

Sports

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Panthers keep rolling, blast Armuchee 50-3

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The Union County defense bottled up visiting Armuchee (1-2) in a 50-3 rout, squeezing the Indians' offense into a paltry 66 yards, one-upping last week's smothering 70-yard outing vs. Towns County.

With the Union County youth teams and cheer squads in attendance for Rec Night, the Purple Swarm was suffocating on third down, thwarting each of Armuchee's 10 third-down attempts. What's more remarkable about Union's recent eight-quarter stretch: Since yielding a late 55-yard touchdown on third-and-1 at Lumpkin County, the Panthers' D has denied 22 consecutive third-down conversions.

"It's very important for [the defense to set the tone]," said Union County senior defensive end David Heredia, who accounted for two of Union's eight tackles for loss. "For those of us that are solely defensive players, it's a great feeling to come out, put up a zero in the first half and let our offense go do their thing."

And the offense didn't let them down, building an early 15-0 lead that ballooned to 36-0 at the break. The Panthers (3-1) piggy-backed off their defensive efforts, starting six drives in plus territory. Excluding two Armuchee kickoffs resulting in touchbacks, Union County enjoyed an average starting field position at the Indians' 49.

"The defense has been outstanding," Panthers head coach Michael Perry said. "Seth Rutan and Ethan Lester were all over the place. Those guys had a big night for us and it was just a great job by our defensive coaching staff: Coach (Mark) Wade, Coach (Justin) Byers and Coach (Athyn) Thurmond."

After going three and out on the game's first possession, Caiden Tanner and the offense set up shop near midfield on the second series following a fourth-down TFL by sophomore safety Cade Dockrey.

Tanner used his legs for gains of 15 and 13 yards before hitting fellow senior Jensen Goble over the middle on a 22-yard touchdown strike.

Goble turned in a career-high 181 yards and two scores on six catches. His 181 yards mark the most by a Union receiver since Sam Gilbert's 2015



Senior David Heredia and the Union County defense have been firing on all cylinders over its last two outings, allowing just 1.1 yards per carry since the loss at Lumpkin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

school-record performance of 233 yards vs. Social Circle.

"[Armuchee] played us in man [defense], and they definitely had a hard time covering No. 12," Perry said.

Senior linebacker Seth Rutan blew up a third-and-3 run moments later, and after a punt, Union County orchestrated its longest-scoring drive of the evening.

But the offense still only needed four plays.

The Panthers went 83 yards, highlighted by a 55-yard catch-and-run by Goble to mount a 13-0 advantage. Union County delivered a back-breaker on the point-after try via an impromptu 2-point conversion, extending the margin to 15 points. It all started courtesy of a Union miscue when senior

kicker Ethan McBride scooped up a high snap, scrambled right, and heaved a wobbly spiral to the endzone toward senior tight end Tyler Grasty, who elevated over two Indians to snag the jump ball.

The defense continued doing its job, and this time, senior linebacker Koooper Ashcraft applied pressure from the outside, forcing an errant throw on third and 12.

Beginning at the Armuchee 48-yard line, Tanner moved the chains on a fourth-and-1 keeper, then a tunnel-screen to Goble netted 11 yards. Three plays later, facing third-and-8 at the 25, Goble used every bit of his 5-foot-10 frame to snag a throw inside the 10 before getting forced out at the 7-yard line. A QB draw by Tan-

ner, followed by consecutive gives to senior Braylen Rader, bumped the lead to 22-0 during the opening minute of the second quarter.

Rader ended the night with three touchdowns, churning out 129 yards on 19 carries. The Panthers made it 29-0 when Tanner went up top to McBride for 34 yards, then the senior quarterback found a crease inside for 10 more on first and goal.

Tanner finished 9 for 15 with 254 yards and 2 touchdowns, adding 79 yards and a score on 11 carries.

The defense continued making life difficult for Armuchee quarterback Luke Lively, who ended up 3 for 11 with 33 yards through the air.

On the second play of the ensuing Indians' possession, senior Lane Lance bullrushed his way up the middle, beating a double-team and dropping Lively for a sack at the 1-yard line.

Taking over at the 46, Tanner stepped up in the pocket and hit Dockrey on a 17-yard out-route before the drive ended with an interception at the 4-yard line. But the defense, led by Rutan, pinned its ears back and forced another Armuchee punt on fourth-and-13.

