

Sports

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Basketball: Henry, Hughes carry Panthers to weekend wins

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Hot-shooting sophomore Hayden Hughes led Union County during two bounce-back victories over the weekend at Athens Academy and vs. Lakeview following Tuesday's region-opening loss at Providence Christian.

During Saturday's overtime win vs. Lakeview, sophomore Houston Henry finished one rebound shy of a triple-double, posting career highs in rebounds, assists, steals and minutes.

The Panthers (10-6, 1-1) will attempt to ride the weekend's momentum into a key region matchup vs. Banks County in Blairsville on Tuesday, Jan. 10. The winner of Tuesday's showdown will gain the inside track for a top-two seed in next month's 8-AA tournament.

"I think we're starting to come together on offense and we just feed off each other," Hughes said after the Lakeview win. "We have guys that can create their own shot and get each other open looks. And we have Eli [Underwood] down low getting us buckets. We enjoy playing together and we're having a lot of fun right now."

"I think there is still more room for improvement. There's more we can do. We have a chance to be a dangerous team by the end of the year."

Panthers 68, Athens Academy 50 - Union County left the home team in the dust during the second half Friday night, outscoring the Spartans 30-10 over a pivotal eight-minute stretch beginning at the 2:15 mark of the third quarter.

Nursing a 35-34 advantage during a see-saw contest just south of the Classic City, the Panthers ended the third on a 10-2 run and opened up some breathing room at 45-36. Hughes, who led the way with a then-career-high 19 points, started the fourth frame with a trey and a layup to cap a 15-2 outburst. Hughes' fifth and final 3-point basket and an Eli Underwood free throw made it a 54-38 game with 5:16 remaining.

Led by Region 8-A Private's reigning Player of the Year, junior Kymel Williams, the Spartans made one final push -- narrowing the deficit to 56-44 with 3:40 remaining. But sophomore Jude Ellis quickly put things away with a triple on the ensuing possession, then a dribble drive at the three-minute mark, sparking a 9-0 Union County run and a 65-44 advantage.

Freshman Cade Dockrey drove to the bucket, and sophomore Houston Henry added a steal-and-score with 2:16 left, finishing off the 9-0 stretch and allowing head coach Corey Garrett to call on his reserves for the final 1:45.

"With us being so young and replacing six seniors from last year, everyone is trying to find where they fit in," Garrett said. "We had the football guys come in late and then we had the flu hit us, so I think it comes down to chemistry and people finding their role. Hopefully we're close to that point, where we play off each other's strengths, help out where we're weak and just do what we do best."

Ellis scored 15 of his 16 points after halftime and dished out four assists. Underwood finished with 14 points and 17 boards; Henry scored 13 points with a game-high seven assists and two steals. Dockrey added 5 points, two steals and one block.

Hughes also delivered on



Sophomore Hayden Hughes fires up the crowd near the end of Saturday's win over Lakeview Academy. Photo/Todd Forreest

the defensive end, providing a game-high three steals, along with three assists and five rebounds. Union County's sophomore sharp-shooter hit 5 of 10 from long range, 6-of-12 overall and 2 of 2 at the charity stripe after a scoreless first frame.

The Panthers took an 11-9 lead into the second but surrendered an 11-2 run and faced a 20-13 deficit at the quarter's midway point. But Hughes ignited an 11-2 run with two free throws at the 3:53 mark. Hughes' first trey came on the heels of a Spartans' deuce, and a Dockrey steal resulted in a 1-for-2 visit to the line. Henry added another steal to move Union within a point via a layup. Later, the point guard went coast-to-coast in under 6 seconds, kicking out to Hughes for a go-ahead corner-3 at the halftime buzzer.

"What we can get during end-of-quarter situations is something we've talked about lately, so it was really cool to see them do that," Garrett said. "After that I told the guys at halftime, 'we're going to hit some shots in the second half and break this thing open' and that's what we did."

