

Sports

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Wrestling: Union claims first Area title in dramatic finish

By Todd Forrest
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Blue Ridge - With the Panthers trailing Banks County 35-27 entering the final two matches, Union needed two wins -- at least one by pinfall.

Enter Payton Legatt and Asa Smith-Foot.

Legatt scored the 6-point pin during the second round of his 165-pound bout, setting the stage for Smith-Foot in a winner-take-all 175-lb match.

Smith-Foot took control early vs. Banks' Davian Knox and never relented, scoring an 11-0 major decision and awarding Union the 4 points it needed to overtake the Leopards, 37-35.

Earlier, senior David Heredia started things off for Union County with a pinfall at 190 lbs, followed by Dusty Aaron's 215-lb pinfall that spotted the Panthers a 12-0 lead.

After a Union County forfeit at 106, Eli Flowers' pin at 113 lbs built an 18-6 margin.

But Banks County rattled off 24-straight points, putting the Panthers in a 30-18 hole



Union County wrestling after securing the program's first Area title on Saturday. Photo/Todd Forrest

when victories by freshmen Kevin Kilpatrick (3-point decision) and Paxon Legatt (pin) had Union within three at 30-27.

After dropping a 5-point technical fall at 157 lbs, the Panthers entered the final two matches behind 35-27 when Payton Legatt and Smith-Foot

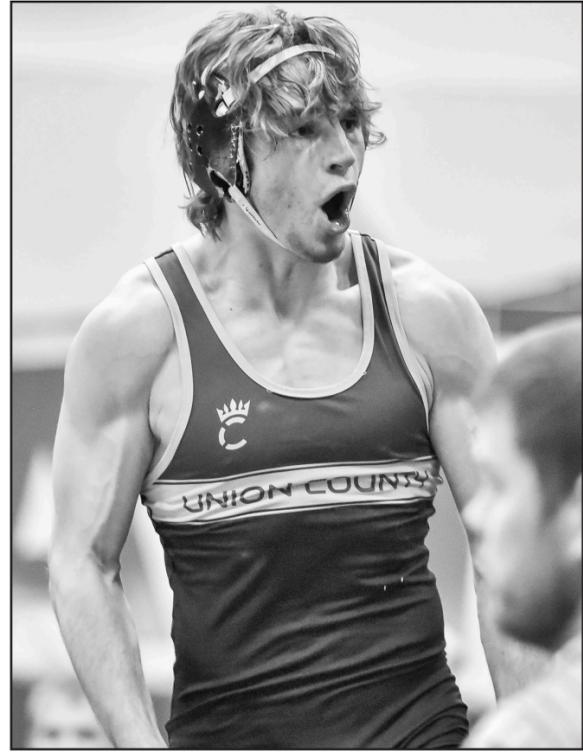
delivered.

Earlier in the day, Union County took care of Fannin County 60-13 during the opening round. Banks County edged East Jackson to punch its ticket to the finals.

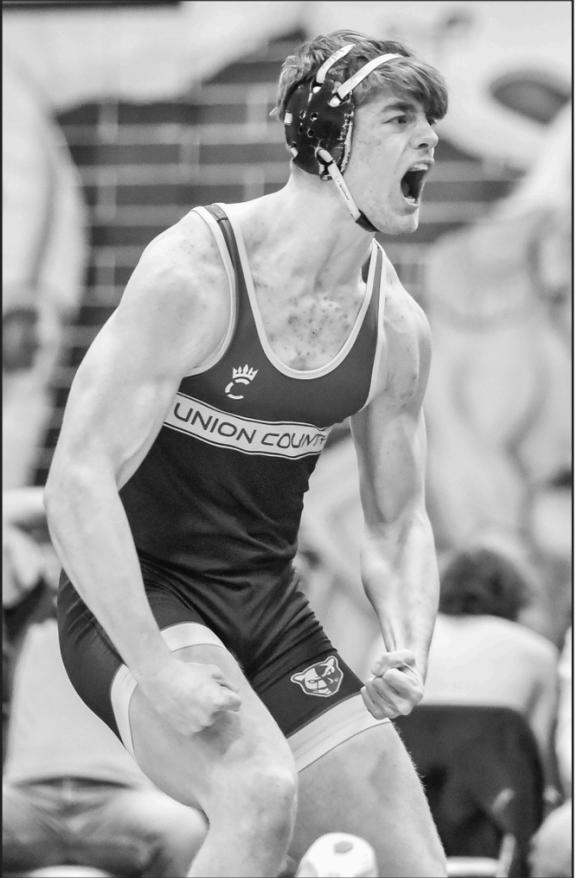
The Panthers will travel to Jeff Davis County on Friday,

Jan. 19 to begin the Class AA State Duals tournament. The state champion will be crowned on Saturday, Jan. 20.

