

Sports

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Shorthanded Panthers hang on behind Ellis' career-high 23 points

Foul trouble hampers Lady Panthers in 57-54 loss to North Hall

By Todd Forrest
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The Panthers held off a furious North Hall rally over the final 33 seconds to force a split during Union County basketball's opening night on Wednesday, Nov. 16 in Blairsville.

Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers battled foul trouble in a 57-54 loss to the Trojans after storming back from a 25-16 first-half deficit to grab a 39-34 advantage during the latter stages of the third quarter.

Union County will host rival Towns County on Tuesday, Nov. 22, before taking part in this weekend's Adrian Penland Classic at East Forsyth.

Panthers 74, North Hall 71

Still without the services of their football players, the Panthers' depth concerns were dealt another blow when sophomore starting point guard Houston Henry was sidelined due to illness ahead of last week's contest.

The Panthers' coaching staff entered shorthanded as well, with head coach Corey Garrett serving the mandatory two-game suspension following his ejection during Union County's playoff loss to Lovett at the end of last season. Assistants Anthony Payne and Kevin Hughes will continue filling in during Tuesday's border war with Towns County.

"Not having Houston [Henry against North Hall] put us in a tough situation because he's such an important part of our team," acting head coach Anthony Payne said after the win. "Our guys did a good job tonight of stepping up and doing what they needed to get the win."

Sophomore Jude Ellis led the way with 23 points as the depth-challenged Panthers never trailed, racing out to a 10-2 advantage and building their largest lead at 39-27 with 43 seconds before halftime.

Ahead 43-32 early in the third, Union remained out front, nursing a 54-49 margin by quarter's end before opening up some fourth-quarter breathing room at 65-55.

With Union County still on top 68-59 with just over a minute left, a Trojans' 3-pointer sliced the lead to 68-62 at the 1:04 mark.

Ellis answered with two free throws, but the Panthers committed the cardinal sin of fouling a 3-point shooter with 46 seconds left. North Hall hit 2-of-3, and sophomore Maddox Young sank two from the charity



Sophomore Jude Ellis uses the Euro step to attack the hoop during the second half of Union County's win over North Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

stripe to maintain a comfortable 72-64 lead.

Following a successful Trojans' sophomore Hayden Hughes split two free throws to keep it a three-possession game at 73-66 with 33 seconds left. North Hall made 1-of-2 at the line five seconds later, then stole the Union County inbound pass for an easy layup to tighten the score at 73-69.

After North Hall missed from point-blank range following another steal, the Panthers missed two free throws at the 16-second mark allowing the Trojans to drive the lane for a quick deuce and a 73-71 score. Young hit 1-of-2 at the foul line with 1.5 ticks on the clock, missing the second attempt and forcing North Hall into a failed full-court desperation heave off the rebound.

"With the clock running out, we really shouldn't have even inbounded the ball in that situation," Payne said. "But it really helped that [North Hall] didn't press us much until the very end. We were really thin tonight on the bench and were doing our best to try and keep guys as fresh as possible."

Ellis finished the game 8-of-19 from the floor and poured in a career-high 23 points - topping his previous best of 21, which he accomplished three times on the road last season (Habersham Central, Chestatee and Elbert). The sophomore guard added four rebounds, three assists and two steals in last Wednesday's victory.

Hayden Hughes scored a

career-high 14 points in his first varsity start, knocking down 3 of 6 from deep while collecting six boards to go with two assists and a steal.

Senior Eli Underwood scored 13 points -- seven coming in the first period -- and pulled down a team-high nine rebounds. Young recorded a career-high 13 points with five boards and three assists.

The first basket of the year went to Hayden Hughes via a corner trey that spotted Union County a 3-0 lead. A bucket by junior Van Marevka extended the margin to 20-10 at the 2:23 mark of the first until North Hall scored the quarter's final five points.

Hayden Hughes rattled off five straight of his own, hitting two free throws to start the second, then sinking a triple from the left wing for a 25-15 advantage. North Hall cut the margin to 29-24 with 3:15 left in the half, but Union outscored the visitors 10-6 the rest of the way, including another Hayden Hughes 3 at the 1:01 mark.

A jump hook by Underwood and a pull-up jumper from Ellis built a 43-32 third-quarter advantage before the Trojans began chipping away, narrowing the gap to 49-45 with 1:42 to play in the period. But Ellis went on the attack, earning two trips to the line where he hit 3 of 4. Later, a basket from Marevka kept the Panthers on top 54-49 heading to the final frame.

Two North Hall free throws made it a 54-51 contest less than 70 seconds into the



Sophomore Ariel McCarter led the Lady Panthers with 12 points during last week's loss to North Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

fourth when Ellis scored off a dribble drive and sophomore Brayden Hogged connected from long distance. Hogged added a free throw and Marevka converted a tip-in, capping an 8-0 run that extended the margin to 62-51 at the 5-minute mark.

