

Sports

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Kight's 27 lifts Panthers past Fannin County on Senior Night

Hot-shooting Rabun County sinks Union in Tiger behind 50-point first half

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County men scored the only victory of the week, forcing a Senior Night split against rival Fannin County on Tuesday following a 62-51 Lady Panthers' loss earlier in the evening.

Later in the week, Union basketball suffered a pair of double-digit region losses at Rabun County in a contest moved up to Thursday due to the weekend's winter weather threat. Icy roads also forced the cancellation of Saturday's games vs. White County.

Panthers 61, Fannin County 46 - Senior Landon Kight poured in a career-high 27 points to go with 12 rebounds and two blocks in 24 minutes during Tuesday's Senior Night victory.

"I will always remember this [game]," Kight said after the win. "If I could change my favorite moment [from the Senior Night presentation], it would be tonight for sure."

According to Kight, not being able to play in the first meeting with Fannin due to injury provided some extra motivation in the rematch.

"There's no doubt that [playing a rival] helped fuel me, especially since we lost to them the first time" he said. "I'm just glad that I could help my senior teammates get the win tonight."

Union County closed the second quarter with an 8-0 run to take a 34-21 lead into the break and were never threatened again, maintaining a double-digit lead throughout the second half.

The Panthers used a 7-1 spurt late in the third period to build their largest lead of the night, 48-28, at the 1:40 mark of the quarter. But Fannin County did its best to make things interesting down the stretch, answering with a 10-0 run that sliced the deficit in half at 48-38 less than 75 seconds into the fourth.

Senior Austin Taylor halted the run with a trey on the ensuing Union possession, then Kight scored on consecutive offensive boards to extend the margin to 55-39 with 4:35



Senior Landon Kight scores and draws a foul during Union's Jan. 25th victory over Hwy. 515 rival Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

to play. The Rebels responded immediately with an old-fashioned 3-point play, but on the other end, freshman Jude Ellis responded with a dribble drive for two. Later, Kight put the game out of reach with a bucket in the paint, followed by a pair of free throws that spotted the home team a 61-42 advantage with under three minutes left.

Senior Caleb John finished with 8 points, six boards and three assists; Ellis added 7 points and two assists. Fellow ninth-grader Houston Henry recorded a pair of game-highs with five assists and four steals (career-high) while chipping in 5 points and three rebounds.

Taylor pulled down a career-high eight rebounds and scored 6 points on 2-of-4 shooting from long distance. Senior Hayden Payne and junior Eli Underwood scored 4 points apiece, with Payne grabbing four boards and Underwood collecting two rebounds and a blocked shot.



Senior Caleb John converts a scoop layup after beating a Rebels' defender off the dribble and splitting two in the paint. Later in the week, John scored 11 points at Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Senior Lake Hughes battled foul trouble the entire game, finishing with one assist and a steal in just 11 minutes of action. Other stat sheet contributors were senior Daniel Snow and freshman Hayden Hughes (two rebounds apiece). Sophomore Braylen Rader pulled down one board.

Landon Norton led Fannin with 14 points and six boards; Chasen Ethington scored 11 points and Will Jones had eight.

The Rebels grabbed an early 4-1 lead and held a 6-5 advantage with 2:40 left in the first, but Union scored the final 8 points of the frame for a 13-6 lead after one.

An Ellis 3-pointer less than 10 seconds into the second stretched the Panthers' margin to 16-6 before back-to-back baskets by Fannin cut the difference to six. Union kept at least a 6-point advantage throughout most of the quarter until a Rebels' trey moved the visitors within five at 24-19.

Still leading 26-21 with 1:31 before the intermission, the Panthers exploded for eight unanswered, ignited by two Kight free throws. John and Underwood each split a pair at the line before Kight scored down low with 38 seconds on the clock.

With time running out, a Henry steal resulted in a layup on the other end, spotting Union County a 34-21 halftime advantage.

