

# Sports

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## Basketball: Panthers thrash Murray, overmatched at No. 2 Columbia

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The Union County men's 2022-23 basketball season concluded Friday night in the Class AA Sweet 16, following an 83-49 loss at second-ranked Columbia (29-1) in Decatur.

Friday's trip to Decatur came courtesy of the Panthers' 85-63 home victory over Murray County on Wednesday, Feb. 22 - the program's first state playoff victory since 2016. The win also marked Union County's most lopsided victory in a state tournament since a 74-51 win over Marion County during the 1971 Final Four.

"It was a good season and I'm proud of all the guys and I'm proud for the community," Union head coach Corey Garrett said. "I've heard from a lot of people that 'basketball is back in Union County' and you like to hear that. And I think you saw it, we had some pretty good crowds this year. So we have something to build on, it's just a matter of keeping it going."

After the Murray County win, senior Eli Underwood discussed what it's been like being the lone senior and team leader on a squad loaded with sophomores and freshmen.

"This year has been the most fun I've ever had on the basketball court," he said. "Just being able to lead this team, play alongside these guys and be successful, the most successful we've been in a while, that means a lot to me."

Coach Garrett added, "I could not have picked a better leader for those young guys. It was awesome. The way Eli has handled everything, the way he's handled his whole high school career, but to see what's he's done this year has been incredible."

"He does everything you ask and he does it the right way - on the floor and off the floor. Everywhere he goes, he makes sure our program is viewed in a positive light. He's a great guy and an awesome teammate. I can't say enough about him. I love him to death and I believe everyone in that locker room feels the exact same way."

**Panthers 85, Murray County 63** - Sophomore Hayden Hughes and Underwood combined for 43 points as Union County blew things open early via a 21-0 first-quarter run.

"Coming in, we didn't know what would happen," Underwood said after the game.



Senior Eli Underwood embraces his three coaches last Wednesday as he departs his final game in front of the home fans. Photo/Todd Forrest

"We were a little down after [losing the region championship game] and our practices weren't all that great. But we just stayed focused on our goal and that was winning tonight's game and moving on to the Sweet 16."

Tied at 3-3 following a Murray County 3-pointer at the 6:50 mark, the Panthers uncorked a 21-0 run in four minutes, beginning with a bucket inside from Underwood and consecutive treys by Hughes.

Hughes ended the night with 23 points on six 3-point baskets -- setting a program record for a state playoff game. Underwood, meanwhile, poured in 20 points with a dozen coming before the break.

"I said last week if we could handle the press, we'd be able to hurt them in the halfcourt," Garrett said. "We handled the press, got them in the halfcourt and we hurt them."

Sophomore Maddox Young added to the 3-point barrage, opening up a 14-3 lead. Underwood scored on a putback, and sophomore Houston Henry drilled his team's fifth triple of the quarter to mount a 19-3 advantage. Sophomore Jude Ellis, who started the game with a trey, finished off the 21-0 assault on a dribble drive for two.

Murray County responded with seven straight, moving within 11 at 21-10 early in the second, but that's as close as

the Indians came to climbing inside single-digits as Young stopped the run by attacking the paint, and Henry turned a steal into a 3-point play and a 26-10 margin.

Hughes' third trey of the half came at the 5:28 mark before Underwood added three buckets, and Maddox converted an and-one to build a 38-15 lead with 2 minutes before halftime.

Over the final 42 seconds, Underwood scored in the paint and Ellis knocked down a corner jumper, but Murray tacked on a late 3-point play to slice its deficit to 42-25 at the intermission.

Hughes started the third by getting fouled in the corner, resulting in three free throws and a 45-25 score. An Underwood jump hook and a 1-for-2 visit to the line kept Union County in control at 48-27, until the Panthers delivered a furious knockout moments later.

After Young tagged the Indians with a body shot at the 5:47 mark for a 50-29 lead, Hughes landed three straight haymakers from 3-point land, busting things open at 59-29 near the midway point of the third.

Ellis and Underwood combined for five free throws over the final 2:55, helping Union County mount its largest lead of the night at 64-32 before taking a 64-37 advantage to the fourth.

"I knew their 2-3 [defense] is a little different from what we've seen, but we were moving the ball and finding the open guy, then Hayden got hot again and other guys started knocking down shots," Garrett said. "Inside they had no answer for Eli, so it was exactly what you want from a gameplan."

Ellis' and-one and a fast-break layup from Hughes extended the margin back out to 32 early in the fourth, but Murray responded with a 10-0 run, prompting a Panthers timeout.

Freshman Cade Dockrey attacked the basket off the dribble to suspend the Indians run. Then, deuces by Underwood and Young, along with three Henry free throws, made it 78-55 near the 3-minute mark.

