

Sports

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Basketball: Underwood, Panthers overwhelm Banks, 72-58 First place in Region 8-AA up for grabs Friday night in Blairsville

By Todd Forrest
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Senior Eli Underwood matched a career-high with 27 points (25 through three quarters) as Union County closed the first period on a 10-0 run and never looked back during a 72-58 Region 8-AA victory over Banks County.

"We knew they didn't have anyone that could guard Eli, it was just a matter of how we got the ball into him against their 1-2-2 [zone defense]," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said. "We were able to do that, then we started hitting shots around him, so yeah, it was just a good offensive night for us."

Trailing 13-12 with 2:06 left in the quarter, the Panthers rattled off 10-straight, beginning with the final deuce of Underwood's 10-point frame. Sophomore Hayden Hughes continued scorching the nets, drilling back-to-back 3-pointers before freshman Cade Dockrey knocked down a short jumper during the final seconds.

Out front 35-29 late in the second frame, Union County entered the break on a 5-0 spurt over the final 34 seconds, mounting a 40-29 halftime advantage. Sophomore Maddox Young, who scored all of his 10 points in the first half, knocked down a corner-3, then Dockrey sent the Panthers into the locker room with a steal on one end and a gliding reverse layup on the other.

"In all my time coaching, I've never seen Banks come out of their 1-2-2, but they came out of it during the second quarter," Garrett said. "That was big for us. To get them out of that defense, which is what they're known for, that was really cool to see."

Sophomore Houston Henry collected his third foul less than a minute into the second half, sending the point guard to the bench at the 7:06 mark, but the Leopards still had no answer for Underwood inside. After dropping 14 in the first half, Underwood scored Union County's first 11 points of the third quarter, opening up



Eli Underwood puts Union County up by double-digits during his 11-point third quarter vs. Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest
a 15-point lead at 51-36 near 56 at 2:16.

Dockrey kept the margin at 15, answering a Leopards' basket with a putback with 3:09 left in the period. But that would be the Panthers' final points of the frame, and Banks County moved within single digits at 53-44 entering the fourth.

The Leopards converted a Union turnover into a layup, but Henry knocked down a 15-footer on the ensuing possession. A Banks County 3-point play trimmed the margin to 55-49, but Hughes delivered consecutive triples, and sophomore Jude Ellis drove to the hoop for a 63-50 advantage near the five-minute mark.

"Houston and Jude didn't have their best game offensively, but defensively is where we took control of the game," Garrett said.

A Henry steal led to a 3-point play from the sophomore point guard, procuring Union's largest lead at 66-50. However, the Leopards refused to surrender their first region loss without a fight, scoring six in a row to pull within 66-

Ellis made two free throws 29 seconds later, then Hughes and Underwood each scored in the paint for a 72-58 lead with 1:02 remaining. On the ensuing Banks possession, Young punctuated the victory with a diving steal when the Leopards attempted rolling the ball upcourt to preserve time.

Underwood turned in a monster performance with 27 points and 17 boards -- his fourth game of the year with at least 20 points and 15 rebounds.

"He's been putting up those 15-rebound games like its nothing," Garrett said. "It's unreal. The dude is playing so well right now."

Hughes added 16 points on 4 of 7 from downtown - giving the sophomore 18 treys in 31 attempts since the calendar flipped to 2023.

Despite battling foul trouble much of the night, Henry dished out 11 assists coming on the heels of a career-high 12 dimes vs. Lakeview. He finished with 5 points, four rebounds and two steals.

Young had 10 points,



Sophomore Maddox Young scored 10 in the first half and came up with a late-game steal to lock up the victory. Photo/Todd Forrest
five rebounds, three assists and one steal; Dockrey scored 10 points with three assists and two steals.

The Panthers overcame a season-worst shooting performance from Ellis, who scored 4 points on 1 of 10 from the floor. The team's leading scorer (14.2 points per game) finished with four rebounds and three assists.

