

Lady Panthers one win away from ending three-year State playoff drought

Third-seed Union County enters Region 8-AA Tournament with 18-6 record

By Todd Forrest
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Union County wrapped up the season sweep vs Banks County, securing the No. 3 seed and home-court advantage in the first round of this week's Region 8-AA Tournament.

The 55-47 win over Banks capped off an abbreviated week that was cut short after the threat of winter weather canceled Friday's trip to Oglethorpe County. Since Union (18-6, 9-4) was locked in the third-seed and Oglethorpe was unable to move out of last, there were no region ramifications at stake and the game was not rescheduled.

The Lady Panthers return to action with a first-round showdown at 7 p.m. Tuesday when they host the winner of Monday's Monticello vs Social Circle game. If Union County is victorious in round one, the Region 8-AA Tournament moves to Rabun County for the final two rounds and the consolation games.

A Lady Panthers' loss on Tuesday and the season is over. If they win Tuesday, they are guaranteed a spot in next week's State Tournament, regardless of Thursday and Friday's results.

Union County would meet Putnam County in the region semifinals after the Lady War Eagles lost at Rabun County on Saturday and fell to the No. 2 seed.

Lady Panthers 55, Banks County 47 - Union County was never threatened following a 14-3 second quarter that opened up a 26-16 halftime lead.

Ava Hunter poured in a game-high 20 points to go with seven rebounds and two assists



The Lady Panthers' defense clamps down in the paint. Photo/Todd Forrest to help lead the Lady Panthers to a 23-point third-quarter advantage.

"Today was more of a complete game from start to finish and we kept our composure," Union County head coach Crystal Beach said after the win. "Banks is a great team, they have some great athletes and they applied some pressure early on but we were able to regroup and keep it together. I haven't seen the stats but I feel like this was one of our best defensive efforts."

Coming out of the intermission, Union County used a 9-2 run to hold a 35-18 lead at the five-minute mark. Still leading 40-23 following a Kyla Locklear free throw, senior Andelin Hill scored five straight to build a 45-23 advantage with a layup and a triple on ensuing possessions.

"At halftime, I reminded them that it's a four-quarter game and that we need a solid four quarters from them," Beach said. "I feel like we got that

and that's something we really needed going into the region tournament."

The Lady Leopards closed the quarter with six-straight to pull within 16, then opened the fourth with a deuce to get within 14 at 45-31. But Union County answered with an 8-2 spurt to extend the margin back to 20 at 53-33, all but putting the game away with under five minutes to play.

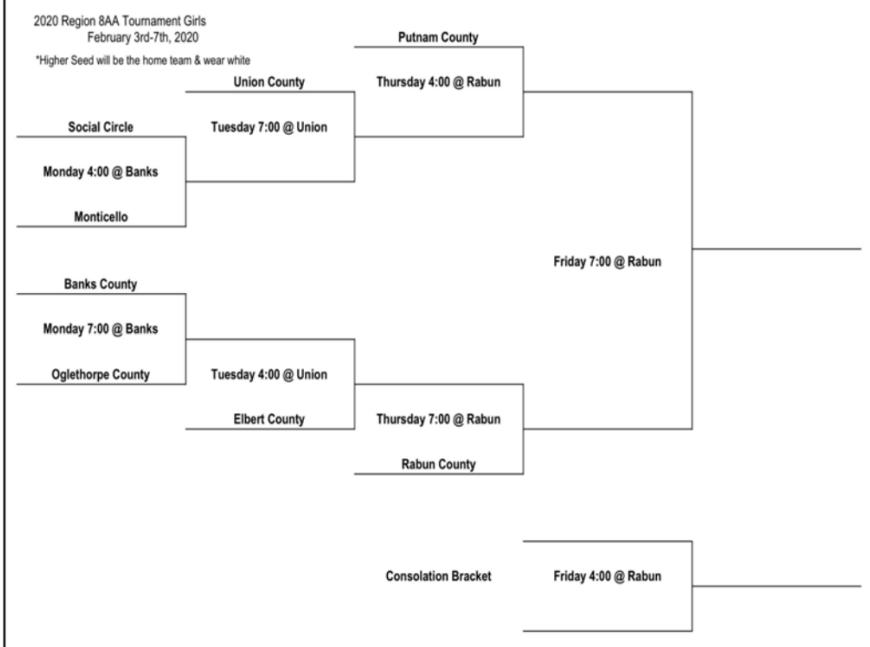
Leading 55-39 with under three minutes left, the Lady Panthers rested their starters and Banks closed with an 8-0 run - capping it off with a basket at the buzzer to pull within single digits for the first time since the second quarter.

Freshman Ellie Cook finished with 11 points, six boards, four assists and three steals. Hill scored 10 points on 2-for-2 from long distance.

Locklear and McCarter added 5 points apiece. Brooke Dockrey had four points, along with a team-high seven assists and three steals.



Andelin Hill's ability to star on both ends of the floor has helped lead Union to 18 wins. Photo/Todd Forrest



Panthers fall short vs Banks, enter region tournament as No. 3 seed

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The Panthers dropped their only game of the week, a 49-39 loss to the eventual region champion Banks County, but will enter the region playoffs as the No. 3 seed.

Unlike Banks, Union County (13-10, 8-5) was playing simply for pride in Tuesday night's contest as the Panthers couldn't move up or down in the standings, regardless of the outcome. Meanwhile, the Leopards needed a win to keep pace with Social Circle, who they defeated on Friday to claim the top-spot in 8-AA, bumping the Redskins to second.