Union County capped off the scoring with late free throws from Henry, Ellis and junior Van Marevka. During Marevka's trip to the line, Underwood departed the contest to a standing ovation from hometown fans.

On the heels of his final home game, Underwood reminisced on his playing days at UCHS, and talked about what he'll remember most from his four years.

"Just the support from the fans, the community and my teammates," he said. "I'm thankful to coach for leaving me in a little longer at the end [of the game] so I could enjoy those last few moments. Then

being able to walk off the court one last time, that was a really special moment."

After his Panthers fell in consecutive region title games to bookend a heartbreaking loss in the Battle of the States title game, Underwood entered last Wednesday's contest prepared to carry his team across the finish line if necessary.

"I did not want to go out tonight," he said. "I was going to do everything in my power to keep the season going as long as I can."

Young finished with 14 points, Ellis had 13 and Henry scored 12 - each connecting on one 3-point field goal. Dockrey's night ended with 2 points; Marevka added a free throw.

No additional stats were available from last week's games.

**Panthers 49, No. 2 Columbia 83** - Union County (19-9) held its own for much of Friday's Sweet 16 contest, but at the end of the day, couldn't match the size and speed of Class AA's No. 2 team for the entire 32 minutes.

Trailing 19-16 in the second, and with two early fouls on Columbia's 6-foot-9 senior Terrell Wright, the Panthers seemed poised to keep things competitive into halftime. But with their big man on the bench, the Eagles' smaller, quicker lineup took over and sparked a 20-2 run.

"We knew coming in that we couldn't guard them [in man-to-man], but even in zone, they can split those gaps so quickly," Garrett said. "They were super-athletic and I'm very interested to see if they end up winning it all."

"We saw on film they had a couple guys who could hit some 3s if you leave them open but the fact that they were able to hit so many mid-range jumpers is what stood out to me."

Union refused to go away as Ellis, Underwood and Young scored the final three buckets of the second period to keep their team within striking distance at 43-27 at the break.

Hughes' third triple of the night moved Union within 15 at 45-30, but Columbia answered with a 7-0 spurt to push the score to 52-30. The Panthers last surge came late in the third when a pair of dribble drives by Dockrey and an Ellis steal-and-score trimmed the margin to 52-36.

But Columbia heated up in a hurry, scoring on 14 of its next 15 possessions, resulting in a 29-7 run that put the visitors away at 81-43 with 3:15 remaining.

In his final appearance with the Purple and Gold, Underwood went out with his team's last six points of night to finish with a game-high 17.

"They had some big guys but Eli kept doing what he's done all year," Garrett said. "I was interested to see how he would do against that size and I was really happy that he was able to have success. But I know he would have gladly traded his individual success for a win."

Hughes hit a trio of 3-pointers to finish with 9 points and end his season with a program-record 92 treys. Ellis added 9 points to give the 2023 region honorable mention selection 641 for his career (374 this year), placing him on the 1,000-point watchlist for 2023-24.

Henry, who re-aggravated a lingering hamstring injury vs. Murray County, scored 4 points in limited minutes at Columbia. Region 8-AA honorable mention selections, Dockrey and Young, added 4 points each for the Panthers.

"It was a great year, we got to 19 wins, and yeah, 20 would have been nice, but we did a lot of things the program hasn't done in a while," Garrett said. "I'm so proud of the entire program. It was enjoyable year and I hate it's over, but we're all excited for what's to come."



Freshman Cade Dockrey, a region honorable mention, scores inside during Friday's Sweet-16 matchup at Columbia. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore region honorable mention Jude Ellis drives into the paint during the second half at No. 2 Columbia. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Hayden Hughes added another 3-point record to his resume with his six treys vs. Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Basketball: Lady Panthers season ends in loss at No. 8 Murray County

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Chatsworth - No. 8 Murray County (22-4) raced out to an 11-0 lead and never looked back in a 59-39 victory over Union County (14-14) in the first round of the Class AA State Tournament on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

Senior Corinne Hill led the way with 19 points in her final game.

A free throw from Hill and two Lara Turner jumpers got the Lady Panthers on the board past the midway point of the first quarter, but they had no answer for Murray County on the defensive end.

Leading 23-5 after one, the Indians built a 27-5 advantage until Hill and sophomore Ariel McCarter kept Union County within 20 at 31-11. Hill added a breakaway layup and scored inside off the dribble, while McCarter hit two from the charity stripe.

Freshman Paula Robertson split two free throws at the 2:10 mark, and Hill added a deuce and a trey for a 36-17 deficit with under a minute until halftime. Robertson scored



Freshman Paula Robertson scored 6 points at Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest

scored six of her team's nine fourth-quarter points. Robertson finished with 6 points, McCarter had five and Turner scored four.