Another Ellis drive and a Marevka free throw kept the Union County lead at 65-55 with 3:16 remaining. Young split two free throws and Hughes scored on the baseline for a 68-59 advantage approaching the 90-second mark.

Marevka finished with 7 points and seven boards; Hogged added 4 points and three rebounds. Junior Anderson Cruise logged nine minutes as part of Union's thin seven-man rotation.

Lady Panthers 51, North Hall 54

After scoring the first bucket of the game, the Lady Panthers played from behind most of the night after surrendering a 9-0 run, beginning at the 5:20 mark of the first.

Union rallied to knot the score at 12-12 after one, but North Hall built a 25-16 second-quarter advantage. With 2:16 left in the first half, the first of two buckets by senior Ivie Chapman sparked an 8-0 run, bringing the Lady Panthers within a point entering the break at 25-24.

Foul trouble began to mount in the third, but with the game hanging in the balance, senior Corinne Hill and junior Kamryn Mull found another gear, helping supply the Lady Panthers their largest lead of the night at 39-34 with 2:02 left in

the quarter. "Those girls stepped up and the bench came in and played great," Union County first-year head coach Brad Cochran said. "They just came in and played their role. They did nothing out of the ordinary and they gritted it out on the defensive end."

"One thing we have is defensive depth," he continued. "We also have pride. We never stop, it doesn't matter if we're down 20, we're still going to play like we're down one."

Sophomore guard Ariel McCarter picked up her third foul 73 seconds into the third, but free throws by junior Lara Turner and sophomore Katelyn Brown gave Union its first lead since 2:0 at 28-27. A steal by Turner led to an easy layup, but the Trojans raced back in front at 32-30 via five straight points. Brown collected her third foul with 3:29 left in the third, but back-to-back 3-point plays by Hill and Mull put Union County on top 36-32. Later, Mull split two free throws and Brown scored on a putback for a 39-34 advantage.

Clinging to a 39-37 lead following a Trojans' 3-pointer, freshman Paula Robertson drove inside for a deuce, then Hill kept Union in front by hitting 1 of 2 at the line with 31 seconds left in the quarter. North Hall would regain the lead by scoring in the paint during the final seconds, mounting a 43-42 advantage entering the fourth.

McCarter collected her fourth foul early in the period as the Trojans built a 49-42 lead. Turner hit two free throws at the

4:02 mark, but McCarter fouled out 30 seconds later with her team trailing 49-44.

The Trojans put Union in an eight-point hole at 54-46 until Turner split two free throws at the 2:27 mark. Brown dropped in an offensive rebound, and Hill scored on a coast-to-coast layup to tighten things up at 56-51 with 20 seconds left. After North Hall sank 1 of 2 at the charity stripe during the final seconds, Mull connected from near midcourt as time expired for a 57-54 final.

McCarter logged a team-high 12 points before picking up her fifth personal on an offensive foul at the 3:32 mark. Turner finished with 10 points. Mull scored 9 points and Hill had eight. Brown's night ended with 7 points and Chapman had 4 points.

Robertson and fellow freshman Mady Adams chipped in 2 points apiece.

Meanwhile, emotions ran high for Coach Cochran, who made his varsity head coaching debut against his alma mater with family and friends on both the home and visitors' side of the court.

"Even with the loss, I don't think you could write a better story [for my first game]," he said. "I was coaching against my alma mater and a mentor in [North Hall head coach] Eric Herrick. I had people in the stands that I know so I don't think I could write a better story."

Union County and Towns County girls will tip off at 7 p.m. Tuesday with the boys to follow. The Panther football players are expected to hit the hardwood before Tuesday's contest. However, the Union County men could be shorthanded once again on Tuesday due to the same illness that kept Henry out of action vs. North Hall. As of Sunday, the status of multiple players remains uncertain for Towns.

On Friday, Union will travel to East Forsyth to face Rabun Gap's men at 3:30 p.m. The Union ladies will meet Class 5A Chattahoochee (Alpharetta) at 5 p.m.

The Union girls will play Saturday at 2:30 p.m. against an undetermined opponent. The Union County men are not participating on day two.

"We're going to hit the film room and turn this [North Hall] loss into a lesson," Cochran said. "We're going to practice, but we're also going to get some rest. We have Towns on Tuesday and we know they're going to come at us hard and we're going to have to be ready for them."



Sophomore Hayden Hughes had a career-high 14 vs NH. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Corinne Hill hits a pull-up jumper vs. NH. Photo/Todd Forrest



Brad Cochran makes his head coaching debut. Photo/Todd Forrest

Football: South Atlanta pulls away following Panthers' hot start

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Atlanta - Second-ranked South Atlanta scored 42 unanswered points after facing a 14-0 deficit during Friday's Class AA second-round contest at Lake-wood Stadium.

The Panthers caught undefeated South Atlanta off-guard on the game's third play, connecting on a 39-yard double-pass from Jensen Goble to a wide-open Griff Young for a 7-0 advantage.

Young also set up the score by gathering a 31-yard sideline throw from Caiden Tanner on the first play of the opening series.