Underwood scored to start the third, putting Union County ahead 26-22, then Hughes' third triple made it 29-24 at the six-minute mark. Two free throws each by Ellis and Underwood, plus a bucket by sophomore Maddox Young, kept the Panthers out front 35-34.

Young finished with 2 points, five rebounds and three assists.

Williams led Athens Academy with 19 points, nine boards and three assists on 3-of-6 shooting from downtown.

Team stats: Union County -- 22 for 57 (39%) shooting; 8 for 19 (42%) from three; 16 for 20 (80%) at the foul line. Athens Academy -- 18 for 48 (38%) shooting; 7 for 20 (35%) from three; 7 for 9 (78%) at the line.

Union -- 38 rebounds (14 offensive); 28 points in the paint; 14 second-chance points; seven turnovers; 17 points off turnovers. Athens -- 30 rebounds (eight offensive); 16 points in the paint; 5 second-chance points; 14 turnovers; 4 points off turnovers.

Panthers 78, Lakeview Academy 68 (OT) - Union County weathered a late surge on Saturday, forcing overtime via an Ellis tip-in with 14 seconds to play.

It was all Union during the extra session, outscoring the visiting Lions 12-2 on the heels of a 10-0 run to begin OT.

Hughes notched a career-high point total for the second straight game, pouring in 23 and sinking six treys -- also a career-best -- as the Panthers avenged last month's loss in Gainesville.

And on a weekend that he combined to hit 11 of 19 from 3-point territory, Hughes' biggest shot was his last.

With 2:27 left in overtime, Hughes delivered the dagger to Lakeview Academy with a corner 3 that extended the Union County lead to 72-66. The clutch shot came courtesy of Henry's dribble penetration, setting up a feed to Hughes in the right corner.

Henry, overshadowed by Hughes' long-range sniping, finished one rebound short of a triple-double, amassing 12 assists, nine rebounds and five steals in 35 minutes -- all career-best totals. The Union County point guard went 5-of-8 from the charity stripe and hit his only 3-point attempt during a 14-point outing.

On the heels of his 12th and final assist via Hughes' trey, Henry split a pair of free throws, followed by two from Ellis that mounted a 75-66 advantage near the one-minute mark. Ellis and Henry added throws during the final 32 seconds, bringing the total tally to 78-68.

Despite leading 61-55 with under 2:45 remaining, the Panthers were fortunate to survive into overtime, surrendering an 11-3 run that dropped Union into a 66-64 deficit with under a minute to play.

"I've talked all year about us being able to handle the press but [Lakeview] got us toward the end," Garrett said. "At halftime, I thought [Lakeview] would press to start the second half and they didn't. But right there at the end they threw it on us and it surprised us."

With 20 seconds left, Underwood rebounded a Henry miss and attracted all five defenders into the paint, where his putback attempt rolled off the iron. The extra attention to Underwood allowed a streaking Ellis to fly in untouched from the weakside for a right-handed tip with 14 seconds left.

The Panthers' full-court pressure forced Lakeview into a timeout in the backcourt with 10 seconds left. And with three fouls to give, Union County made those final 10 ticks a slog, forcing the Lions to inbound again with 7 seconds left. With time running down and Lakeview pushing across halfcourt, Hughes got his hands on a pass but couldn't secure possession, sending the



Coach Garrett works the officials as sophomore Houston Henry looks for space during the second half at Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forreest

ball out of bounds on the baseline with 1.2 seconds left.

On the final shot of regulation, Lakeview drew up a perfectly-crafted play out of a timeout, resulting in a great look from 6 feet that bounced three times on the iron before rolling off the other side.

The overtime began with a deuce and a free throw from Underwood on Union's first two possessions. The third trip down the floor ended with Henry's 12th dime and Hughes' sixth 3-pointer.

The Panthers finished with five players in double-figures as Ellis, Underwood and Young each scored 10 points. Dockrey added 9 points, four rebounds, two assists, a steal and a block.

Underwood matched Henry with nine boards; Hughes grabbed seven rebounds and handed out three assists. Ellis added three assists, while Young finished with three boards and a steal.