Union padded its lead before the intermission, taking advantage of a starting field position at the Indians' 22-yard line. From there, two carries by Rader of 14 and 8 yards stretched the halftime margin to 36-0.

Panthers eye 4-1 start ahead of bye weeks

Union County travels to West Hall on Friday to face its second Region 7-AAA opponent (Lumpkin) of 2023. The Spartans sport a 1-2 record and are coming off a bye week following a 42-7 loss at 8-AA's East Jackson on Sept. 1.

After the visit to Oakwood, Union County will take two weeks off before opening Region 8-AA play with Homecoming vs. Banks County on Oct. 6.

"We held Towns to under 20 yards rushing, we had a good week [vs. Armuchee] and I'm excited about what we can do [this week]," Heredia said. "It's important to keep the momentum going because that will lead into the [bye weeks] and then into the region against Banks. If we lose momentum, we'll have to sit on it for a while, and it'll be a long time before we can redeem ourselves."

West Hall's lone win was a 29-9 victory over Johnson-Gainesville. The Spartans



Ethan McBride

opened with a 35-28 loss at East Hall, who fell to Johnson two weeks later.

West Hall is led by junior running back Elijah

The third opened with another three-and-out from the defense, and Union's first possession of the second half started at the Armuchee 41-yard line. On second down, Tanner hooked up with Goble for 32 yards, and two plays later, junior Connor Schucknecht found the endzone from 5 yards out.

During the early stages of the fourth, Armuchee got on the board via a 31-yard field goal, but Rader answered by showing off his wheels on a 51-yard touchdown carry, bringing the final tally to 50-3.

"I can't say enough about our defense," Perry added. "But Jensen Goble had a big night, Tanner threw some great balls and Rader just keeps on doing his thing."

Heredia, when asked how much fun the Union County defense is having right now, couldn't contain his smile as he answered.

"It's amazing," he said. "We're having a blast out there. These [Armuchee] guys tonight, they were doing some talking, but I like playing teams like that."

Stats: Passing - Tanner 9-15, 251 yds, 2 TDs, INT; Chetley Cox 1-1, 6 yds. Rushing - Rader 19 car, 129 yds, 3 TDs; Tanner 11 car, 79 yds, TD; Cox 2 car, 28 yds; Schucknecht 4 car, 13 yds, TD; Bentley Rich 2 car, 12 yds; Brandon Lynch 2 car, 9 yds. Receiving - Goble 6 rec, 181 yds, 2 TDs; McBride 1 rec, 36 yds; Dockrey 1 rec, 17 yds; Cade Walden 1 rec, 6 yds.

Defense - Lester 10 tkl, QBH; Rutan 9 tkl, 2 TFL; Lancia 4 tkl, 2 TFL sack, Heredia 4 tkl, 2 TFL, Ashcraft 4 tkl, TFL, QBH; Schucknecht 4 tkl; Dockrey 3 tkl; TFL; Jonah Kluth 2 tkl; Nolan Thompson 2 tkl; Carter Deal 2 tkl; Gunnar Franklin 1 tkl. Kicking - McBride 6-6 PATs.

Extra points: During the Sept. 1 win over Towns County, Tanner matched Pierson Allison's school record (at Putnam County, 2019) with 5 passing TDs in a half.

With his 3 rushing touchdowns vs. Armuchee, Rader now has 11 on the year, surpassing his 12-game total of 9 TDs from a season ago.

Union's 50 points on Friday marks the second time in program history (2019) that a Panthers team has reached 49 points in three of its first four games.

Hayes, who averages 12.3 yards per carry and went for 216 yards in the Johnson win. East Jackson somewhat held Hayes in check, but the junior still rushed for 85 yards and one touchdown on 13 carries.

One year ago, the Panthers limited Hayes to 23 yards on four touches in Blairsville.

"We're really going to have to stop him," Perry said. "As long as we do that and don't turn the ball over, I think we'll be okay."

"Then we go into the two bye weeks and hopefully that will let some guys heal up a little bit."

Last year's 48-7 win over the Spartans marked Union's first win in three tries vs. West Hall. The Spartans' two series wins came during the 1990 and 1991 seasons by a combined tally of 78-3.

Friday's kickoff is at 7:30 p.m. West Hall is located at 5500 McEver Rd, Oakwood, GA 30566.



