A Henry 3 and Ellis' 15-footer pushed the lead to 16-7, eventually resulting in a



Houston Henry's go-ahead 3 pointer in the fourth. Photo/Todd Forrest

19-12 edge at quarter's end. Union County opened up a 23-12 advantage courtesy of a Dockrey 3 followed by a turnaround jumper and a free throw by Ellis. Later in the second, an Ellis 3 and a Henry dribble drive kept the margin at 11 entering the break, 35-24.

Still on top 40-32 in the third, Union County's 9-0 run opened up a 17-point lead. Dockrey sparked the run with a pull-up from 12 feet, then Henry's steal-and-score and Hughes breakaway layup put Union up 46-32.

Hughes finished off the run with a 3 in transition, awarding Union a 49-32 lead with 3:05 left in the third.

Two Henry free throws and a Dockrey 3 kept the Union lead at 54-38 until Franklin finished the period with a 5-0 spurt, banking in a 3 at the horn and sending the contest into the fourth at 54-43.

Franklin scored the first 4 points of the fourth frame until two Dockrey free throws halted the run. Later, with his team clinging to a 54-51 lead, Hughes' 3 bumped the margin



Hayden Hughes connected three times from beyond the arc during the second half of Union County's 70-66 win over Franklin, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

back to a half-dozen with 6:10 remaining.

Hughes connected again from downtown, this time with Union up 59-57. But that would be the last Union basket for nearly 3 minutes as Franklin raced ahead 63-62 until Henry's triple ended the scoring drought.

Henry finished with 25 points, 4 rebounds, 4 assists and 4 steals, connecting on 3-of-4 from long distance.

Hughes ended with 13 points, 3 rebounds and 3 steals. Dockrey had 12 points, 6 rebounds and 3 assists; Ellis added 11 points, 3 rebounds,

3 blocks and 2 assists; Combs had 7 points, 6 rebounds and 2 blocks.

Freshman Jaxon Tothrow went for 2 points and 2 rebounds. Junior Brayden Hogsed and sophomore Vince Marevka pulled down one rebound apiece.

Franklin's Max McClure led all scorers with 27 points to go with a game-high 9 rebounds.

Game stats: Union shot 46% (25-54) from the floor, 56% (9-16) from 3-point range and 55% (11-20) at the line.

Franklin hit 42% (25-60) overall, 39% (9-23) from deep

and 64% (7-11) at the line. Franklin out-rebounded Union 38-29 and won points in the paint 28-26.

Union committed 14 turnovers; Franklin coughed it up 18 times.

Union faced Murphy, NC on Saturday in the semifinals. Results from the final two days of the tournament will be in next week's newspaper.

Up next: The Panthers will jump into 8-AA play on Tuesday, Jan. 2 vs. the defending state runner-up and region champion Providence. Union will host No. 7 Athens Academy on Friday, Jan. 5

Lady Panthers tip-off BOTS with rout of Franklin, NC

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Hiwassee - The Lady Panthers' 2023 Battle of the States debut went as well as it possibly could, punching their ticket to the semifinals with a 55-38 blowout of Franklin, NC.

Union County (6-6) never trailed in the win, leading by as many as 28 at one point.

Junior guard Ariel McCarter led the way with 24 points and 7 steals. Sophomore Paula Robertson chipped in 14 and senior Lara Turner went for 5 points, 11 rebounds and 5 steals.

Union County raced in front 8-2 and led by 10 after one behind 14 combined points from McCarter (7), Robertson (4) and Turner (3).

The Lady Panthers opened the second with a 13-1 run, taking control at 27-5 before holding a 31-9 halftime lead.

Junior Hope Taylor led the second-quarter surge with 6 points, Robertson scored five, while McCarter, Mull and Robertson added two each.

McCarter scored all 13 of Union's third-quarter points as an 8-0 run to start the period pushed their margin to 39-11.

Franklin answered with a 23-8 stretch that narrowed the gap to 47-34 during the fourth, but that's as close as it would get.

Taylor finished with 6 points and 3 rebounds; junior Katelyn Brown had 2 points, 8 rebounds, 4 steals, 3 blocks



Junior Ariel McCarter (11) with one of her 7 steals vs. Franklin, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

and 2 assists. Senior Kamryn Mull had 2 points, a team-high 4 assists and one block. Junior Aubrie Akins finished with 2 points, a rebound, a block and a steal.

Junior Sloane Dyer collected 2 boards and dished out 2 assists with one steal. Senior Morgan Warren had a rebound and an assist.

Union County finished 36% (16-44) from the floor, 18% (3-17) from long range

and 79% (11-14) at the line. The Lady Panthers out-rebounded Franklin 31-26 and committed 19 turnovers to Franklin's 25.

Union County faced Coosa (Rome) in Friday's

semifinal with a chance to earn a spot in Saturday's championship game.

Results from the Battle of the States' final two days will be featured in the Jan. 10 newspaper.



Sophomore Paula Robertson (24) returned to the court and scored 14 points after missing the previous two games. Photo/Todd Forrest

Region 8-AA play opens Tuesday, Jan. 2 when Union hosts Providence Christian at 6 p.m. The Lady Panthers host the defending 8-AA region runner-up Athens Academy on Friday, Jan. 5 at 6 p.m.