Despite the offensive struggles, Ellis earned praise from Garrett for his efforts on the other end of the floor.

"I think Houston and Jude had 9 points combined, but defensively, I think that was Jude's best game," Garrett said. "Houston didn't score a lot but he had 11 assists, but what was big for us was, Maddox and Cade giving us 10 apiece, Hayden staying hot and Eli dominating inside. Offensively, it was a great game for those guys, but defensively, that's the best [man-to-man] we've played all year. We held [Banks] to 58 and they came in averaging around 66 or 68."

"If someone had said Houston and Jude would only combine for 9 points against Banks, I wouldn't have expected a good outcome. But we're playing really good team ball. You can see the way we're sharing the ball and I feel like we're getting better every

happy and move on. Or we can use it try and be a great team, get better and be the best we can be. [Fellowship] would be an easy team to take lightly and use as a chance to pad our stats, or we can try and get better as a team.

"[Fellowship] can play, they have a lot of athletes at that school and have elite football and baseball programs. So it's not a team we can just blow out by walking onto the court. We just have to go in trying to get better on every possession and approach the game with some maturity. The last thing we want [Tuesday] is to play sloppy and limp through it. We've been off for a week so it's time to restart the engine, and a great team can do that."

Fellowship suffered a 66-33 rout at the hands of Lakeview Academy on Dec. 6. Fellowship also dropped a 66-54 decision at East Jackson on Jan. 10.

Friday's game vs. Providence will serve as Union County Basketball's Homecoming.

The third-ranked Storm (15-2, 3-0) shot the lights out in the previous meeting, overcoming an 11-point deficit to take a one-sided victory over the Panthers in Lilburn on Jan. 3.

"We have to be better defensively, we have to execute better, we have to do everything better," Garrett said when asked what it will take for Union to pull the upset. "I don't think [Providence] will shoot 15 of 30 from three this time, but if we let them shoot it, they will."

"I think we'll shoot more than two free throws this time, but we also can't lean on that. The way we have to look at it is, are we better than we were the last time we played them? That's got to be our mindset going in."

As for Banks County, the Leopards (12-6, 2-1) bounced back with a 77-69 win over Athens Academy in Homer on Friday to keep pace with Union County and Providence.

Schedule update: Last Friday's East Jackson game has been rescheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 25. There is no word on whether or not the North Hall game will be made up. At this point of the season, non-region games are usually not rescheduled.



Houston Henry's 3-point play off a steal spotted Union County its largest lead of the night at 66-50 near the halfway point of the fourth quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

Banks' size advantage too much for shorthanded Lady Panthers

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Union County (9-8, 0-2) fell to 0-2 in Region 8-AA following a 49-23 home loss to 4th-ranked Banks County on Tuesday, Jan. 10.

Hazardous road conditions canceled Friday's contest vs. East Jackson and Saturday's non-region road trip to North Hall. Union County resumes 8-AA action at Fellowship Christian on Tuesday, Jan. 17, before hosting Providence Christian on Friday, Jan. 20.

During Tuesday's loss, the Lady Panthers fell into a 14-2 hole and never threatened during the second half as the Leopards improved to 17-3 overall and 3-0 in 8-AA.

Union County, still without the services of junior Lara Turner and senior Ivie Chapman, narrowed the deficit to 14-8 during the second, courtesy of two free throws and a 3-pointer from senior Corinne Hill. But Banks County answered with 10 straight points, building a 24-8 advantage at the 1:53 mark of the half.

An Ariel McCarter free throw and two Katelyn Brown baskets kept the Lady Panthers within a baker's dozen at the break, trailing 26-13. Hill (7) and Brown (5) accounted for 12 of their team's 13 first-half points.

The third frame began with a 7-0 Banks County run before Hill slowed the bleeding near the period's midway point. The Leopards kept their foot on the gas, hitting two free throws and scoring via a putback to open a 38-15 lead.