Senior receiver Jensen Goble eyes the goal line after hauling in the first of his two touchdown receptions vs. Armuchee. Goble ended with a career-high 181 yards receiving. Photo/Todd Forrest

Volleyball: Union shocks No. 7 Providence in 8-AA opener

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Union County (7-13, 1-0) stunned Providence Christian by a 2-1 score (25-20, 17-25, 15-9) on Wednesday, Sept. 6, one day ahead of Providence's 2-1 victory over defending Region 8-AA champion Athens Academy.

After one week of region play, Union County sits atop 8-AA in a first-place tie with Banks County. In non-region action last week, the Panthers fell in straight sets to White County and Habersham County on Tuesday in Cleveland.

Dawson County took all four sets in Blairsville during Wednesday's tri-match with Union County and Providence (16-7, 1-1). On Thursday, the Panthers split a tri-match at Franklin County, scoring a 2-1 win over the home team and suffering a 2-1 loss to Stephens County.

During the win over Providence, the Panthers took the first and third sets to secure the upset. In the opener, Union raced ahead 5-1 before the Storm rallied for an 11-9 edge. The two squads swapped leads until four straight by Union opened up a 22-20 advantage. From there, three potential Providence points sailed out of bounds, giving the Panthers a 25-20 set-one victory.

The Storm rebounded in set two and never trailed in a 25-17 win. A Mallory Rouse block moved Union within a point at 9-8 before the Panthers tied it up at 10-10. But Providence rattled off six straight and later held a 19-13 advantage until Claire Colwell delivered consecutive Union County points.

Unfortunately, the Panthers would get no closer as Providence quickly extended its margin to 23-15.

In the third and final set, Union faced an early 4-3 deficit until Charlei Robinson's kill capped a quick spurt with an 8-5 edge. Rouse's kill maintained the three-point margin at 11-8, then two Providence errors bumped the lead to 13-9. Smelling blood, the Panthers finished off the visitors with the final two points in the 15-9 victory.

Earlier in the day, Union County couldn't protect early set-one leads of 8-1 and 10-2 vs. Dawson County. But despite falling behind 17-15 and 19-17, the Panthers pushed ahead at 20-19 and 21-20 before Dawson finished things off at 25-23.

Juniors Lily Brookshire and Katelyn Brown helped Union mount second-set leads of 7-3, 10-4, 12-7 and 14-9 before the Tigers rallied ahead 16-15. Sophomore Reese Jones put the Panthers up for a moment at 19-18, a lead that held until 21-20, but Dawson finished off the home team with a 5-0 spurt.

Union County traveled to Carnesville a day later and downed Franklin County 2-1 by scores of 25-11, 20-25 and 15-9. The Panthers couldn't keep it going vs. Stephens County, who prevailed 28-26, 20-25 and 15-11.

The Panthers visited Cleveland on Tuesday, dropping two sets apiece to White and Habersham Central.

Union traveled to Andrews, North Carolina on Monday, Sept. 11, before resuming region play Tuesday at East Jackson. The Panthers visit Providence on Thursday for a tri-match involving Whitefield Academy.



Union County volleyball celebrates last week's 2-1 victory over Providence Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest

Softball: Lady Panthers drop 9-inning heartbreaker to Banks County, 3-1

Union County blanks Fannin County 8-0 in 5 innings

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Union County's Region 8-AA title hopes were dealt a body blow on Thursday, Sept. 7, during a 3-1 extra-inning home loss to Banks County.

Freshman pitcher Izzy Anthros drove in the Lady Panthers' lone run via a solo homer, then tossed all nine innings before taking the tough-luck loss.

Unfortunately, the freshman, who also doubled during a two-hit performance, didn't get much help from the rest of the lineup, who managed just two additional hits and a hit-by-pitch over nine innings.

Union County couldn't secure two opportunities to put Banks County away, beginning in the bottom of the first when the Lady Panthers had Banks on the ropes following senior Georgia Patton's hit-by-pitch, and Anthros' double off the left-field fence. With two runners in scoring position, nobody out and the 3-4-5 hitters due up, the Lady Panthers failed to crack the scoring column via two strikeouts and a tapper back to the pitcher.