Union County closed the game in style but struggled in the early going, falling into deficits of 8-2 and 18-11 after briefly securing a 9-8 advantage.

Facing an early 7-point margin at 18-11 with two fouls on Ellis, the Panthers raced ahead 32-25 during a 21-7 stretch sparked by an 8-0 run that was headlined by Dockrey, Henry and Young.

A combination of missed free throws and offensive rebounding helped Lakeview close the gap to 32-28 during the half's final moments, courtesy of six free throw attempts in four seconds. One of Lakeview's offensive boards proved extra costly when Underwood collected his third foul on the putback.

With Union's senior big man on the bench to start the third, Lakeview regained control momentarily with leads of 40-37 and 43-39, but Hughes drilled consecutive 3s to even the score at 45-45. Young converted a dribble drive in the final seconds to send the contest into the fourth quarter tied at 47-47.

Dockrey, Ellis and Henry moved Union out front 53-49, then an Underwood and-one made it 56-51 at the five-minute mark. Hughes converted a traditional 3-point play for a 61-55 advantage with 2:55 left.

"My dad [assistant coach Kevin Hughes] and my teammates have been helping me a lot," Hayden Hughes said after the Lakeview win when asked about discovering his role in the offense. "I guess the energy kind of takes over and it gives me the

confidence to take my shots, and that picks [the energy] up even more."

Game stats: Union County -- 27 for 60 (45%) shooting; 7 for 13 (54%) from three; 15 for 22 (68%) free throws. Lakeview -- 24 for 62 (39%) shooting; 6 for 27 (22%) from three; 6 for 13 (46%) free throws.

Union -- 39 rebounds (14 offensive); 40 points in the paint; 9 second-chance points; 11 turnovers; 13 points off turnovers. Lakeview -- 35 rebounds (13 offensive); 32 points in the paint; 15 second-chance points; 10 turnovers; 6 points off turnovers.

Panthers 38, No. 3 Providence Christian 73 - Union County raced out to a 17-6 lead in Lilburn, but it was all Providence the rest of the way, outscoring the Panthers 16-4 to close the first quarter.

The Storm pulled away in the second, scoring the first 14 points en route to a 21-2 lead that dropped the Panthers into a 43-23 halftime deficit.

While Union County committed only 10 turnovers, they had no answer on the perimeter, where Providence shot a scorching 15 of 30 from 3-point range.

"[Providence is] probably the most complete team I've ever coached against," Garrett said. "In terms of discipline, fundamentals, athleticism and

shooting, they are probably the most balanced team I've faced. Of course, when you shoot 15 for 30, everything looks better."

Underwood finished with 10 points and 13 boards; Ellis scored a team-high 11 points. Hughes added 9 points on 3-of-5 from downtown -- kickstarting a week where the sophomore hit 14 of 24 over three games.

Young ended with 4 points and two rebounds; Henry scored 2 points, grabbed six boards and dealt four assists. Dockrey had 2 points and two assists; sophomore Kaden Combs gathered two rebounds.

Game stats: Union -- 16 of 50 (32%) shooting; 5 of 20 (25%) from three; 1 of 2 (50%) free throws. Providence -- 29 of 59 (49%) shooting; 15 of 30 from three; 0 for 0 (N/A) free throws.

Union -- 27 rebounds (9 offensive); 16 points in the paint; 4 second-chance points; 10 turnovers; 6 points off turnovers. Providence -- 37 rebounds (12 offensive); 24 points in the paint; 14 second-chance points; 5 turnovers; 18 points off turnovers.

Up next: Union County hosts Banks County (11-5, 1-0) on Tuesday night, beginning with the girls' contest at 6 p.m. The Leopards are coming off a 78-56 win over East Jackson on Tuesday, Jan. 3. Earlier in the season, Banks split two meetings with Rabun County, defeating Lakeview 71-64 and lost 63-62 to North Hall.

