

# Panthers, Lady Panthers playing in Tuesday's Region consolation game

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Both Union County basketball teams opened with double-digit losses to the region's top seeds during last weekend's 8-AA tournament.

The Panthers and Lady Panthers will now attempt to improve their respective State playoff seeding in the upcoming Region 8-AA consolation games on Tuesday night at Banks County.

**Lady Panthers 39, Elbert County 74** - The upcoming Region 8-AA girls basketball title game will feature two new squads in 2021 as last year's participants square off in Tuesday's consolation game when Union County visits Banks County to face the host Leopards at 6 p.m.

Unlike the 2020 tourney, Union County (2-11) could not pull off the upset and secure its spot in the Region finals, suffering a 74-39 loss to second-ranked Elbert County (20-2) on Friday night. Overcoming a cold start from the field, the Blue Devils took advantage of 10 first-quarter turnovers by Union County before heating up from long distance in the second -- Elbert County went on to sink seven 3's during the second and third periods combined.

Despite the early giveaways, the Lady Panthers trailed just 12-11 with a minute left in the opening frame, limiting Elbert to only two field goals in the first five minutes.

After doing most of its early damage from the charity stripe, Elbert outscored Union County 7-0 over the final 46 seconds of the first, taking a 19-11 advantage into the second.

Trailing 22-11 less than 25 seconds into the second, junior Ava Hunter halted the 10-0 run with two of her team-high 13 points, bringing the Lady Panthers within single digits for the final time.

Elbert County opened up its largest lead of the half at 32-15 with six minutes on the clock. Still down 37-21 with 49 seconds to play in the first half, Union County tried keeping it close with junior Rebekah Chambers splitting a pair of free throws and freshman Lara Turner scoring inside, pulling her team within a baker's dozen, 37-24 at the break.

Chambers led the Lady Panthers with 9 points at half-time. Hunter had 8 points, and Turner scored six of her 7 points in the second period to round out the first-half scoring.

Elbert used a 12-3 spurt out of the locker room to put the game away by the quarter's five-minute mark. Kindled by four treys -- three from sophomore point guard Terrace Hester -- the Blue Devils went on to outscore Union County 24-11 during the third, resulting in a 61-35 advantage.

With 10 points, Chambers reached double digits for the fifth time in six games. Meanwhile, Turner scored 7 points -- all coming in the first half. Elbie Cook finished with 3 points on a third-quarter trey - Union County's only 3-point basket.

The freshman trio of Layla Akins, Katie Byers and Sofia McNabb rounded out the Lady Panthers' scoring with 2 points apiece.

**Lady Panthers 31, Rabun County 72** - On Monday night, Union County wrapped up the regular season with a 72-31 loss at No. 3 Rabun County.

The Lady Panthers could muster only 6 points after half-time as Chambers hit 4 of 8 from the floor and 2 of 2 at the line to lead the way with 10 points. Hunter added 8 points on 4-for-10 shooting.

Cook finished with 5 points on 1-of-2 shooting behind the arc; Turner chipped in 4 points, hitting 2 of 4 from the field. Sophomore Corinne Hill and freshman Kira McKechnie scored 2 points each.

Hunter grabbed 12 boards -- giving her at least 10 rebounds in four of her last five contests.

McNabb pulled down five rebounds; Cook recorded three.

Cook's four assists marked a season-high for the sophomore guard. Hill and Hunter chipped in two dimes apiece.

Hill led the defense with two steals. Chambers and freshman Kamryn Mull each added one.

The Lady Panthers committed 35 turnovers while shooting 13 for 33 (39%) from the field and 4 of 6 (67%) at the line.

**Looking ahead:** Union County and Banks County will meet Tuesday in Homer with the No. 3 seed in next week's Class AA State Tournament up for grabs. With No. 10 Heard



Rebekah Chambers glides to the basket vs. Elbert. Photo/Todd Forrest

County (18-6) accounting for the only ranked squad in Region 5-AA (Region 8-AA's first-round opponent), avoiding the No. 4 seed could potentially offer a boost to the winner of Tuesday's meeting.