Katelyn Brown forced a tie-up following a Union miss. The sophomore ended with 8 points and eight boards. Photo/Todd Forrest

Banks County answered a Kamryn Mull trey with 26 seconds left in the third to maintain a 23-point margin entering the fourth at 41-28.

A steal-and-score by Hill at 5:36 and a 3-point play from Brown during the final minute accounted for all five of Union County's fourth-quarter points.

Hill led the way with 11 points, four rebounds and three steals. Brown scored 8 points, grabbed eight boards and collected four steals. Mull had 3 points, one assist and a steal; McCarter added a free throw, eight boards and three

steals.

Banks County's Region Player-of-the-Year favorite, senior Kamryn Grier, finished with 17 points, nine rebounds and five steals on 7-of-14 shooting.

Game Stats: Union -- 8 for 44 (18%) shooting; 2 for 13 (15%) from three and 5 of 9 (56%) at the line; 32 rebounds (16 offensive); 12 points in the paint; 8 second-chance points; 7 points off turnovers; 29 turnovers.

Banks - 18 for 51 (39%) shooting; 4 for 15 (27%) from three; 9 of 15 (60%) free throws; 29 rebounds (13



Senior Corinne Hill's 10 points led the way vs. Banks. Hill has been the team's top-scorer in each of the last two games. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Union County Rec Department youth teams were recognized last Tuesday, Jan. 10. Photo/Todd Forrest

offensive); 24 points in the paint; 8 second chance points; 24 points off turnovers; 18 turnovers.

Up next: Union County travels to Fellowship Christian at 6 p.m. Tuesday before hosting Providence at 7 p.m. Friday in a non-region contest (the Providence girls do not play a region schedule).

Fellowship (8-6, 0-1) lost 75-44 to East Jackson but rebounded with a 38-36 win over Providence. Three of Fellowship's top-four scorers are freshmen, led by Ella Upchurch's 11.3 points a game. Fellow 9th graders Tristin Brown and Ally Hardin ranked third and fourth in scoring at 7.5 and 5.8, respectively. Hardin leads the Paladins at five assists and 4.5 steals a night.

Five-foot-10 junior Alden Hayes averages 9.6 points and 8.1 boards a night.

Schedule update: Union County will host East Jackson in a Region 8-AA makeup game on Wednesday, Jan. 25. The makeup game at North Hall remained undecided as of Sunday, Jan. 15.

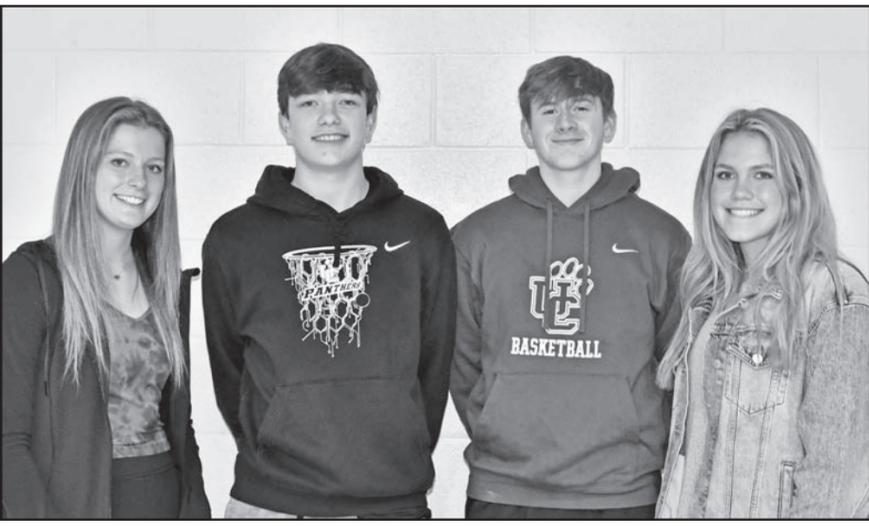
UCHS Basketball Homecoming King, Queen to be crowned Friday night