Taylor began the third by answering a Fannin County basket with a corner trey. Then, following a near-three-minute scoring drought from both squads, Kight scored via a turnover with 4:32 left in the period. An inbounds play to John extended the margin to 41-23, but Fannin answered with a pair of baskets to stay within 14. However, an and-one from Kight followed by baskets from John and Payne opened up a 48-28 Union lead late in the third.

Kight finished the game 7 for 7 at the charity stripe and connected on 10 of 15 from the floor.

Union County shot 41% (23 for 56) for the game to



Houston Henry with a wrap-around pass in the paint vs. Fannin. The freshman guard notched a career high four steals and a game-high five assists vs. the Rebels. He later scored 11 at Rabun. Photo/Todd Forrest

Fannin County's 26% (15 for 47). The Panthers also hit 4 of 16 (25%) from deep while the Rebels struggled at 3 for 21 (14%).

Union sank 11 for 14 (79%) at the line to Fannin's 13 for 24 (54%). The Panthers out-rebounded the Rebels 42-32 and outscored them 38-20 in the paint. Union County committed 19 turnovers to Fannin's 15, resulting in a 12-7 points off turnovers edge for the Rebels.

Panthers 61, No. 8 Rabun County 78 - The Wildcats never trailed, jumping out to a 7-1 advantage before cruising to a 50-30 halftime advantage and a 17-point victory.

The Panthers, however, opened the third with a 17-7 run, eventually cutting the margin to 60-52 during the early stages of the fourth. Union continued to hang around well into the final frame, down 66-55 just inside the four-minute mark, until Rabun County eventually put the game away behind a 50% (24 for 48) performance from the floor and 26-of-33 (79%) shooting at the charity stripe.

Still holding onto a 71-61 advantage late, Rabun County, who remains unbeaten in region play, closed the game with a 7-0 run.

Taylor led the way with 12 points; John had 11 points and eight rebounds. Henry added 11 points and three boards before fouling out.

Kight's evening ended with 8 points, nine rebounds, three assists and a steal. Lake Hughes finished with 6 points, six boards and a blocked shot.

Underwood had 5 points and one rebound; Ellis fouled out with 4 points and two steals. Snow and Payne chipped in 2 points each.

The Panthers shot 35% (23 for 66) from the floor and 5 of 20 (25%) from deep. At the line, Union County made 10 of 18 for 56%. The Panthers out-rebounded Rabun County 39-32 but were victimized by 28 turnovers to only 16 for the Wildcats.

Up next: Union County hosts Banks County (2-2 in Region 8-AA) on Tuesday looking to avoid the season sweep and



Senior guard Austin Taylor had 6 points on two treys vs. Fannin County last Tuesday. On Thursday, Taylor scored a team-high 12 points at Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

its ninth-straight loss in the series. The Panthers close the week with a Friday road trip to Elbert County (2-1).

With a pair of wins this week, the Panthers will remain in the hunt for the No. 2 seed in the upcoming Region 8-AA tournament. With two losses, Union County (8-11, 1-3) will need a victory over winless

Riverside Military Academy on Feb. 8 to avoid fifth place.

Both of this week's contests will get underway following the Lady Panthers' 6 p.m. tip-offs.

Homecoming festivities have been rescheduled for 5:15 p.m. Tuesday, ahead of Union's Region 8-AA doubleheader vs. Banks County.

Soccer registration is open at the Union County Recreation Department

January 11, 2022- February 18, 2022 for ages 5-12.



Age you will be September 1, 2022 determines age group you play in. Season will begin in March. We are happy to announce Chris Robbins will be overseeing Rec Soccer. Fee is \$55.00

Please register online at unioncountygga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center located at 519 Industrial Blvd.

Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

Lady Panthers unable to keep pace with No. 1 Rabun, No. 3 Fannin

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County ladies couldn't string together four complete quarters during losses to No. 3 Fannin County and at No. 1 Rabun County.

First-quarter struggles dealt Union an insurmountable 26-8 deficit vs. the Rebels, then a 17-5 fourth frame allowed the top-ranked Lady Cats to pull away following three tightly-contested quarters in Tiger.

