

Sports

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Lady Panthers run into a buzzsaw vs. Rabun, at Lumpkin

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The shorthanded Lady Panthers (2-5, 0-1) suffered two one-sided losses over the weekend to a pair of top-four squads in Rabun County and Lumpkin County.

Fourth-ranked Rabun County paid a visit to Blairsville on Friday night, jumping all over Union County early in a 65-37 victory. Sophomore Ellie Cook paced the Lady Panthers with 16 points, but Ava Hunter was limited to just 8 points – all coming in the first half.

The Lady Cats put the game away early, outscoring Union County 19-7 after one quarter, before extending the margin to 37-19 at the break and 47-24 entering the fourth.

The Lady Panthers were without the services of head coach Crystal Beach and freshman starter Lara Turner over the weekend, with assistant Mandy Hunter handling the coaching duties and junior Ansley Collins moving into the starting lineup.

Sophomore Corinne Hill finished with 6 points, freshman Sofia McNabb had three, and junior Rebekah Chambers scored two before picking up her fifth foul.

Freshman Kyra McKechnie added 2 points for Union

County, who struggled at the foul line, hitting just 5 of 11 in the Region 8-AA opener.

Things only got more challenging for the Lady Panthers on Saturday when they paid a visit to Class AAA's fourth-ranked Lumpkin County and came away with a 69-35 defeat.

After struggling the night before, Ava Hunter got off to a slow start at Lumpkin but came to life in the second half, scoring 13 of her team-high 15 points in the final two quarters.

Unfortunately, the outcome was all but determined, with the Indians seizing a 38-16 halftime lead thanks to a 22-7 second period.

Ava Hunter scored nine of her team's 11 third-quarter points as the Lady Panthers trailed 51-27 after three, but Lumpkin County finished off Union with an 18-8 fourth quarter.

Chambers scored 9 points and Cook had five. Hill, McNabb and freshman Layla Akins chipped in 2 points each.

Union County's slate doesn't get any easier this week as they visit No. 7 Banks County (13-9) on Tuesday and No. 2 Elbert County (14-2) on Friday. Tuesday's contest will tip at 6 p.m., and Friday's will get underway at 6:30 p.m.



Ellie Cook led the way with 15 points in Friday night's loss to Rabun County.
Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Rebekah Chambers scores in the paint during a recent Lady Panthers game.
Photo/Todd Forrest

Panthers unable to crack the win column in return to the hardwood

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The Union County men fell to 0-6 on the year, dropping a pair of games over the weekend in their first action since Dec. 12.

Taking the floor Friday night for the first time in six weeks, the Panthers were bested by Rabun County for the first time since 2016, suffering a 66-40 Senior Night loss. A day later, Union's comeback bid came up short in a 56-54 non-region defeat at Class AAA Lumpkin County.

After losing senior Kaston Hemphill to an early ankle injury at Lumpkin, Union County overcame a 25-11 foul discrepancy in favor of the home team, including a pair

of quick-trigger technicals on Panthers head coach Corey Garrett in the fourth quarter, resulting in an ejection.

Following four technical free throws, Lumpkin was able to open up an eight-point advantage with under five minutes to play. But Union County refused to go away thanks to juniors Caleb John and Landon Kight, who combined for 16 of their team's 19 fourth-quarter points.

Unfortunately, the Panthers' late-game surge wasn't enough to overcome a 33-point outing from Lumpkin County senior Chandler Pulley, who connected on eight 3-pointers – six in the first half.

Meanwhile, junior Lake Hughes, Union County's 3-point marksman, battled foul

trouble throughout the first half but sparked the third-quarter rally with three treys in the quarter before fouling out in the final period.

John, who scored all of his team-high 12 points in the second half, also dealt with early foul issues as the Panthers fell into ruts of 15-6 after one and 30-17 at the break.

Union County finished with three players in double figures, led by a dozen from John and 11 each from Kight and sophomore Eli Underwood. Hughes added nine and junior Hayden Payne scored five.

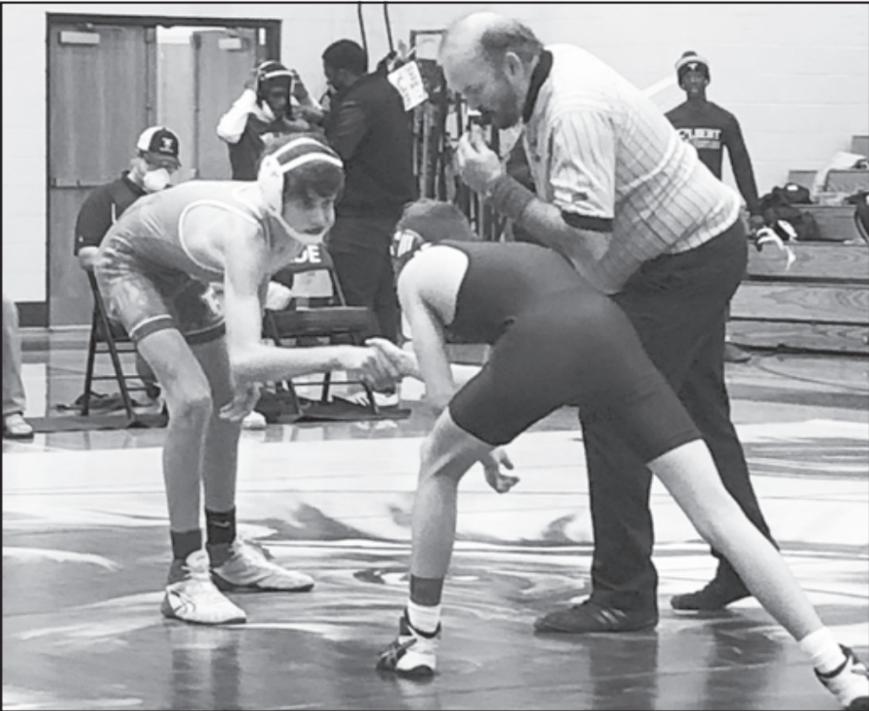
Hemphill had four before suffering his injury. Freshman Caiden Tanner scored 2 points.

"Eli Peugh and Tanner both came off the bench and played some very good min-



Kaston Hemphill enjoyed a round of applause Jan. 22 in between the boys and girls' games on Senior Night.
Photo/Submitted

Union County Wrestlers fall to Elbert in first round of Class AA Duals



Union County Wrestling traveled to Dade County over the weekend where the Panthers were eliminated by Elbert County in the first round of the Class AA Duals Tournament. Union will participate in the Traditional Area Tournament on Feb. 6.
Photo/Submitted

utes for us while Lake and Caleb were on the bench in foul trouble," Garrett said.

On Friday night, Rabun County used a 19-10 second quarter to build a 35-22 halftime lead before cruising to a 66-40 victory.

John and Kight once again led the Panthers, with

Kight scoring 14 and John finishing with 13.

The Wildcats continued to pull away in the second half, building a 50-29 lead after three quarters. Hughes scored five of his 8 points in the third period, while Austin Taylor added three in the fourth.

Hemphill had 2 points as

only five Panthers cracked the scoring column.

Union County will hit the road this week for a pair of region games, beginning with Banks County at 6 p.m. Tuesday. The Panthers will visit Elbert County at 6:30 p.m. Friday.



Senior Panther cheerleader Leia Ritchie was joined by her family on the court for Senior Night Friday.
Photo/Submitted