Last year's Union-Banks series ended all square at 1-1, with each team claiming a hard-fought home victory. Like the Panthers, Banks leaned heavily on a talented crop of freshmen in 2021-22 but suffered significant losses to graduation as well.

Union County hosts East Jackson (6-11, 0-2) on Friday at 7 p.m. before going on the road Saturday to North Hall.

"Tuesday night is a big one," Garrett said. "Banks is a little like us, they are young and like to play at a high pace. They have a ton of shooters and they use their zone defense that forces you to shoot it. They're going to be tough. We are two pretty even teams playing a game we both need to win. It should be fun. I expect some fireworks."

"East Jackson is Friday at home and they're a confusing team. Some games they look really, really good and other times you're left scratching your head."



Freshman Cade Dockrey goes to the hoop following a steal during the second quarter at Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forreest

Lady Panthers bounce back vs. Lakeview behind Hill's 19 points

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The Lady Panthers welcomed head-coach Brad Cochran back to the sideline on Saturday as they split their weekend games vs. a pair of private schools.

Union County (9-7, 0-1) enjoyed an off day on Tuesday as the men traveled to Providence Christian; unfortunately, junior Lara Turner suffered an ankle injury during practice that will likely sideline the team's third-leading scorer and rebounder for most of January.

Lady Panthers 45, Lakeview 40 - In Cochran's first game since the Dec. 10 trip to Lakeview, the shorthanded Lady Panthers used a 14-4 fourth frame to erase a 36-31 deficit.

Senior Corinne Hill came up big in the late rally en route to a career-best 19 points. And with her team trailing by five early in the fourth, Hill scored the first 7 points of Union's game-shifting 13-0 run. When the dust settled, the Lady Panthers held a 44-36 edge with a minute left.

"With Lara out, I told the girls that someone needed to step up in her place, and Corinne accepted that responsibility and made some big shots for us tonight," Cochran said after the game.

Two Lakeview free throw halted the Lady Panthers' run with 37 seconds left, but Hill split two free throws on the ensuing possession for a three-score lead at 45-38.

Sophomore Katelyn Brown added a career-high 10 points to go with 15 rebounds during the win.

"That motor on that girl never stops," Cochran said about Brown. "She brings it on every play of every game. She is really the heart and soul of this team and I can't say enough good things about her."

Sophomore Ariel McCa-



Senior Corinne Hill poured in a career-high 19 points, including seven straight to begin the fourth quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

rter had 6 points, eight boards, five steals and three assists. Junior Kamryn Mull scored 6 points with two assists; junior Morgan Warren had 4 points and 3 boards.

"Tonight was a special win, coming against a school I used to coach at," Cochran said. "I had a lot of friends and family here today. One of my coaching mentors was also in the building."

Lakeview opened the contest with a 5-0 spurt, but Union County responded with six straight and held a 16-13 advantage after one. The Lions inched ahead 22-19 late in the half until McCarter tied the score with a free throw and a putback on consecutive trips.

Another 5-0 stretch to start the second half moved Lakeview in front 27-22 until a Mull trey and a Brown layup tied the score near the three-minute mark. Union kept pace at 31-31 courtesy of two buckets from Hill before the Lions ended the third with five straight.

Game stats: Union -- 19 for 58 (33%) shooting; 2 for 11 (18%) from three; 5 of 15 (33%) free throws. Lakeview -- 15 for 43 (35%); 0 for 10 from three; 8 for 12 (67%) free throws.

Union -- 37 rebounds (18 offensive); 34 points in the paint; 15 second-chance points; 9 turnovers; 14 points off turnovers. Lakeview -- 32 rebounds (11 offensive); 22 points in the paint; 11 second-



Sophomore Katelyn Brown scores two of her 6 first-quarter points and earned postgame praise from her coach. Photo/Todd Forrest

chance points; 18 turnovers; 6 points off turnovers.

"I'd been gone for so long that tonight felt like the start of a new season," Cochran joked after the game. "But our girls and our coaching staff really stepped up while I was gone. I'm extremely proud of each one of them."