Lady Panthers 51, Fannin County 62 - Union County could not recover from an early 26-8 deficit, and the Rebels picked up their third straight win over neighboring Union County on Tuesday.

After surrendering 49 points in the first half, the Lady Panthers limited Fannin County to just four third-quarter points but could not capitalize, scoring only six of their own in the period.

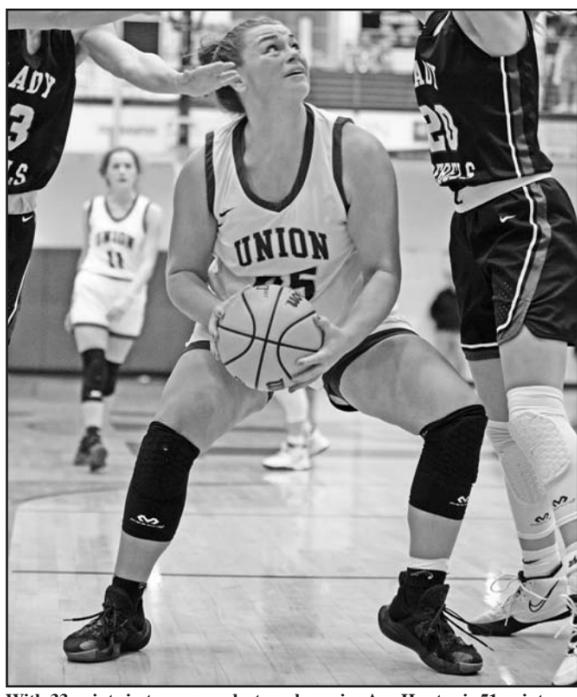
Down 53-41 entering the fourth, Union County would get no closer than 11 points following a 1-for-2 trip to the line by senior Ava Hunter, less than 20 seconds into the final frame.

The Rebels quickly put the game out of reach with a 7-0 run, capped by a trey at the 5:50 mark that knocked Union into a 60-42 hole. Following a scoreless stretch of two-and-a-half minutes, Hunter sank two free throws and sophomore Lara Turner knocked down a triple to slice the deficit to 60-47 with 2:32 remaining.

Unfortunately, the Lady Panthers wouldn't score again until a Hunter layup at the one-minute mark, proving too little, too late for the home team.

Hunter finished with 22 points, 10 rebounds, three steals and two blocks. Combined with her 11-point outing at Rabun County two days later, Hunter is currently 51 shy of 1,500 career points.

In the Fannin loss, Union County faced early deficits of 8-0 and 10-2 before a pair of baskets by Hunter moved the



With 33 points in two games last week, senior Ava Hunter is 51 points away from 1,500 for her career. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers within four at 10-6. However, the Lady Rebels closed the first with a 14-2 run, beginning with a trey at the 3:23 mark, to mount a 24-8 advantage at quarter's end.

Down 26-8, Union County started to chip away with buckets from senior Rebekah Chambers and freshman Ariel McCarter. Later, Hunter drilled a trey from the top of the circle, but Fannin answered with a mid-range jumper for a 31-15 advantage just over two minutes into the second.

But a 9-0 run allowed Union to claw within seven after Chambers scored down low, and Hunter converted a 3-point play with 5:09 on the clock, trimming the margin to 31-20. An inbounds play to Turner and a McCarter pull-up jumper capped the run, slicing the Fannin County lead to 31-24 at the 4:30 mark.

Union momentarily kept pace as Chambers answered a Rebels' deuce with a fast-break layup, and a McCarter 3-pointer canceled out a Fannin trey. Turner

scored inside as the clock approached three minutes, but the Rebels converted a 3-point play to lengthen their advantage to 41-31 with 2:38 left in the half.

Back-to-back 3s increased the Fannin County lead to 47-31 before baskets from Hunter and McCarter cut the deficit to 49-35 at the break.

