

Sports

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Panthers take down Putnam and Rabun; tied for third in 8-AA

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The Panthers (9-5, 3-2) picked up a pair of Region 8-AA victories last weekend thanks to strong second-half performances to overcome deficits vs Putnam County and at Rabun County.

Union County moves to 3-2 in 8-AA as they prepare to host region favorite Banks County on Tuesday. The Panthers are currently tied with Social Circle for third place in the region. Union County lost to Social Circle last month but will get a chance to right that wrong when they visit the Redskins in a rematch on Jan. 22.

Panthers 51, Rabun County 38 - When the Panthers traveled to Rabun County on Friday, they were in desperate need of a victory after dropping two of three in region play to open the year. And what better way to get back on track than by beating up on a struggling rival.

Rabun County entered Friday at 1-11 overall and 0-3 in 8-AA but came out swinging against Union County. However, a halftime wakeup call sparked the Panthers to a 14-2 run out of the break as junior Pierson Allison scored 11 points on three 3-pointers in the third period. Union County went on to outscore the Wildcats 36-19 in the second half, leading by as many as 17 points in the fourth.

Allison would finish with a game-high 20 points, Drake would add 15 and Waller scored 10 to lead the Panthers to their third straight win over Rabun County.

"I think we fell in love with the 3 (early on) so I told the guys at halftime to attack the rim," Union County head coach Casey Jones said. "We came out in the second half and scored on our first three trips. (Rabun) went man-to-man so we started going with some isolation plays and they weren't able to guard us."

Union County's last three-game winning streak in the series came during the 2007-08 season when the Panthers were wrapping up a 19-game winning streak that dated back to 2000-01 -- when Wildcats head coach David Adcock was a junior at RCHS.

Throughout the first half of the season, Rabun County has lived and (mostly) died by the 3-point shot, and in the early going Friday night, they connected on a pair of triples to open up a 9-2 lead over Union County.

Baskets by Drake and Waller allowed the Panthers to keep pace at 11-6 before an Allison trey made it a 13-9 game after one.

Buckets by Kanon Hemphill and Drake tied things up at 13-13 early in the second but six unanswered from Rabun put Union in a 19-13 hole, just inside of the 3-minute mark.

The Panthers missed four-straight from the charity stripe but the Wildcats went ice cold over the final 2:55 of the half, allowing Union to pull within four on a Drake putback at the 1:42 mark.

"We were kind of lol-lygagging in the first half and weren't really doing anything," Drake said. "At halftime we straightened things out and we came out and executed in the second half."

Trailing 19-15 to open the



Sawyer Drake swats a Putnam County shot attempt. Photo/Todd Forrest



Pierson Allison drives inside for a layup at Rabun. Photo/Todd Forrest



Kanon Hemphill goes to work down low at Rabun. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Coleston Daniel at the free throw line. Photo/Todd Forrest



Britt Waller dishes off a pass under the basket at Rabun County. The senior had 10 points in Friday's win. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Colton Day rips the ball away from a Putnam County ball handler as he drove into the paint. Photo/Todd Forrest

third, Drake went on the attack and drew a foul on a driving layup, less than 10 seconds in. The free throw cut the deficit to one before a Rabun deuce stretched the lead to 21-18.

That would be the Wildcats' last field goal for nearly four minutes as Allison and the Panthers seized control away from the home team.

A Waller basket and an Allison trey gave Union its first lead of the night at 23-21 with 5:35 to play in the third period. Another Allison triple, 50 seconds later, provided the Panthers with a 5-point edge. Junior Cayden Drake hit 1-of-2 on a layup and Drake hit 1-of-2 at the line to open up a 29-21 advantage at the 4-minute mark.

Rabun slowed the bleeding with a pair of baskets sandwiched around a Waller putback with 3:18 to play in the third. The Wildcats would make things interesting with a trey at the 2:40

mark that cut the Union lead to 21-18, but on the ensuing possession, Allison drilled his third 3-ball of the quarter to stretch the margin back to six.

Following a Rabun County free throw that made it a 34-29 game in the final minute of the third, Allison blew past his defender and banked in a runner to give the Panthers a 36-29 lead after three.

With the Wildcats switching to a man-to-man defense, Union County relied upon an unflinching assault of dribble penetration to attack the defense at the rim. Each of the first four Panther possessions to start the fourth quarter resulted in a trip to the foul line, where Allison and Drake were a perfect 4-for-4 and Union stretched its lead to 44-29.

"We always want to start off the game strong but sometimes it just doesn't happen but we were able to correct that and come out strong in the second half," Drake said.

A Rabun triple shaved the margin back to a dozen but a Rich tip-in, a Waller layup and a Drake free throw put the game away at 49-32 with 1:34 remaining. Allison would hit a pair from the line with 46 seconds left to give him 20 points and cap off the Union County scoring.

Rich would finish with 4 points and Hemphill scored two for the Panthers.

Panthers 49, Putnam County 39 - Entering Saturday, both Union County and Putnam were even at 2-2 in region play but it was the Panthers who pulled away late to put themselves in the driver's seat for one of the top four spots in Region 8-AA.

"We found a way to grind it out in the fourth quarter and get the win," Coach Jones said. Union County never trailed for the first 23:56 of the game until the War Eagles stormed ahead with a 7-0 run to close the third. Putnam County capped off the run by taking its first lead of the day on a corner-three as time expired in the period.