"One of the things I told the girls while I was away was, they would need to supply their own energy because I won't be there to provide it for them. But we beat two really good teams at the Battle of the States, and lost to a very good Franklin team. I don't think we played bad against Franklin, I think Franklin is just a very good team."

Lady Panthers 27, Ath-

ens Academy 41 - A Warren layup to start the game Friday marked Union's only lead of the night as the Spartans answered with a 17-2 run.

In their first contest without Turner, the Panthers sliced the deficit to 17-10 via two Brown free throws and baskets from McCarter and Brown. McCarter's 7 first-half points kept Union within striking distance at 24-15 entering the break but Athens Academy clamped down during a low-scoring third.

A basket by freshman Paula Robertson accounted for her team's only third-quarter points, helping the Spartans pull away at 32-17 by quarter's end.

Hill inched the Lady Pan-

thers within 11 at 37-26 with 3:23 left, but Union County wouldn't get any closer.

McCarter led the way with 11 points; Brown, Hill and Warren added 4 points apiece. Freshmen Mady Adams and Robertson scored 2 points each.

No team stats were available for Friday's game at Athens Academy.

Up next: Union County hosts No. 4 Banks County (15-3, 1-0) on Tuesday in the region home opener. The Leopards, winners of eight-in-a-row, picked up a 52-41 win over Habersham Central on Saturday, four days removed from a 64-37 rout of East Jackson.

Banks owns an impressive 76-38 victory over Battle of the States champion Rabun County. In the first meeting, Rabun County defeated the Leopards 52-37. Banks' other losses came to a pair of common opponents in North Hall (55-43) and No. 2 White County (51-29).

Union County hosts East Jackson on Friday at 7 p.m. The Eagles currently sport a 7-10 record against a brutal schedule that includes a 63-62 upset of Class AAA's 10th-ranked Dawson County.

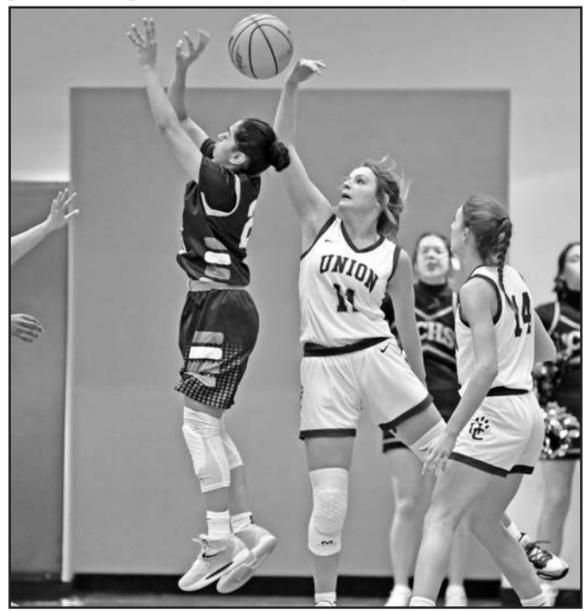
The Lady Panthers visit North Hall on Saturday.