Union County's first round opponent remained unknown as of the Monday morning deadline.



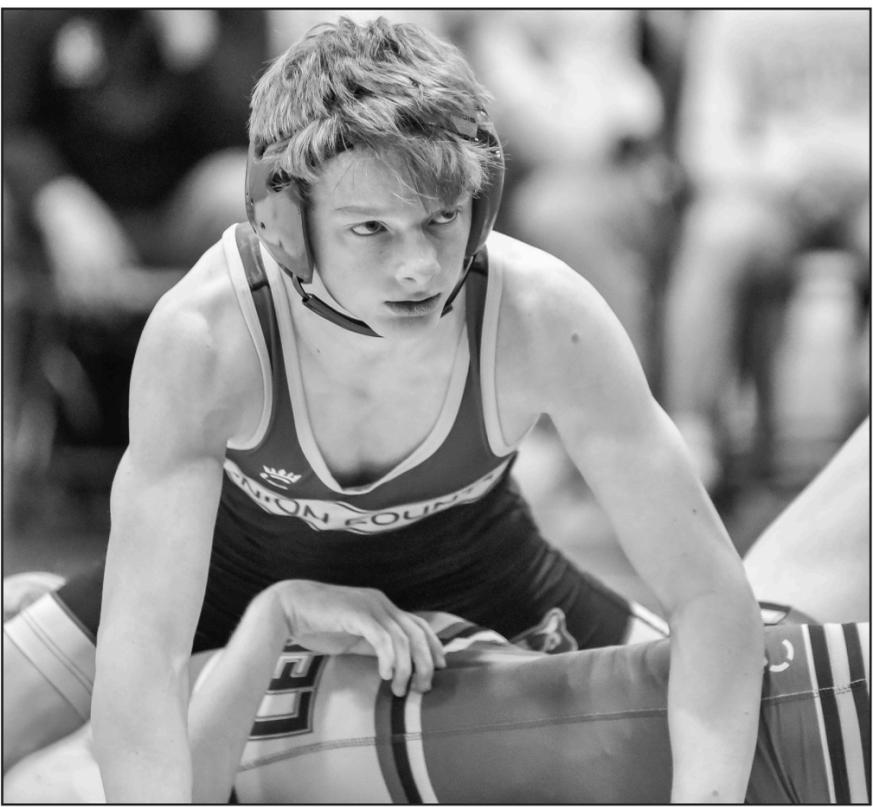
An animated Payton Legatt after keeping Union's Area 8 championship hopes alive with his 165-lb pinfall victory. Photo/Todd Forrest



Dusty Aaron celebrates his pin vs. Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Asa Smith-Foot (top) during his Area-clinching decision over Banks County at 175 lbs. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman Eli Flowers scores a pin vs. Banks County at 113 lbs. Photo/Todd Forrest

River City Bank Sponsors UC Panther Tip-Off Club



Athletes from the Men's and Women's Union County High School Basketball team accept the sponsorship check from River City Bank. Pictured with Scott Nanney, Market President; Austin Pattee, Universal Banker; and Tammy Collins, Relationship Manager.

River City Bank is a proud supporter of youth athletics and is honored to partner with the Union County Tip-Off Club for the Panther's 2023-2024 basketball season.

"Sports have a unique way of bringing people together and instilling valuable life skills. As a community bank, we are excited to support organizations that encour-

age the overall growth of our students," said Scott Nanney, Market President.

As your hometown local banking team, River City Bank proudly supports the Union County Panthers both on and off the court and we look forward to a great season for the Panthers!

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Lady Panthers remain perfect in Region 8-AA action

Fannin County's holds off late Union surge in 48-47 victory

By Todd Forrest
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Union County improved to 3-0 in Region 8-AA on Friday, Jan. 12, courtesy of a 64-23 rout at East Jackson before falling 48-47 in a heartbreaking non-region loss to Fannin County on Saturday afternoon.

With the Tuesday, Jan. 9 matchup at Banks County rescheduled for Jan. 23 and two upcoming games vs. Fellowship Christian and Providence Christian, the Lady Panthers (10-8, 3-0) can take a significant step this week toward securing one of the top-two seeds during next month's Region 8-AA tournament.

"The girls have improved a great deal, but sometimes the top of one mountain is the bottom of another," Union County head coach Thomas Nelson said.

Lady Panthers 64, East Jackson 23 - Union County opened Friday's road trip with 22 straight points as 13 players scored in the win.