Although, Callaway (11-6) might have something to say after splitting the regular season with Heard - picking up a 58-53 road victory on Feb. 5. But overall, Heard has been the most dominant team in 5-AA with an average victory margin of 20.5 points (57.6 points for; 37.1 allowed) in region play. As for Callaway, the Cavaliers are scoring 49 a game while giving up 34.6.

The State Tournament will get underway on Feb. 23 and 24.

As for Banks County, the Leopards defeated Union twice during the regular season, but the second meeting went down to the wire before Banks pulled away late for a 46-38 victory.

During the first matchup at Banks, the Leopards held a 31-27 advantage after three but held on to a 47-39 win. Additionally, the Lady Panthers were without Turner - the team's fourth-leading scorer and rebounder - in the first loss.

During the second loss to Banks on Feb. 3, Turner took the floor for the first time in 19 days while making just her second appearance in 7 1/2 weeks. In



Austin Taylor hit a first-quarter trey during Union's trip to Rabun County on Monday. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman Lara Turner scored six of her 7 points during the second quarter vs Elbert County on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Old Union Women's Golf Association offering free membership during April

The Old Union Women's Golf Association will begin their pre-season league starting Monday, April 5, 2021, starting at 10 AM, with our Opening Day event on May 3rd.

During our pre-season month, (April), everyone is invited to come and play with the league without becoming a member. If anyone has considered joining a women's golf league, but they "on the fence," this will give them an opportunity to "try us out." Hopefully, they find a home with a close knit group of fun, kind women!

The cost to play golf on our league day at Old Union is \$20. We have a weekly game which is optional for \$4, but players must have an active \*GHIN account to participate

the three games following her Feb. 3 return, the freshman wing has increased her efficiency, shooting 47% (8 for 17 - second on the team over that span) after beginning her high school career shooting at a 33% clip (9 for 27).

**Panthers 35, Banks County 48** - The Union County men closed out the regular season with a 59-34 loss at Rabun County and opened the Region 8-AA Tournament with a 48-35 loss to the top-seeded host team, Banks County.

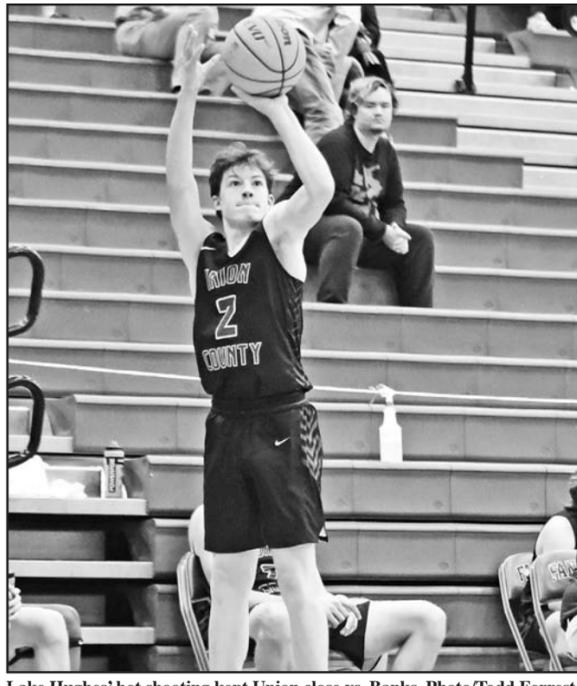
During Saturday's post-season loss to No. 9 Banks County, the Panthers held their own against a squad that owned consecutive 35-point victories over them in each of the last two meetings in Homer.

After a low-scoring first quarter ended in a 6-6 tie, Banks County could not open up much breathing room - taking a 20-15 lead into the break.

Things started breaking the Leopards' way in the third as they built a 33-20 margin with a 13-5 quarter.

Junior Lake Hughes did his best to keep Union County close in the fourth, scoring 14 of his season-high 16 points on four treys. Unfortunately, sophomore Eli Underwood's one free throw was all the help Hughes received over the final eight minutes.

Hayden Payne added 8



Lake Hughes' hot shooting kept Union close vs. Banks. Photo/Todd Forrest

points for the Panthers, while a pair of 3's by Landon Kight resulted in 6 points for the junior. Underwood finished with 3 points, and junior Caleb John scored two.