After the Rebels hit 56% (18 of 32) overall and 50% (7 of 14) from downtown in the first half, Union's defense picked up the intensity during the third, limiting Fannin to just 2 for 20 (10%) from the field and 1 for 10 from 3-point range in the quarter.

However, Union County shot 2-for-18 (11%) overall and 0 for 5 from deep during the third and trailed 53-41 entering the fourth.

Turner opened the third frame with a putback, but Fannin scored inside approximately 90 seconds later. McCarter split two free throws and Hunter converted an offensive board near the three-minute mark to keep the Lady Panthers within a baker's dozen.



Freshman guard Ariel McCarter recorded her first high school double-double with 12 points and 14 boards vs. Fannin. Photo/Todd Forrest

Hunter closed the quarter with a 1-for-2 trip to the foul line as Union outscored Fannin 6-4 in the third.

McCarter poured in career-highs with 14 rebounds and five assists along with 12 points and four steals. Turner scored 9 points while dealing with a sore ankle that she injured more than two weeks ago. Chambers added 6 points and sophomore Kamryn Mull had 2 points. Junior Corinne Hill dished out four assists and sophomore Sofia McNabb grabbed three boards. Senior Ansley Collins pulled down one rebound.

Both squads shot 37% from the floor, but Fannin County connected eight times behind the arc to only three for Union.

The Lady Panthers went 10 for 17 at the line and Fannin County sank 8 of 17. The Rebels out-rebounded Union 43-36 while committing 19 turnovers and forcing 26.

Union County outscored Fannin County 30-20 in the paint.

Courtney Davis scored 18 points for Fannin County and Becca Ledford added 15.

Lady Panthers 41, No. 1 Rabun County 60 - Top-ranked Rabun County outscored Union County 17-5 down the stretch on Thursday to pull away during a contest that remained competitive through three-plus quarters.

Looking for their first win over a top-two opponent in more than a decade (No. 2 Fannin County - 2011), the Lady Panthers (11-8, 1-2) closed the opening frame with a 7-2 spurt to grab a 14-13 lead at quarter's end. Rabun County answered with a 7-2 stretch to begin the second but Union County quickly evened the score at 20-20.

The second frame saw ties of 22-22 and 24-24, but a Lady Cats' bucket in the waning moments of the half sent the home team into the locker room ahead 26-24.

Both squads were plagued by cold shooting to begin the third as the score remained deadlocked at 26-24 until a Rabun deuce

pushed the margin to four just inside of five minutes. Union County answered with four-straight points to even the contest at 28-28, but the Lady Cats used a 12-2 run to open up a 40-30 advantage late in the period.

The Lady Panthers weathered the storm and entered the fourth trailing 43-36 until Rabun started the quarter with a trey. Union answered to remain within eight at 46-38, but it was all Lady Cats the rest of the way, putting the visitors away with a 14-3 run to cap off the 17-5 final frame.

Union's 41 points marked the team's lowest output since Dec. 7 when Habersham Central limited the Lady Panthers to 40 points.

Hunter led the Lady Panthers with 11 points, six rebounds, four steals and two blocks. Chambers finished with 9 points, seven boards, two assists and two steals. Turner also chipped in 9 points while hauling in three rebounds.

Hill added 6 points, eight rebounds and three steals. McCarter had 5 points, eight rebounds and three assists. McNabb finished with 2 points and three boards; Mull had two rebounds and Collins grabbed one.

Rabun County shot 33% (23 for 69) from the floor to Union's 30% (14 for 47). At the line, the Lady Panthers made 13 of 17 (77%) and Rabun sank 8 of 11 (73%).

Union County was blanked (0 for 6) from 3-point territory while the Lady Cats made 6 of 20 (30%). Union controlled the glass 42-33 but turned it over 32 times, compared to 17 giveaways for Rabun.

Up next: Union County needs a win Tuesday vs. Banks County to lock up no lower than a No. 3 seed in 8-AA. On Friday, the Lady Panthers visit second-ranked Elbert County in a contest that could help determine second place in the region. Both games will tip at 6 p.m.

Senior Night pictures from Tuesday, Jan. 25 will be published in future editions of the North Georgia News.