"That shows we're becoming more of a team and not relying on one or two individuals to carry the load," Nelson said. "We played our JV team in the second half and that younger group did really well and our senior leadership is starting to show through."

Junior Ariel McCarter tallied team-highs with 8 points and 6 steals during the first half before taking the night off. Sophomore Paula Robertson finished with 7 points and 2 steals.

Mady Adams, Kamryn Mull, Nomi Nelson and Hope Taylor scored 6 points each. Sloane Dyer had 5 points and 3 steals, while Aubrie Akins, Hensley Adams, Ragan Mc-



Senior Lara Turner appeared in her first game since Dec. 29 when Union faced East Jackson last week. Photo/Todd Forrest

Carter added four apiece. Akins also pulled down a team-high 9 rebounds.

In addition to the win, Union County welcomed back Lara Turner from an ankle injury, and the senior forward finished with 4 points, 2 rebounds and an assist during one half of action.

The Lady Panthers stormed ahead 22-0 in the second ahead of a 43-5 lead at the break. The reserves took over during the third quarter as Union County coasted to a 41-point victory.

Junior Katelyn Brown finished with 3 points and 4 rebounds; freshman Izzy Anthros added a free throw, 5 rebounds and 2 assists. Senior Morgan Warren and freshman Regan

Trlica collected two boards each.

Lady Panthers 47, Fannin County 48 - Fannin County's Macy Hawkins sank the second of two free throws with three-tenths of a second remaining during Saturday's loss to the visiting Rebels.

Moments earlier, as the final buzzer sounded for the first time, Turner attempted to strip Hawkins, but a whistle came in after the horn, sending Fannin to the line for two. After an unsuccessful first attempt, Hawkins knocked down her second try, and the Rebels' Courtney Davis picked off Union's inbound pass to seal the win.

Davis, the Lady Rebels' career points leader, finished with a game-high 29 points -- 25



Junior Katelyn Brown went for 9 points, 12 rebounds, 6 assists and 3 steals vs. Fannin County on Saturday, Dec. 13. Photo/Todd Forrest

during the final three quarters. Meanwhile, Taylor led Union County with 11 points, despite spending most of the game in foul trouble.

"We lost to a very good Fannin County team with a standout player (Davis)," Nelson said. "She is a really good kid and I'm rooting for her to go as far as she can."

"But I thought we played well. We could have played better in spurts. But kudos to Davis. She willed them to that win."

The backcourt trio of Ariel McCarter (6), Mull (3) and Robertson (6) combined for just 15 points, but Brown picked up the slack, scoring 9 points with 12 boards, 6 assists and 3 steals.

Turner finished with 6 points, 6 boards and 3 steals.

In the early going, Union jumped ahead 8-3 and took a 10-7 lead into the second. Fannin pushed ahead 19-15 and took a 23-21 margin into the break.

Union County briefly regained the lead at 25-23, but Fannin opened a 36-30 advantage until Mull's 3 cut the deficit in half heading to the fourth.

The Lady Rebels bumped their lead back to six at 43-37 with 4:23 remaining, but Union climbed within a basket via a steal and two free throws from Brown, and Ariel McCarter's fast-break feed to Robertson for a layup.

Fannin extended its margin back to six with 2:33 left when Davis hit two free throws on each of its next two pos-

sessions. Still, Union County refused to go away. Brown hit two more at the charity stripe, then Fannin missed two at the 1:13 mark, resulting in a 2-on-1 opportunity on the other end, finished by Robertson's dish to Dyer for 2 points.

With 38 seconds left, Dyer tied up Davis near mid-court, forcing a possession-changing jump ball.

"Dyer came in and made two or three big plays to get us back in the game," Nelson said. "I was really proud of our girls tonight. It was a team effort and those girls [off the bench] really stepped up."

Turner missed a jump hook in the post with 23 seconds to play, but Fannin turned it over, leading to Turner's game-tying putback off Brown's miss.

Coming out of a Fannin timeout with 7 seconds left, three Lady Panthers turned away Davis' dribble drive near the left block. But with time running down, Davis kicked out to Hawkins, where Turner stepped out to swat away the bounce pass. Instead, Turner drew a whistle at the buzzer for her "contact" with Hawkins' arm near the free throw line.

"The referee told me [Lara made] contact, but I didn't see it," Nelson said after the game. "It was a tough way to lose."

Despite the non-region loss, Union County still controls its own destiny for the No. 1 seed and the right to host the Region 8-AA tournament.

Up next: Union hosts Fellowship Christian on Tuesday at 6 p.m. The Paladins are winless in 8-AA following a 67-36 loss at Banks County. On Friday, the Lady Panthers visit Providence, a team they defeated 74-41 on Jan. 2.