Banks took advantage of a single and an error to manufacture one in the third, but Anthros got it back in the bottom half courtesy of a two-out, two-strike



Freshman Izzy Anthros goes deep to tie the game vs. Banks County. She also doubled and struck out a career-high 13 in the circle. Photo/Todd Forrest

big fly to left — the first of her high school career.

The game remained deadlocked into the bottom of the eighth when Union County strung together consecutive hits but couldn't generate the walk-off win. With two away, senior Gracie Gladding lined a laser

off the centerfield fence, just missing a game-winning homer by inches. Despite the ball nearly leaving the park, Banks County limited Gladding to a single thanks to an unfortunate combo of the high exit velocity, a perfect carom off the fence to the centerfielder and a strong

throw to second.

With the winning run at first, Sloane Dyer singled to right field, putting runners at the corners, where they were left stranded heading to the Banks County ninth.

Union County was one out away from leaving Banks'

career-high 13 strikeouts while surrendering 6 hits and 2 earned runs.

With no 8-AA tournament at the end of the year and the eight region champs hosting a four-team regional to determine the quarterfinal spots in Columbus, the Lady Panthers will likely need to defeat Banks County in each of the next two meetings if they want to repeat as region champs and host during next month's postseason.

Earlier in the week, Union County blanked rival Fannin County 8-0 in 5 innings behind Patton's 3-RBI evening on Tuesday, Sept. 5.

The senior shortstop belted her first homer of 2023 to finish 1 for 2 with a walk, 2 runs and 3 RBIs. Gladding went 2 for 2; Lilly Helton doubled, knocked in a run and scored three times during a 1-for-2 game. Massey and Anthros each singled in the win.

Anthros fanned 11 Lady Rebels over 4 innings of two-hit ball. Sophomore Ayla Jamison fanned one during one scoreless frame.

Union County hits the road for two Region 8-AA games this week, beginning Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. at East Jackson.

The Lady Panthers visit Providence Christian on Thursday at 5 p.m.

Anthros ended with a leadoff single at second base when back-to-back run-scoring doubles opened up a 3-1 margin. The Lady Panthers were retired 1-2-3 in their final at-bat following a diving catch by the Leopards' left fielder to open the frame.

Anthros ended with a

XC: Union County ladies fourth at North Hall; men finish eighth

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Gainesville - Facing a slew of north Georgia's top runners from all classifications, the Union County girls delivered a remarkable performance at last week's North Hall Invitational, coming in fourth behind the host Trojans, Jefferson and Buford.

Sophomore Lola Hunter placed fifth overall with a time of 20 minutes, 56 seconds, coming in behind three North Hall runners and one from Habersham Central.

Senior Ellie Adams came in 30th at 23:08, moving up from 33rd place at the 1-mile mark and 31st at two. Junior Hannah Kazmierzak (23:13) placed 33rd, improving her position throughout, from 35th at a mile and 34th at 2 miles.

Senior Natalie Payne clocked in at 23:55 to finish 43rd; sophomore Avery Husson was 54th at 24:44 and freshman Clara Kazmierzak came in 60th with a time of 25:12.

Other Union County runners include junior Lydia Wagner at 25:28, junior Katie Payne at 27:11.30 and sophomore Averie Tanner at 27:11.80.



Sophomore Lola Hunter placed fifth overall at North Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

The Union County men turned in an impressive eighth-place performance behind senior Benton Gregory's 21st place finish at 18:18. Senior Wes Seiler crossed the line at 19:24 - good enough for 45th;

runner include sophomore Ty Hogsed (20:54), freshman Andrew Nushtayev (21:26), freshman Noah Payne (21:35), senior Ethan Hill (22:04) and junior Logan Duckworth (23:58).

Other Union County

The top-10 guys team standings: North Hall (51), Buford (104), East Forsyth (152), Jackson County (166), Lumpkin County (165), Fideles Christian (178), Chestatee (199), Jefferson (235), Union County (254), White County (282), Madison County (291).

The girls' top 10: North Hall (27), Jefferson (86), Buford (125), Union County (152), Jackson County (166), Lanier (218), Apalachee (246), Lumpkin County (256), Chestatee (260), Greater Atlanta Christian (271).

Union County will race at Gilmer on Tuesday, Sept. 12.

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Union County
Volunteer Fire Station 2
(15 Jones Creek Road S, Blairsville, GA)

Will be hosting its annual
Open House
on Saturday, September 16th
11 a.m. - 2 p.m.