Sophomore Katelyn Brown and freshman Mady Adams added 2 points each. Junior Kamryn Mull had one.

The two squads broke even in the third at 11-11 with McCarter and Robertson knocking down 3s and Hill converting an and one. Hill



Senior Corinne Hill led all scorers with 19 during last week's trip to No. 8 Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest

No additional stats were available for last week's game.

McCarter and Turner end the year as First-Team All-8-AA selections. Brown earned an honorable mention nod.

Heading into the State

Tournament, McCarter averaged a team-high 14.2 points and 2.3 steals per game. McCarter's 2.1 assists were second to Hill (2.3), while her 5.8 boards were third on the team behind Turner's 6.0 and Brown's 8.8 a night.

As for Turner, the junior

was second at 9 points while leading the team with 0.5 blocks a game. Her 1.6 assists and 1.6 steals were both good enough for third.

Along with her team-leading 8.8 boards, Brown finished at 4 points, 1.2 steals and 1 assist a night.

# Soccer: Panthers extend winning streak to five with perfect week

## Lady Panthers draw with No. 3 Dawson County in first game featuring full squad

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The Union County men capped off a 3-0 week with victories over Fannin County, Dawson County and White County. Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers went 1-1-1 last week, notching an 8-0 win at Fannin County before battling Class AAA's No. 3 Dawson County to a 1-1 stalemate and falling 3-0 to Class AAA's fifth-ranked White County.

Through the first six games, the Class AA Lady Panthers (2-3-1) have faced four of AAA's top-seven squads in No. 2 Lumpkin County, No. 3 Dawson, No. 5 White and No. 7 Coahuilla Creek. The Union men (5-1) have met two: No. 6 Coahuilla Creek and No. 8 Lumpkin County.

**Panthers 6, White County 1** - The Panthers won their fifth straight match, racing out to a 4-1 halftime lead during a home rout of White County on a rainy Friday night.

Antonio Solario and Evan Bohms scored two goals each while Bohms handed out three assists.

Senior Wilson Walker added a goal in the 32nd minute; Zuriel Mancillas notched a corner-kick assist in the 58th via Bohm's final goal.

**Panthers 3, Dawson County 2** - Union County held on following a 3-1 halftime advantage behind goals from Bo-



Junior Zuriel Mancillas during a recent game. Photo/Todd Forrest

hms, Solario and Walker. Bohms, alongside Benton Gregory and Joel Mendoza, added one assist for the Panthers.

Despite getting out-shot 14-10 by the Tigers, Union's senior goalkeeper Trent Baker recorded four saves in the win.

Union struck first in the second minute when Gregory's cross into the box resulted in Solario's shot off the keeper's right leg that found the back-left

corner of the net. Bohm's free-kick made it 2-0 in the 19th, bending the shot inside the right post from 26 yards out. Dawson County answered in the 31st minute, sending a left-footed shot into the net from 30 yards away to slice the deficit in half.

Union countered before the break when Bohm launched a lengthy pass toward the Dawson goal, allowing Walker to gather



Junior Zoe Crawford scored three goals at Fannin. Photo/Todd Forrest

possession just outside the box before blowing past his defender and slipping the shot past an attacking keeper.

The Tigers added a late goal in the waning seconds to bring the final tally to 3-2. On the restart, sophomore Zuriel Mancillas booted a shot toward the Dawson County goal as time expired.

**Panthers 5, Fannin County 1** - Union blew things open in the second half, scoring four goals and turning a 1-1 tie into a 5-1 drubbing on Tuesday, Feb. 21 in Blue Ridge.

Walker scored the first of his two goals in the 11th minute, before capping the game's scoring in the 74th via a feed from Mancillas.

Mancillas, who collected two assists, added a goal in the 69th courtesy of Kooper Ashcraft's second helper.

Solario notched one assist. Bohms and Nick Depalma tacked on unassisted goals.

**Lady Panthers 8, Fannin County 0** - The Lady Rebels proved no match for the Lady Panthers as both squads entered shorthanded with their respec-

tive basketball teams advancing to State.

Zoe Crawford and Italia Salazar each recorded a hat trick as Union County scored five goals after halftime.

Two of Crawford's goals came in the first 25 minutes, then a feed from Adison Meeker to Salazar sent Union into the break up 3-0.

Kaylee Helton found Crawford for a 4-0 score in the 49th. Meeker made it 5-0 two minutes later, then Salazar added her second goal in the 64th.

Salazar's hat trick came via an unassisted goal in the 72nd minute. Naomi Gelinias scored in the 80th.

