

# Sports

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## Panthers outlast Fannin and Oglethorpe; stumble late vs Banks

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Union County survived a pair of upset bids over the weekend following a gut-wrenching home loss to region heavyweight Banks County on Tuesday evening.

Leading the way for the Panthers was junior Sawyer Drake, who turned in a productive week, averaging 19.3 points a game over the three-game stretch that was highlighted by a 23-point outing vs Banks County.

Meanwhile, Pierson Allison, who turned in scoring performances of 14, 18 and 12 last week, proved to be the hero of Saturday's win over Fannin County when the junior scored the game-winning basket with 15 seconds remaining.

**Panthers 47, Fannin County 45** -- All tied up at 45-45, Allison was able to find a lane to the hoop and score on a left-handed reverse layup. With two fouls to give on the other end, Union used them both and forced the Rebels into a low-percentage, desperation heave at the buzzer.

Receiving a toss from Drake, just beyond the 3-point arc with around 20 seconds to play, the lefty Allison was able to penetrate to his right before switching hands and scoring on an up-and-under layup between a pair of taller defenders in the paint.

Down by two, the Rebels quickly advanced the ball beyond mid-court then called a timeout to set up a final attempt. Following two more timeouts -- one by each coach -- Fannin County inbounded the ball and was immediately fouled 25-feet from the basket. On the next attempt to inbound the ball, the Rebels were fouled before getting off a 3-point shot.

After four timeouts -- and with Union County out of fouls-to-give -- the best the Rebels could muster was to hurl a contested 30-footer in the direction of the backboard.

Moments earlier, however, Fannin County was shooting a pair at the line, trailing by one, following a Panther turnover that led to a Rebel fast break. After sinking the first to tie it up at 45-45, the second misfired and bounced out-of-bounds, last touched by the blue-and-gray and setting the stage for Allison's heroics.

In the previous meeting in Blue Ridge, Union County dismantled Fannin, 56-24. The Rebels also entered Saturday's contest with a 3-15 record and were fresh off a 71-36 loss at Dawson County the night before, an 82-29 loss to GAC on Tuesday and a 58-38 defeat to Gilmer one week prior.

As for the Panthers, they were coming off a closer-than-expected region battle at Oglethorpe County the night before and a heartbreaking loss to Banks County on Tuesday. But in the early going Saturday, it was obvious that this wouldn't be another 32-point Union County drubbing. Although, not many folks expected Fannin County to have a chance to win the game at the Rebels either.

The Rebels have been a second-half team most of the season so when they led 16-12 after one and took a narrow 30-24 margin into the break, many Panthers fans must have felt pretty comfortable. But this time around, it was the opposition that came out of the locker room on a mission. The Rebels would



Sawyer Drake drives the base line vs Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Britt Waller (35) rejects a Banks County shot attempt during the first half. Photo/Todd Forrest



Pierson Allison dribbles out a game-saving offensive rebound following a missed free throw in the final seconds at Oglethorpe. Photo/Todd Forrest



Cayden Rich scores and draws the foul following a late steal that helped secure the win at Oglethorpe County. Photo/Todd Forrest

outscore Union County 14-5 in the third period to take a 38-35 lead into the fourth.

Prior to Allison's game-winner, the junior point guard was scoreless in the fourth, in fact, it was sophomore Colton Day that did most of the heavy lifting in the fourth period, scoring on a three and a driving layup. Drake also finished with five in the quarter but was just 1-for-4 at the foul line.

Day would finish with 10 points on a pair of threes. Junior Sawyer Brey scored 4 points -- all in the first half, senior Britt Waller had two, while Jared Nelson and Kanon Hemphill scored one each.

Senior Dahla Myers led the Rebels with 13 points while senior Chandler Kendall added 10.

**Panthers 64, Oglethorpe County 60** - Everytime Union County would start to pull away, the Patriots would storm right back to generate a little drama.

Leading by as many as 11 late in the third, the Panthers would take a 46-37 advantage into the fourth. They would hold a double-digit advantage well inside the 5-minute mark when Oglethorpe made its run.

Trailing 52-42, the Patriots used a 3-point play to trim the margin to seven with 4:37 remaining. Consecutive Union County turnovers resulted in two easy layups, and just like that, Oglethorpe was within three at the 3:23 mark.

Drake sank a pair of free throws to stretch the advantage back to five with 3:00 on the clock but the Patriots used a deuce, followed by a 1-for-2 trip to the line to pull within two.

Once again, the Panthers turned to Drake, who drew a foul on a dribble-drive, sending him to the line where he sank 1-of-2.

Trailing 55-52 with under two minutes left, Oglethorpe County got careless and Cayden Rich made them pay by swiping

a pass then taking it coast-to-coast for the basket plus a foul. The and-one opened up a 58-52 advantage with 1:47 to play when Allison picked the pocket of a Patriot ball handler on the ensuing possession and went the other way, where he was fouled on his layup attempt.

He would connect on both tries from the stripe, giving Union a 60-52 advantage with 1:35 remaining.

If anyone thought Oglethorpe was going to roll over during the final one-minute, 30 seconds, they obviously hadn't been paying attention during the game's first 30 minutes.

Following a Patriot miss, Day came down with the rebound and was fouled with 1:20 to play. He would hit 1-of-2 to make it a 61-52 game with 1:20 to play but Oglethorpe answered with a quick bucket then converted a Union turnover into an and-one opportunity with 45 seconds to go.