East Jackson stuns No. 7 Union County, 80-79 in overtime

Panthers respond to loss with 66-55 Homecoming win over Fannin County

By Todd Forrest
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No. 7 Union County (15-3, 2-1) rallied from a double-digit second-half deficit at East Jackson but fell 80-79 in overtime despite holding a 71-68 lead with under 3 seconds remaining in regulation.

A day later, the Panthers opened its home non-region contest vs. Fannin County with a 19-2 run, eventually taking a 66-55 victory over a Rebels' squad tied for first place in Region 7-AA.

Weather rescheduled Union's Jan. 9 trip to Banks County to Jan. 23. As a result of the Panthers 1-1 week, Banks takes over sole possession of first place in 8-AA. Meanwhile, Union slipped to No. 10 in the latest Class AA State rankings.

Panthers 79, East Jackson 80 (OT) - East Jackson's game-tying 3-pointer at the buzzer sent the contest into overtime tied at 71 after Union erased a 43-32 halftime deficit.

"We prepared for Banks, we were hyped up to go down there and it got canceled," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said. "Then there was talk Friday of canceling the East Jackson game. It's not an excuse, but I think it factors into us coming out flat [at East Jackson]."

With the Panthers trailing 75-73 with 3:50 remaining in the extra session, Jude Ellis drilled a go-ahead trey from the wing, then Hayden Hughes' deflection led to a breakaway layup by Houston Henry and a 78-75 advantage.

East Jackson answered with a triple on the other end, tying the game until Ellis' 1-for-2 trip to the line moved Union ahead 79-78 near the 1:10 mark.

An Eagles turnover had the Panthers in position to add to its advantage, but a miss inside led to an wide-open East Jackson layup and a Union timeout with 16 seconds left.

Union's final possession was hamstrung by a deflection out of bounds off the Eagles with 1.2 seconds left. Inbounding under his team's basket, Henry found Ellis in the corner, but his contested fadeaway jumper bounced off the rim as time expired.

"We thought we had a good game plan going in, but [East Jackson] had guys hitting shots that we hadn't seen them make on film," Garrett said. "But we talked in Saturday morning, we came on that game and flushed it."

The Panthers' night began as problematic as it finished, falling behind 6-0 off the tip and 41-28 during the second period. Junior guard Maddox Young sparked the Panthers with 10 first-half points off the bench, keeping his team within 11 at



Sophomore Cade Dockrey had 15 points, 9 rebounds and 5 assists at East Jackson. Photo/Todd Forrest

the break. Union narrowed the deficit to three at 49-46 and 52-49 during the third period but still faced a 56-50 margin heading to the fourth until Ellis' reverse layup sparked a 6-0 spurt. During his team's next two possessions, Dockrey hit a floater in the lane, then found Hughes inside for a layup, tying the score with 6:50 remaining.

After an Eagles' 3, Totherow moved Union within a point with 4:40 left, but another East Jackson triple a minute later stretched the score to 62-58. Consecutive baskets by Dockrey tied the score with 2:50 left and

Totherow's putback handed Union its first lead at the 1:59 mark. After an Eagles' free throw, Young's offensive board bumped the Panthers' lead to 66-63. The lead was short-lived as East Jackson knocked down a 3 on the other end but Henry's dribble drive put Union back in front with 40 seconds left.

East Jackson missed from downtown, sending Dockrey to the line, where hit 1 of 2. A Union foul awarded the Eagles two free throws, trimming the margin to one, but with 13 seconds left, Ellis knocked down two on the other end ahead of East Jackson's game-tying trey.



Junior Maddox Young returned to the Union rotation on Friday night and scored 12 points at East Jackson. Photo/Todd Forrest

Henry finished with 17 points, 7 rebounds, 5 steals and 4 assists. Dockrey had 15 points, 9 rebounds, 5 assists and a block; Ellis scored 14 points with 3 rebounds, 3 assists and 3 steals.

Young ended his 2023-24 debut with 12 points and 5 rebounds. Hughes had 11 points, 6 steals and 3 boards; Totherow finished 8 points, 3 rebounds and 2 steals; Kaden Combs had 2 points and 2 rebounds.

Team stats: East Jackson shot 55% (29-52) from the floor after going 8 for 11 (73%) in the first quarter and 15 for 24 (63%) in the first half. The Eagles fin-

ished 8 of 19 (42%) from long distance and 14 for 18 (78%) at the line.

Union finished 46% (30-66) from the floor, 32% (6-19) from 3-point range and 62% (13-21) at the line. The Panthers out-rebounded East Jackson 35-27, won points in the paint 48-40 and forced 28 turnovers while committing 21.