**Lady Panthers 1, No. 3 Dawson County 1** - Union County welcomed its basketball players back to the pitch and responded by playing AAA's third-ranked team to an 80-minute draw.

Union's lone score came via freshman Kennedy Daniel's first high school goal - a second-half equalizer after Dawson led most of the night.

**Lady Panthers 0, No. 5 White County 3** - Union County yielded three second half goals to the fifth-ranked Warriors on Friday, Feb. 24 in Blairsville.

**Up next:** Both Union clubs begin Region 8-AA play on Thursday, March 2, where the Lady Panthers are rewarded with a trip to fourth-ranked Athens Academy at 5:30 p.m.

# Baseball: Panthers drop all three last week; reinforcements on the way from the hardwood

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Jasper - The Panthers (0-8) were dealt three shutouts away from home, suffering a 10-0 loss at Pickens followed by two neutral-site losses to Woodland and Hampton by scores of 8-0 and 7-0, respectively.

Union County hosts Dawson County at 5 p.m. on March 1. The Panthers welcome rival Fannin County on March 3 - varsity action gets underway after the 4 p.m. JV contest.

**Panthers 0, Hampton 7** - With the conclusion of basketball on Friday night, sophomores Hayden Hughes and Kaden Combs moved outdoors during Saturday's finale of last weekend's Pickens tournament.

Hughes went 1 for 3 in his diamond debut; Combs finished 0 for 3 with a pair of ground-outs.

The Hornets scored two in the first, three in the fourth and two in the sixth while limiting the Panthers to only three hits in the 7-0 shutout.

Maddox Patton and Holton Fleming turned in a 1-for-3 day for Union County. Will Duncan and Bo Brown added two walks apiece.

The Panthers stranded a pair in scoring position during the bottom of the first when Patton and Hughes both singled and Duncan drew a free pass. Brown walked in the second and Fleming reached via a third-inning single - his team's final hit of the game.

Duncan walked in the sixth; later, Eli Sosensky drew a hit by a pitch and Brown earned a base on balls in the seventh.

Gunnar Akins worked 3 1/3 innings on the bump, allowing six hits, four earned and three walks while fanning four. Fleming surrendered five hits, one



Union catcher Bo Brown during a recent game. Photo/Todd Forrest

earned run, two walks and struck out two in 1 2/3 innings.

Brayden Sweat went 1 1/3,

walked one and recorded three strikeouts.

**Panthers 0, Woodland 8** - The Wolfpack got four in the fifth and two in the sixth to put Union County away on Friday, Feb. 24.

Eli Gwynn went 2 for 2 with a pair of doubles and a walk. Patton and Mayo Collins-Spiva each went 1 for 3; Hunter Fleming stole a base.

Patton tossed three innings, allowing three hits, three walks and two earned runs while striking out three. Gwynn allowed eight hits and six earned over three frames; Duncan fanned two during a 32-pitch scoreless seventh.

Union County put two aboard to begin the fifth when Gwynn doubled and Collins-Spiva singled. Gwynn and Akins each walked with one away in the seventh.

**Panthers 0, Pickens 10** - The Dragons ended the Tuesday,

Sosensky, Duncan and Hunter Fleming notched one single apiece. Patton added a double and Akins tripled. Sweat worked a two-out walk in the sixth. Holton Fleming swiped his first bag of the year.

Union left the bases juiced in the first after Patton doubled, Hunter Fleming walked and Connor Swanson was hit by a pitch. The Panthers stranded another runner in scoring position in the second following Akins' two-out triple.

Duncan and Hunter Fleming reached on back-to-back singles in the third. During the fifth, Sosensky singled to left field and Duncan followed with a base on balls.

Akins allowed six hits, four earned runs and three runs while striking out five over 3 2/3 innings. Duncan gave up three hits and four earned in 1 1/3; Gwynn tossed 2/3 of an inning, surrendering two hits and a run.

# UCRD 12U girls finish first; 10U boys second



The 12U girls won the District basketball championship at White County. Coaches: Megan Henry and Megan Brown. Players: Kamryn Brown, Bristol Davis, Lennon Ellis, Scout Henry, Mya Jordan, Kinsley Kendrick, Hailey Marshall, Elle Munn, Lyla Price, Miya Totherow.



The 10U boys placed second and are coached by Krista Fox and assistants Jack Lance and Tim Mason. Players: Abel Bass, Bentley Burgess, Parker Dillinger, Sawyer Fox, Zayne Helton, Ethan Liberatore, Adrian Mason, Jacob Nichols, Coltyn Sandler. Asher Wentland is not pictured. The 12U boys team will be featured next week.