**Panthers 34, Rabun County 59** - In Monday's loss at Rabun County, the Wildcats raced ahead 17-9 after one and 32-15 at the break, eventually

cruising to a 25-point victory.

Underwood scored a team-high 8 points - six coming in the fourth quarter.

Hughes scored all of his 7 points in the second half. Kight sank two 3s in the second period to finish with 6 points.

Griffin Young scored 5 points, Austin Taylor had three, John added two and Braylen

## NASCAR 2021

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

### McDowell stuns with Daytona 500 win

Michael McDowell's first NASCAR Cup Series win was a big one. He led only one lap in Sunday's Daytona 500, but that was the last and final one. He avoided a collision between Team Penske teammates Joey Logano and Brad Keselowski during the final-lap for his first win after 357 winless starts.

"I can't believe it," McDowell said. "I've got to thank God. So many years of just grinding it out, hoping for an opportunity like this. I've got to thank (team owner) Bob Jenkins for giving me this opportunity. I'm so thankful."

"What a great way to get a first victory—in the Daytona 500!"

It appeared as if Logano was going to win on the last lap. However, he and teammate Brad Keselowski collided in turn-3, leading to a multi-car pileup. McDowell was able to avoid the spinning cars, and was in first place when the caution flag came out following the crash on Lap 200, edging out Chase Elliott.

"I saw the lights come on (for the caution), and I knew it was over right then," Elliott said. "We had a fast car. We weren't as good as I thought we were on Thursday (in the Duel 150-mile qualifying race). I thought we did a really good job of executing today, staying out of trouble."

"That's not something I've done a very good job of here in this race, so I'm glad we could at least finish this race and have something to build on for when we come back and try to do better."

Austin Dillon ran third, followed by Kevin Harvick.

Fifth-place finisher Denny Hamlin fell short in his attempt to win a record third straight Daytona 500. Hamlin won the first two stages but lost the lead during the final cycle of green-flag pit stops. He took the lead in the second stage after a cycle of green-flag pit stops and held it through the fifth caution of the race, which waved when Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Christopher Bell cut a left rear tire and spun into the Chevrolet of Ricky Stenhouse Jr.

At that point, Hamlin had led 58 laps, bringing his total of laps led in the Daytona 500 to 434, fifth-all-time and one ahead of Bobby Allison.

Ryan Preece, Ross Chastain, Jamie McMurray, Corey LaJoie, and Kyle Larson rounded out the top-10.

During lap 14, Kyle Busch was pushing Christopher Bell's No. 20, causing Bell to get into the rear of Aric Almirola's No. 10. Almirola's car went up the track and sparked a 16-car pile-up including pole-sitter Alex Bowman.

"We were just getting pushed too hard too early," Almirola said. "It's a long, long race. Man, we were in a fine position, just sitting there riding around in the top two, three and the 20 (Bell) just came with a big run and hit me really hard in a bad spot and it turned me to the right and tore up our race car and ended our Daytona 500 way too early."

Derrike Cope at 62 years of age was the oldest driver to start the race. He has one Daytona 500 to his credit and hoped to add to it. Cope got loose on Lap 3, scraped the wall, and had a DNF. This was his first 500 start since 2011.

The race was red-flagged for 5 hours, 40 minutes with 15 laps complete after rain and lightning hit the 2.5-mile track Sunday afternoon. The race resumed under green-flag conditions on Lap 30 at 9:34 p.m. ET, leading to an early Monday morning finish.

**CINDRIC WINS XFINITY SHOOTOUT**

Austin Cindric, the reign-



McDowell stuns with Daytona win.



Big wreck on Lap 14.

ing champion held off Brett Moffitt in a two-lap Overtime shootout to win Saturday's Xfinity Series race.

Obviously, coming off a lot of momentum winning that championship last year, but nothing is guaranteed and keep working hard," said Cindric.

The runner-up finish was a career-best for Moffitt, who previously had one top five in the series, a fifth at Talladega.

"Once the 22 (Cindric) got up front, every time I got within a car length, I'd just push him farther forward," said Moffitt, who chased Cindric in overtime time after taking over second place from Harrison Burton, the third-place finisher.

Jeb Burton ran fourth, followed by AJ Allmendinger, Brandon Brown, Myatt Snider, Brandon Gdovic, Daniel Hemric and Jason White.