Panthers 66, Fannin County 55 - Union County jumped in front 19-2 and maintained at least a 9-point margin until 51-43 in the fourth quarter. But the Panthers quickly put the Rebels away with a 7-2 spurt, mounting a 61-49 advantage.

"I told the guys, the East Jackson game won't define us, but how we come out against Fannin might," Garrett said. "I'm proud of the way we started. I think we got a little tired at the end playing back-to-back after a late night [at East Jackson]."

Combs scored 15 points with 9 rebounds. Henry had 13

points, 6 rebounds, 5 assists and 3 rebounds. Hughes added 8 points and 6 boards; Young had 7 points and 4 boards; Totherow finished with 6 points and 2 rebounds; Dockrey had 5 points, 3 rebounds and 2 steals.

Tied at 2-2, Union County put Fannin away with 17-straight points, beginning with Totherow's putback and an Ellis trey. Dockrey's runner made it 9-2, and buckets from Totherow and Combs pushed the margin to 13-2.

Combs' tip-in, Young's baseline drive and Henry's up-and-under layup expanded the margin to 19-2 with 58 seconds left in the half.

Fannin answered with 8-straight to cut the difference to 19-10 during the second, but Young, Combs and Ellis quickly pushed the lead to 26-10, en route to a 34-21 halftime edge.

Ellis' layup equaled Union's largest lead of the night at 38-21 until Hughes' 3 made it an 18-point game with 5:15 left in the third. Fannin County kept chipping away, but Henry's floater at the horn had the Panthers out front 51-37 after three.

The Rebels sliced the margin to 51-43 near the 6-minute mark, before getting within seven at 54-47 a minute later. Young's 3 boosted the difference back to 10 with 4:40 left, then Combs kept the margin at 10 at the 2:53 mark. Henry bumped the lead back to 12 at 61-49 with 2:30 on the clock.

Team stats: Union County shot 41% (27-66) from the floor, 16% (4-25) from deep and 53% (8-15) at the line. Fannin hit 42% (23-55) from the floor, 13% (2-16) from deep and 50% (7-14) at the line.

Union out-rebounded Fannin 39-37 and outscored the Rebels 46-34 in the paint. Fannin turned it over 16 times compared to Union's 14.

Up next: The Panthers host Fellowship Christian on Tuesday before traveling to Providence Christian on Friday. Both girls' games tip off at 6 p.m.

UCHS SWIM TEAM TOP 10 FINISHES

WATER WARRIOR MEET | JAN. 13 | CHEROKEE COUNTY

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>200 MEDLEY RELAY BOYS A- 4TH: ANDREW NUSHTAYEV, COLE ORLANDO, WYATT CHANDLER, NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV GIRLS A- 9TH: LILLY COLLINS, LILLY HELTON, REESE JONES, ISABEL HOOVER</p> | <p>200 FREE RELAY BOYS A- 8TH: ANDREW NUSHTAYEV, COLE ORLANDO, WYATT CHANDLER, NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV GIRLS A- 9TH: LILLY HELTON, LILLY COLLINS, REESE JONES, ISABEL HOOVER</p> |
| <p>50 FREE NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV, 3RD LILLY HELTON, 5TH</p> | <p>100 BREAST ANDREW NUSHTAYEV, 7TH ISABEL HOOVER, 8TH REESE JONES, 9TH</p> |
| <p>100 FLY WYATT CHANDLER, 7TH LILLY HELTON, 6TH</p> | <p>100 FREE NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV, 3RD* *STATE QUALIFIED</p> |
| <p>500 FREE REESE JONES, 8TH</p> | <p>OVERALL COMBINED: 9TH BOYS: 7TH GIRLS: 12TH</p> |

Union County Recreation Department

Baseball, Softball, and T-ball Registration

For Ages 5-14
The age you are September 1, 2024 is the age group you play in.

| Age Group | Regular Reg. Ends | Late Reg. Ends | Fee: |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------|------|
| 9/10 yr olds | February 2nd | February 9th | \$80 |
| 11/12 yr olds | February 2nd | February 9th | \$80 |
| 13/14 yr olds | February 2nd | February 9th | \$80 |
| 5/6 yr olds | March 1st | March 8th | \$65 |
| 7/8 yr olds | March 1st | March 8th | \$65 |

Registration is open to both boys and girls. Late registration is an additional \$20. 9/10- and 11/12-year-olds will have evaluations 3/2, weather permitting. Registration can be completed online at unioncountytga.gov, or in person at the Union County Recreation Department located at 519 Industrial Blvd. If you need any additional information, please call 706-439-6074.