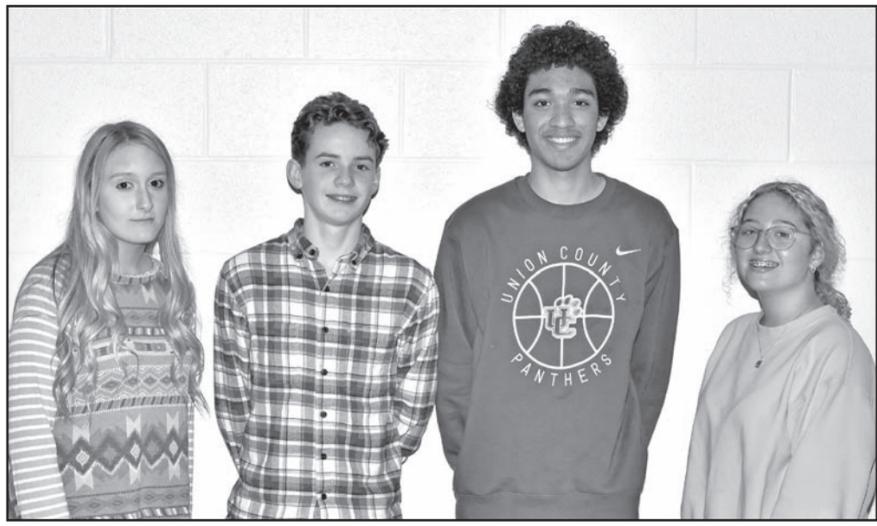
Senior representatives: (L-R) Courtney Foster, Hunter Fleming, Jaycee Seabolt, Eli Underwood, Taylor Carroll, Ivie Chapman, Jett Busbee and Darla Aaron. Photos by Todd Forrest



Junior representatives: (L-R) Ryan Barnett, Morgan Warren, Lane Lance, Eli Decker, Zander Rotko and Kendra Mason.



Sophomore representatives: (L-R) Ariel McCarter, Houston Henry, Jude Ellis and Katelyn Brown.



Freshman representatives: (L-R): Kaitlyn Jones, Holden Payne, Marques Gatewood and Lila Holland.

Wrestling: Union County third at State Duals Prelims; UCHS to host Individual Area Tournament next month



Union County head coach Justin Byers and his four seniors saw their duals season come to a close in Eatonton over the weekend during the State Duals Prelims. Union finished third at Putnam County, falling to the host War Eagles, 40-31 and defeating The Walker School, 52-18. The Panthers will begin preparation for next month's Individual Area tourney at UCHS. Union will wrestle at Vidalia's Union Invitational on Jan. 27-28.

Union County Recreation Department Monthly Hikes for Adults



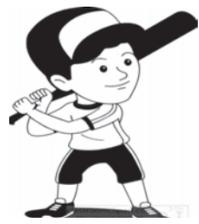
Register at the Union County Recreation Department for the adult hike adventure! Your guide will be Dustin Rogers and friends. You will see 2 waterfalls, and a swinging bridge Tuesday, January 24th from 8:15 AM - 4:30 PM. The hike is 2 miles and strenuous.

Meet at the Union County Sports Center at 8 AM to carpool to the different locations. Please wear appropriate clothing/shoes, bring sack lunch, and water.

Please register in person at the Union County Sports Center by Monday, January 23. Fee is \$5.

NJan18Z10/CA

Union County Rec. Baseball, Softball, T-ball Registration



group you play in.

Fee is \$65 for 5-8 year-olds. Fee is \$80 for 9-14 year-olds.

You must register your child by Monday, February 8th.

You may register online at unioncountyga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center located at 519 Industrial Blvd. Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

Baseball, softball, and T-ball registration opens January 4th, 2023 at the Union County Recreation Department for boys and girls ages 5-12, and boys to age 14. Age you are on September 1st 2023 is the age

We are always in need of volunteer coaches. If you are interested, please come into the Union County Sports Center to complete an application. NJan18-Feb1Z5/CA