Now, Union County returns to action at 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, hosting the winner of Monday's Elbert County vs Monticello play-in game. A win on Tuesday and the Panthers will return to the State Tournament for the second-straight year. A loss and the season is over.

With a win, Union County would also advance to the region semifinals where they would meet the 2-seed Social Circle on Thursday at Rabun County. Tip-off would be at 5:30 p.m.

Panthers 39, Banks County 49 - Union County bounced back from a 24-10, second-quarter deficit to pull within one at 31-30 at the midway point of the third. Unfortunately, the Panthers were unable to push ahead, eventually running out of gas in the final two minutes as Banks pulled away 49-39 in a low-scoring region contest.

Trailing 31-30 with just over three minutes to play in the third, Union County missed a go-ahead trey attempt and Banks responded with a 3 on the other end. Pierson Allison kept the Panthers within two by knocking down a pull-up jumper but they went into the fourth still down four at 36-32.

The Leopards extended their lead to 40-33 in the early stages of the fourth but Union continued to hang around, pulling within five on a Kaston Hemphill bucket with 5:15 left.



Senior guard Pierson Allison hit three treys in the first half to help Union County erase a 14-point deficit. Photo/Todd Forrest

Still down 42-37, the Panthers had a chance to pull within three but missed from in close. Banks quickly pushed it up the floor and drilled a back-breaking trey from the corner, essentially putting Union County away at 45-37 with 1:53 remaining.

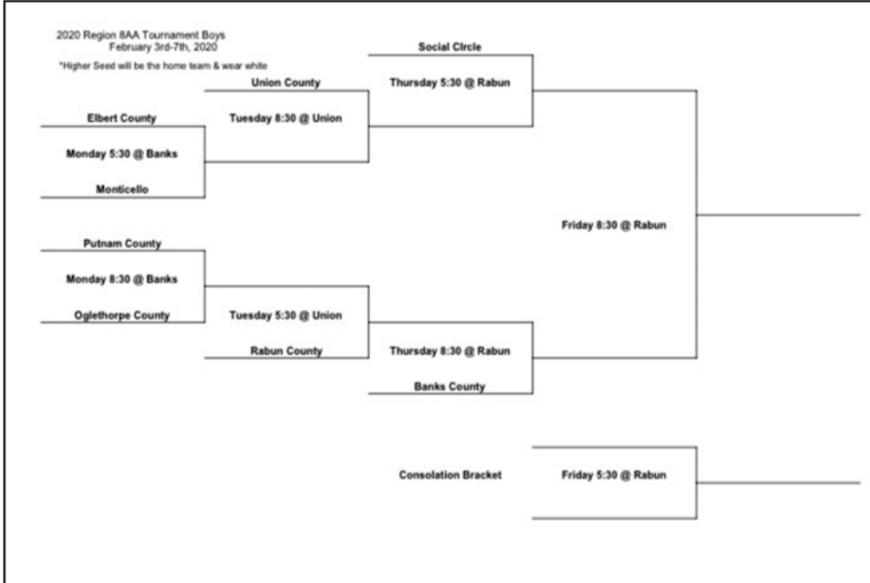
Sophomore Landon Kight kept the Panthers within six but that would be their final basket of the night. Kight saw signifi-

cant minutes in the second half after senior Cayden Rich suffered an ankle injury in the first half and didn't return.

Allison finished with 15,



Sophomore Landon Kight (35) provided a solid contribution off the bench vs Banks. Photo/Todd Forrest



Hemphill had seven, Morlock added six and Kight scored four. Sawyer Brey, Sawyer Drake and Rich scored two each. Landon Cox added a free throw.

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7-8 Boys Machine Pitch
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You may register at the Union County Recreation Department located at 310 Wellborn Street or online at unioncountyga.gov. Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

Spring Session 2020- Fitness Family Programs
Union County Recreation Department
Ages: 18 and over

Spring is quickly approaching! Union County Recreation Department will be offering many fabulous fitness class options for the Spring session. Here is a list of the following fitness classes we will offer, and take a look at our new class offerings for 18 years and older!

Regular Aerobics (T/Th) @ 8:30-9:30 AM
Advanced Strength-Core class (M/W/F) @ 9:45-10:30 AM
** NEW Advanced Strength-Core class 2 (T/Th) @ 9:45-10:30 AM
** NEW Mini-Spinning Cardio Class (M/W/F) @ 8:30-9:30 AM
AM Beginner Strength and Core class (T/Th) @ 11:15-12:00 AM
AM Intermediate Step-Aerobics class (M/W/F) @ 10:45-11:30 AM
AM Beginner Step-Fitness class (T/Th) @ 10:30-11:15 AM
Chair Fitness-Aerobics class (T/Th) @ 1:15-2:00 PM
**NEW Flex-Balance-Relaxation with Rachel (M/W/F) @ 11:45-12:45PM
**Zumba-Latin Combo Class (M/W/F) @ 8:45-9:45 AM (Age 18 and over)
**PM Step-Aerobics class (T/Th) @ 5:30-6:30 PM (Age 18 and over)
**PM Dance Jams (Monday class only) @ 5:30-6:30 PM (Age 18 and over)

*Spring Session 2020 New Registration begins on February 3, 2020 and ends February 26, 2020 (or until classes fill to capacity) at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.) Registration and class payments must be done in person. If you have any questions, you can call (706) 439-6074 and ask for Jennifer.