The free throw was unsuccessful and the Panthers were left nursing a 61-56 lead. Allison split a pair at the charity stripe but Oglethorpe scored on a putback to trim the deficit to 62-58 with 18 seconds remaining.

With 13 seconds left, Drake went to the line but missed both shots, luckily, Allison came away with the rebound and sealed the win with two free throws.

Allison and Drake would each record a game-high 18 points while Rich added nine and Hemphill finished with six. Waller scored five, Day and Nelson each chipped in 3 points.

After falling behind 2-0, it was all Union County, who closed the first quarter on a 13-2 run. Trailing 18-9, Oglethorpe countered with a 12-2 run for a 21-20 lead with 72 seconds left in the half.

With under a minute remaining, Nelson silenced the Patriot surge with a go-ahead, corner-trey. Oglethorpe would tie things up but Hemphill and Allison each sank a pair from the line during the final 32 seconds to open up a 27-23 Union County advantage at the intermission.

The Panthers began the third with an 8-2 spurt to take

a 35-25 lead. Two Allison free throws made it 37-27 at 5:24, two more at the line by Allison kept the home team at arm's length at 39-30 with 3:24 left in the period.

A Patriot Trey on the ensuing possession sliced the margin to six but Drake used a putback and two free throws to keep Union ahead by 10.

Drake would hit 1-of-2 and Day was perfect on two tries and the Panthers led 46-37 after three.

The fourth got underway with a Patriot free throw but Allison countered with a breakaway layup on the other end for a 48-38 advantage. A jump-pass from Drake set up a Hemphill lay-in, keeping the lead at 10 before Oglethorpe rallied over the final 4:30-plus.

**Panthers 45, Banks County 54** -- Union County went ice cold over the final 9 minutes, 22 seconds as the Leopards rallied from an early 14-point margin, then overcame the loss of its star player when Carl Cleveland fouled out with 7:12 remaining.

With two minutes left in the third quarter, Allison's third foul sent him to the bench as the Panthers were clinging to a 40-39 advantage. In an danger of trailing for the first time all game, Drake nailed a triple to make it

a 4-point game at the 1:22 mark of the third.

That would be the final field goal of the evening for Union County.

When Cleveland fouled out early in the fourth quarter by picking up his fourth personal and a technical simultaneously, Allison sank two free throws to make it a 45-41 game with 7:12 to play.

Those would be the final points of the game for Union County.

Banks County took its first lead on a three with 6:09 remaining. Luckily for the Panthers, the Leopards would also experience a scoring drought as the score remained frozen at 46-45 until inside of 90 seconds, providing Union County plenty of opportunity to regain the lead.

With under 1:30 to play, Banks County came up with a steal and turned it into a layup and a 3-point lead on the other end. They would push the margin out to five when they went coast-to-coast for a layup with under 40 seconds remaining.

The Panthers chances for a late rally all but evaporated when they were tagged for an offensive foul on the ensuing possession and the Leopards put the game on ice at the free throw line.

Before Banks County scored the final 15 points of the

game, Union County scored the game's first 12 points and led 16-2 with 2:28 left in the first.

Trailing 16-6 after one, Banks used a 9-2 run to open the second and cut the difference to 18-15 at the 5-minute mark. The Panthers responded with a 10-3 surge that stretched the lead back to double figures at 28-18.

After five-straight Leopard points, a Drake jumper kept Union County ahead at 30-23, just shy of the 1-minute mark.

Drake would pour in 20 first-half points as the Panthers took a 32-26 lead into the break.

Allison answered a pair of Banks County treys with dribble drives to keep Union on top 36-32. The lead would extend to eight as Day scored on a lay-in off a full-court pass and Rich went inside for two and a 40-32 advantage.

The next seven points belonged to Banks as they pulled within a point before Drake's 3-ball from the corner allowed the Panthers to take a lead into the final frame.

Drake ended up with 23 points but was forced to sit the final 77 seconds when he was noticeably limping after knocking knees with a Banks County player.

Allison scored 14 points, Hemphill had 4 points, Rich and Day added 2 points apiece.

**Big Picture:** With the Fannin win not counting towards region play, the Panthers continue to tread water in 8-AA.

The top four teams -- Elbert, Social Circle, Banks, Union -- have started to separate themselves somewhat but the Panthers are currently fourth, one game back of Social and Banks, who are tied for second.

If Union County avoids a hiccup vs the bottom half of the league then scores road wins at Social and Banks, second place is still a very real possibility.

**Up Next:** On Tuesday, Union County will host first-place Elbert County, who is unbeaten in 8-AA and on the verge of wrapping up the No. 1 seed following Banks County's loss to Social Circle on Friday. A win by the Panthers would definitely shake things up a little bit but they'll need a much better showing than the 61-29 loss in Elberton last month.

The girls will get underway at 6 p.m. Friday with the guys to follow.

Union will head back out on the road Friday when they visit Monticello. The Hurricanes were winless when they fell to the Panthers in Blairsville but since that loss they're clearly a different team. They took Banks County down to the wire in a 58-53 loss before defeating Putnam County 55-44 and going to Oglethorpe County and handling business 50-35.

Girls tip off is scheduled for 5 p.m. Friday at Monticello.

Union County is off on Saturday before visiting Social Circle next Tuesday.

The tip off is scheduled for 5 p.m. at Social Circle.



Panther head coach Casey Jones on the sideline during the final minutes at Oglethorpe County on Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

**2019 Baseball and Softball registration opens at the Union County Recreation Department January 7<sup>th</sup> - February 15<sup>th</sup> 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.