

Sports

See the Sports Section at ngame.com

Panthers fall to first place Elbert; escape Monticello on Drake's game-winner

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Union County split two games last week before receiving a much-needed day off on Saturday as they prepare for the home-stretch with second place still within reach.

The Panthers hosted Elbert County on Tuesday and despite Pierson Allison's best efforts, Union County was unable to hand the Blue Devils their first region loss.

Later in the week, the Panthers went on the road to Monticello and survived the upset bid after trailing the entire game.

With time running out and Union down by a point, Sawyer Drake was able to get to the basket and score the game-winner, moving the Panthers to a game over .500 in region play.

Panthers 41, Monticello 40 - The Panthers trailed for most of the day until a Sawyer Drake basket in the final seconds gave Union a 41-40 region victory at Monticello (3-17, 2-7).

Drake would finish with a team-high 18 points -- eight in the fourth quarter -- as Union County overcame a 20-15 halftime deficit.

Pierson Allison chipped in 12 points, including a 4-point play in the fourth quarter. The junior would finish with three 3-pointers and score 10 of his dozen points in the second half.

Sawyer Brey and Kanon Hemphill scored 4 points each for the Panthers; Britt Waller added three.

Union County (12-7, 5-4) shot 6-of-12 at the free throw line while the Hurricanes were a near-perfect at 7-for-8. Senior guard Jay Fleetwood led all scorers with 25 points -- 14 in the second half -- as Monticello led 7-6 after one and 29-27 through three quarters.

Although, the Canes' only miss at the charity stripe belonged to Fleetwood, who split a pair late in the fourth quarter, allowing Drake to win the game instead of forcing overtime.

Panthers 42, Elbert County 56 - Union County was unable to keep pace with first place Elbert County (18-2, 9-0) in a 56-42 loss last Tuesday night in Blairsville.

Entering the contest, the Blue Devils were unbeaten in Region 8-AA and have all but wrapped up the No. 1 seed in next month's region tournament.

Allison led the Panthers with 22 points -- 15 in the second half -- as the junior point guard did all he could to keep Union County from getting blown out, however, he and the Panthers were unable to threaten the senior-heavy Elbert County squad.

After falling behind 7-0, Union County rallied to within three at 11-8 before an 11-0 Blue Devil run put the home team in a 22-8 hole. Drake would pull the Panthers to within a dozen at 22-10 as eight of his nine points came in the opening frame.

Trailing 27-10, Allison knocked down a three then



Junior Sawyer Drake scans the floor during the first quarter vs Elbert County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sawyer Brey (3) denies an Elbert Co. shot attempt. Photo/Todd Forrest



Pierson Allison drives the base line for two of his 15 second half points vs Elbert County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Cayden Rich drives to the hoop vs Elbert. Photo/Todd Forrest

scored on a reverse layup to make it a 27-15 game. A Drake free throw and two Waller free throws cut the margin to 11 at 29-18 with 3:53 left in the half.

Cayden Rich scored the next four Panther points as Union County momentarily cut the deficit to nine before an Elbert three pushed the margin back to a dozen at 32-20. The Blue Devils would continue to bomb away from long distance to take a 37-23 advantage into the break.

Elbert County put the game away in the third with a 13-3 run out of the break for a 50-26 advantage -- its largest of the night. A 3-point play by Allison and a Hemphill deuce cut the deficit to 50-31 entering the fourth as Union County continued to battle despite facing very overwhelming odds.

Allison scored all 11 Panther points in the fourth, including three free throws that made it a 17-point game at 4:38 and two more from the charity stripe that pulled Union within 15 at 4:18.

Elbert stretched its advantage back to 18 at 56-38 but an Allison jumper with 3:28 to play and a driving layup at 2:10 would be the final points of the game for either team.

Rich finished with 6 points while Waller and Hemphill added two each and Brey scored one.

Big picture: At 5-4 in region play, Union's win at Monticello keeps fifth place Rabun County two games behind and sixth place Monticello three games back (technically it's four games since the Panthers own the

tiebreaker).

Whether or not Union County can improve its placement remains to be seen as a loss at Social Circle on Tuesday combined with a Banks County win over Monticello would pretty much eliminate the Panthers from finishing any higher than fourth.

With Elbert facing Rabun, Banks and Social Circle in its next three games, Union County could force a tie for second by winning out and rooting for Elbert County to win its next three.

Should the pieces fall into place, the Panthers would finish tied for second with the winner of the Social Circle at Banks County game on Feb. 1 -- the regular season finale for all three teams.

Looking ahead: As previously mentioned, Union County will visit Social Circle on Tuesday in a do-or-die game for the Panthers if they wish to improve upon their current fourth place position.

The girls are scheduled for a 5 p.m. tip-off at Social Circle with the guys to follow. Social Circle is 8-1 at home this season with its only loss an upset at the hands of Putnam County back in



Senior Britt Waller goes up for two in the post against Elbert County last Tuesday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

December.

Meanwhile, the Panthers are currently 5-4 at home and 7-3 away from Blairsville.

At 5-4 in the region, Union is currently two games back of Banks County and Social Circle, who are tied for second place at 7-2.

On Friday, the Panthers

will host fifth-place Rabun County, who is trying to keep pace with Union County. A win on Friday could clinch a top-four finish for the Panthers should the Wildcats fall to first-place Elbert County on Tuesday.

Friday's action will get underway at 7 p.m. with the Lady Panthers and Lady Cats.

Surprisingly, Rabun County has been a better team on the road at 3-8 away from Tiger and 1-7 on its home floor.

Union County will head back on the road Saturday for a 3 p.m. contest at Putnam County. The War Eagles are 0-12 on the road but have been respectable at home with a 4-4 mark.



Colton Day moves the ball around during the first half vs Elbert. Day's recent play has earned him a spot in the starting-five. Photo/Todd Forrest

Re-Delivery
Positive Parenting Workshop
Discipline at the Primary Level: Home and School

When: February 19th, 2019
Time: 11:30 AM
Where: Union County Primary PLC Room

Introduce the concept of firm loving discipline and the value of more action and less talk.

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.