**RHODES GETS DAYTONA TRUCK WIN**

Ben Rhodes won Friday night's Truck Series race at Daytona.

"This is so special the biggest win of my career," Rhodes said. "I can't even believe this. As a driver, you're always asked about what your biggest accomplishment is. This is it. This is hands-down it. This is the place to be. I can't even believe it."

Jordan Anderson, Cory Roper, Ryan Truex, Carson Hocevar, Sheldon Creed, John Nemechek, Codie Rohrbaugh, Chandler Smith and Drew Dollar were the remaining top-10 finishers.

**"ROWDY" KYLE TAKES BUSCH CLASH**

Kyle Busch won the Busch Clash At Daytona last Tuesday night.

Pole sitter Ryan Blaney was leading heading into the front stretch chicane on the final lap when Chase Elliott got into his rear quarter panel. Blaney spun and Elliott lost enough momentum to allow Busch to take the lead and win.

"I didn't know how it was going to play out or what was going to happen there, but I saw those guys go in there two-wide and I was like, 'I don't know if they're going to come out two-wide,'" said Busch. "Certainly, it was a tough battle between those two. They were really good. The 9 (Chase Elliott) was fast. I don't know if he was the class of the field, but the 12 (Ryan Blaney) was definitely just fast and made aggressive moves and was doing a good job all night getting himself back up to the front each

Rader had one.

**Looking ahead:** The Panthers and Rabun will meet for the third time when they square off in the 8-AA consolation game on Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. in Homer.

The loser of Tuesday's contest will likely travel to Callaway, who finished 8-0 in Region 5-AA despite owning an 8-9 overall record.

Other possible destinations for the No. 3 and 4 seeds in 8-AA are Temple and Heard County. Both squads enter the region tournament with a 5-3 record in 5-AA.

Meanwhile, Haralson County and Bremen round out the region standings at 1-7. And, barring a major upset, will battle it out to face the winner of Elbert County and Banks County's Region 8-AA title game.

The State Tournament begins on Feb. 23 and 24.

Speaking of the Region Championship, Wednesday night marks the third time in four years that Banks and Elbert will meet for the title. In 2019, Elbert County, defeated Banks County 63-51 after suffering a 55-44 region title game loss to Banks the year before.

Last year, the Leopards blasted Social Circle 65-44 to claim its third region crown in four seasons.

time. Those two coulda, shoulda, woulda been the two to race it out for the win, and maybe the 19 (Martin Truex Jr.). Just interesting how that plays out sometimes and what dynamic will push you into victory lane."

Elliott finished second followed by Joey Logano, Tyler Reddick and William Byron.

The Clash was a non-points race.

**Racing Joke:** Four expectant fathers were in a hospital waiting room while their wives were in labor. The nurse arrived and proudly announced to the first man that he was the father of twins.

"What a coincidence," he said. "I work for the Twins baseball team."

Later the nurse returned and congratulated the second father on the birth of his triplets.

"Wow, that's incredible," he said. "I work for the 3 M Corporation."

An hour later the nurse returned to congratulate the third man on the birth of quadruplets.

Stunned, he could barely reply. "I don't believe it. I work for the Four Seasons Hotel."

After this, everyone turned to the fourth guy, a race car driver, who had just fainted. The nurse rushed to his side. As he slowly regained consciousness, he began to mutter over and over, "We should never have signed 7-Eleven as our major car sponsor. We should never have signed 7-Eleven....."

**Weekend Racing:** Racing continues at Daytona for the second week in a row. This time all three series' will be competing on the 3.66-mile Daytona road course.

Fri., Feb. 19; Truck Series race two; Starting time: 7:30 PM ET; TV: FoxSports1.

Sat., Feb. 20; Xfinity Series race two; Starting time: 5 PM ET; TV: FoxSports1.

Sun., Feb 21; Cup Series race three; Starting time: 3 PM ET; TV: Fox.

**Racing Trivia Question:** Derrike Cope, who started this year's Daytona 500 has one 500 victory. What year did he win?

**Last week's question:** Who won the first Daytona 500? Answer. The first Daytona 500 was held in 1959. It was won by Lee Petty.

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