Brad Cochran



Morgan Warren battles at Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest



Ariel McCarter blocks a Lakeview shot. Photo/Todd Forrest



Kamryn Mull at Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest

Swimming: UCHS returns from break with six top-5 placers at Tallulah

UCHS SWIM TEAM TOP 10 FINISHES

SHIVER ME TIMBERS MEET
TALLULAH FALLS, GA - JAN. 7, 2023

200 MEDLEY RELAY
Girls A Relay: 6th

50 FREESTYLE
Nicholas Nushtayev: 4th
Courtney Foster: 8th

100 FREESTYLE
Nicholas Nushtayev: 4th
Lily Helton: 3rd

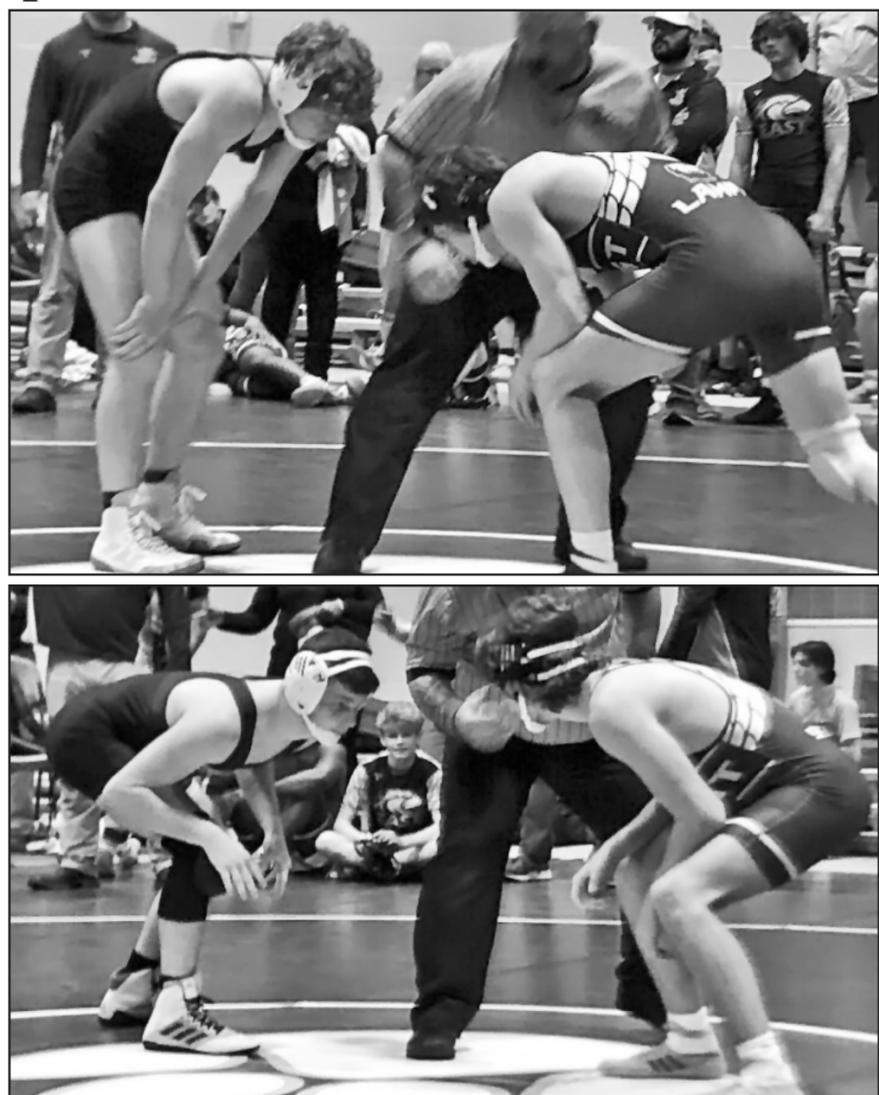
200 FREESTYLE RELAY
Girls A Relay: 5th

100 BACKSTROKE
Andrew Farmer: 7th
Courtney Foster: 5th
Lilly Collins: 9th

100 BREASTSTROKE
Lily Helton: 2nd

OVERALL SCORES
GIRLS: 6TH
BOYS: 7TH

Wrestling: Union fourth at Area; qualifies for State Duals tournament



Pictured (both UC wrestlers on the left in photos): Asa Smith-Foot (top) and Damon Wallace (bottom) compete in Banks County during last weekend's Area 8 Duals Tournament. The Panthers qualified for their second straight state duals tournament with a fourth-place finish in Homer. Fannin County took home first, Banks County came in second and East Jackson placed third. David Heredia, Payton Legatt and Huck Whisenhunt finished undefeated in their respective weight classes. Thomas Gary, Smith-Foot and Wallace each went 1-1. The Panthers will travel to Glenn Hills High School in Augusta this weekend for state preliminaries. Union County High School will host the individual Area tournament next month. Photos/submitted