Trailing 35-34 to open the fourth, the Panthers responded by outscoring the War Eagles 15-4 over the final 8 minutes to take a 10-point victory and move into a third-place tie in 8-AA.

"We had to step up our defense (in the fourth quarter) and Coach (Jones) was able to get us all back on the same page offensively," Drake said.

Union County regained the lead just 48 seconds into the final frame when Allison sank a three from the top of the circle. Putnam tied it up a minute later

but Allison used a dribble-drive to put the Panthers on top for good.

The War Eagles sank 1-of-2 at the line but Drake scored the next five points on consecutive drives to the hoop -- the second resulting in an and-one -- to open up a 44-38 lead at the 3:10 mark.

Once again, Putnam hit 1-of-2 but Waller answered with consecutive baskets in the paint to give his squad a 48-39 advantage with 1:01 remaining.

Drake split a pair of free throws in the final seconds to put the finishing touches on a dominating fourth quarter performance by the Panthers.

Drake ended up with a game-high 16 points and Allison chipped in 11. Waller added 6 points while Colton Day and Rich scored five apiece.

Brey scored 4 points after missing the Battle of the States due to injury and Hemphill finished with two.

Union County would lead 13-8 after one following a 5-0 spurt to open the game. Waller, Allison and Drake guided the Panthers to a 7-2 advantage before Putnam made it a one-point game at 7-6.

Brey, Day, and Drake were responsible for the final 6 points of the frame as Union led by five after one.

The War Eagles got on the board first in the second period but the Panthers answered with a 7-2 run to grab the largest lead of the half at 20-12.

A Rich triple ignited the run, followed by a Brey layup and a Hemphill offensive rebound-layup. Putnam charged back with five unanswered before an Allison three beat the buzzer, giving Union County a 23-17 rich time advantage.

Rich struck first in the second half to open up a 25-17 lead on a dribble-drive. A 3-point play by Day, a Drake base line drive and a Rich tip-in stretched the Panther margin back to eight at 32-24 at the 3:21 mark of the third.

That would be the final field goal of the quarter as two Drake free throws were all the offense Union could muster over the final 3-plus minutes of the period. Leading 34-28 following Drake's trip to the line, the Panthers were the victims of a 7-0 War Eagle run over the final minute of the third frame.

"I'm not making excuses, but when you play these early games like today (girls tipped at 3 p.m.), everything seems kind of dead. The crowd is dead because its earlier in the day, plus we didn't get in until late last night. But if you're a over team, you'll find a way to overcome all of that and hopefully we're getting better. We have more of these day games so we're going to have to find a way to get going early and find some energy."

And Jones is hoping for an energetic home crowd on Tuesday night as Union County hosts region frontrunner Banks County.

"Tuesday is a big region game," he said. "They're one of the (region) favorites so it'll be a good test for us."

The Leopards are currently 4-1 in region play with a 60-52 loss to Elbert County as the only blemish.

Three of Banks County's four wins have all come by double-digits with a 58-53 victory at Monticello its closest region victory. They also own a 68-53 win over Rabun, a 69-42 victory over Putnam and a 91-42 win over Oglethorpe County.

"Banks and Elbert are the two best teams in the region so I'm looking forward to Tuesday. It's going to be an exciting matchup," Drake added.

The Panthers will visit Oglethorpe County on Friday before hosting Fannin County in a non-region contest Saturday. Oglethorpe is currently sporting a 1-4 mark in region play, highlighted by a 58-53 win at Rabun County back on Dec. 14.

The Patriots fell 81-38 to Elbert County, 61-36 to Putnam and 71-29 to Social Circle.

As for Fannin County, the Rebels dropped 8-of-9 in December after suffering a 56-24 defeat to Union County on Nov. 30. Fannin was only competitive in two of the losses: a 47-40 loss at North Hall and a 52-40 loss to Towns County.

The lone December win was a 66-59 victory over a solid nine-win Heritage-Ringgold squad on day three of the North Murray Christmas tournament.

All three girls games will get underway at 6 p.m. this week with the guys to follow.

Panthers JV 48, Rabun County 51 (OT) - Tied 44-44 at the end of regulation, Union and Rabun needed an extra session to settle things on Friday night.

The Panthers got 13 points from Landon Cox while Logan Helcher scored 12 and Lake Hughes added 10 but it wasn't enough, however, as Union was outscored 7-4 in overtime.

Daniel Snow finished with nine and Blake Davis had four for the Panthers, who led 35-27 entering the fourth quarter following a 17-17 tie at the intermission.



Cayden Rich glides through the air for two points. Photo/Todd Forrest

2019 Baseball and Softball registration opens at the Union County Recreation Department January 7th - February 15th for ages 3-14. Fee: \$55

3-4 Coed Start Smart-parent participation is required.	
5-6 Coed T-ball	11-12 Softball
7-8 Girls Machine Pitch	11-12 Baseball
7-8 Boys Machine Pitch	13-14 Softball
9-10 Softball	13-14 Baseball
9-10 Baseball	

Daddy Daughter Dance

When: Saturday, February 9, 2019 6 PM - 9 PM
Cost: \$50 per couple
\$20 for each additional daughter
Tickets are limited and must be purchased in advance.
Tickets are available only at the Union County Recreation Office located at 310 Welborn Street.
Dinner and limo rides are included.
Pictures are an additional fee.
Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.