Swimming: Last Chance Invitational



Adairsville - Again, Union County High School competed in its final swim meet of the 2021-2022 season, representing Panther Nation at the Adairsville High School "Last Chance" Invitational.

After their last two meets were cancelled due to weather, the swimmers were ready to "make some waves." If you're interested in being a part of this "record setting" team, come see if you have what it takes to be a "Swimming Panther." The future of Union County Swimming is highly anticipated heading into the 2022 season.

Adairsville High School hosted the ninth swim meet (two were cancelled) of the season for our excited and enthusiastic Panther High Swim team, taking place on Thursday, Jan. 27 at the Adairsville Natatorium.

With the slogan of "No One Can Catch Us Now," the UCHS team competed against

multiple other schools with these results:

Overall High School: A phenomenal fourth place out of 19 teams.

Overall men: Fourth place. Overall women: Fifth place.

UCHS Men's Results: 200 Medley Relay: Third place. (Team members are Grayden Cobb, Michael Leird, Hunter White and Preston Perron)

200 Freestyle Relay: Ninth place. (Team members are Cobb, Gabriel Panter, Leird and White)

100 Freestyle (21 competitors): White - first place and State qualifying time. Cobb - 14th; Leird - 16th; Panter - 18th.

100 Breaststroke (11 competitors) White - first Place and State qualifying time.

100 Backstroke (Eight competitors): Perron - fifth. 50 Freestyle (39 competitors): Cobb - 24th; Perren - 26th;

Leird - 29th; Panter - 32nd.

UCHS Women's Results: 200 Freestyle Relay: Sixth Place. (Team members are Lilly Collins, Rachel Reid, Lily Helton, Hannah Kazmierzak.)

200 Individual Medley: Reid - fourth.

200 Freestyle Relay (9 teams) - fifth. (Team members are Cassie Flowers, Collins, Reid and Helton)

100 Backstroke (12 competitors): Collins - sixth; Flowers - eighth.

100 Breaststroke (Eight competitors): Helton - fourth and school record. Kazmierzak - sixth.

50 Freestyle (40 competitors): Helton - 16th; Reid - 24th; Collins - 28th; Kazmierzak - 29th; Flowers - 34th.

Editor's note: Senior Night photos will be published in upcoming editions of the North Georgia News, beginning with the senior swimmers.

UCHS Wrestling update: Individual Area Championships rescheduled for Monday, Jan. 31

Blue Ridge - Union County wrestling finally returned to the mat on Monday, Jan. 31 for the Individual Area Championships at Fannin County High School.

The results were unavailable as of Monday morning's deadline and will be published in next week's (Feb. 9) edition of the North Georgia News.

Previously scheduled for Friday, Jan. 28, the threat of winter weather pushed the wrestling tournament back to Saturday, Jan. 29. However, snow and ice led to unsafe driving conditions on Saturday morning, resulting in another cancellation.

The tournament was held at the old Fannin County High School gymnasium beginning at 5 p.m. Monday.



UCHS wrestling coach Justin Byers encourages one of his grapplers during a home match earlier this winter. Photo/Todd Forrest

NBA's State Farm Arena hosts Mountain Area Christian Academy basketball teams

Atlanta - On Jan. 24, the Mountain Area Christian Academy (MACA) varsity and middle school boys' basketball teams received the opportunity to play at State Farm Arena - home of 2020-21 NBA Eastern

Conference finalist, Atlanta Hawks.

Each year, the arena offers the Court of Dreams Experience to Georgia schools. This year, MACA was blessed by getting selected to play against

King's Way Christian.

Our teams were honored to be chosen for such a wonderful experience. We are thankful for our coaches Darrin Sparks and Thomas Shamblin.



Top-bottom: The MACA boys varsity team at State Farm Arena. MACA's middle school boys squad at State Farm Arena. MACA senior Easton Collins (13) attempts a jump shot at State Farm Arena while his Lions' teammates battle for position in the paint. Photos/submitted