The Union defense forced a three-and-out on South Atlanta's first possession, resulting in a high snap that airmailed the punter and allowed Union County to set up shop at the Hornets' 30-yard line.

Following a Hornets off-sides penalty, Tanner went up top to Young and the senior receiver pulled down a 1-on-1 jump ball in the endzone for a 14-0 lead with 9:02 left in the first.

"We had a good feeling [South Atlanta] would try to man us up [on defense] and we took advantage of that," Union County head coach Michael Perry said. "We got them out of man-to-man very quick. Unfortunately, after that, we just had some things that didn't go our way and that really set us back."

The defense continued to swarm Georgia's leading rusher Keyjuan Brown, dropping the Purdue commit for a 4-yard loss on first down. A false start flag moved South Atlanta into a second and 19, which turned into third and 11 at the 18-yard line following a gain of eight.

One of the game's turning points came on that critical third down when Union County allowed a receiver to get behind the secondary for a 61-yard completion.

"That was a huge play for them, it looked like [the receiver]



Union County senior linebacker Gage Barnes (35) drops Purdue commit Keyjuan Brown in the backfield. Ohio State running backs coach Tony Alford was in attendance to watch Brown. Photo/Todd Forrest

might have pushed off, but hey, it is what it is," Perry said. Panthers a first-and-goal inside the Hornets' 5-yard line -- where they would've had an excellent chance to go up 21-8 -- instead, saw the penalty waved off and the home team regain possession in another early-game turning point.

Four plays later, the Hornets punched it in the endzone, and the 2-point conversion sliced the Union lead to 14-8 with 4:57 remaining in the opening frame.

The Panthers responded by quickly driving into South Atlanta territory, drawing a pass interference penalty on a third-down pass attempt to Goble. From there, consecutive completions to Braylen Rader netted 6 and 12 yards, then a 5-yard run by Tanner brought up third-and-5 at the Hornets' 24-yard line.

With his receivers blanketed downfield, Tanner broke loose into the secondary, where he took a vicious helmet-to-helmet hit that forced a fumble inside the South Atlanta 10-yard line and drew a flag for targeting.

On what should have been as easy call that awarded the

"If the targeting stands and we have first and goal, there is no doubt we were going to score," Perry said.

The defense continued to stand tall, holding their ground and forcing a three-and-out as the first quarter wrapped up. After the punt, the Panthers started at their own 32 and advanced inside the Hornets' 30-yard line, but were stopped short on a fourth-and-2 handoff at the 27.

The two teams traded punts until a South Atlanta fumble allowed Union to take over in plus-territory near the 44-yard line. This time, the Hornets' defense forced a quick punt and senior Wilson Walker's kick



Senior Griff Young (6) comes down with a jump ball in the endzone to spot Union an early 14-0 advantage. Photo/Todd Forrest

rolled to a stop at the 15-yard line with 2:17 on the clock. In a gut-wrenching momentum swing, South Atlanta needed only two plays to go 85 yards and take the lead for good at 16-14, starting with a 75-yard run by Brown. One play later, the Hornets' quarterback scrambled for 10 yards and a score.

Union entered the break down only two when Walker came through again for Union County during the final moments of the half, picking off a pass in the endzone with 42 seconds left.

South Atlanta began the third quarter by driving 55 yards on six plays to build a 24-14 lead.

"Not getting a stop to start the half really put us in a tough spot and things started going downhill from there," Perry said.

Union County then stalled at the Hornets' 29-yard line after sophomore Connor Schuknecht

rushed for 8 yards on first down from the South Atlanta 38. Following a 1-yard gain on second down, resulting in third-and-1 from the 29, two Panther passes fell incomplete to hand the ball back to South Atlanta with 6:41 left in the third.

The Hornets drove into Union territory, where the defense stopped a fake punt on fourth and 13 at the 33-yard line with 1:56 left in the third. Unfortunately, a Panthers' three-and-out led to a punt, and South Atlanta broke a 54-yard touchdown run on its first play of the ensuing series.

"That's what great running backs do, they just wear you down as the game goes on," Perry said.

Trailing 30-14 in the fourth, the Panthers stalled near midfield and South Atlanta scored five plays later, going up top on a 34-yard touchdown pass for a 36-14 advantage.

Union County drove in-

side the Hornets' 40-yard line, but an incomplete pass denied the Panthers on fourth and 8 at the 38. With a touchdown on the aforementioned drive, the Panthers still had an opportunity to make it a two score contest at 36-21 with over 6 minutes to play. However, South Atlanta took over and immediately put the game out of reach with a 54-yard touchdown pass to cap the scoring at 42-14.

Tanner finished the game 26 of 36 through the air for 271 yards and a touchdown. The junior quarterback also rushed 13 times for a team-high 44 yards.

Young caught five passes for 120 yards and two touchdowns. Goble had six grabs for 44 yards; McBride hauled in five receptions for 45 yards. Schuknecht had five catches for 26 yards, while Rader had 35 yards on four receptions. Junior Tyler Grasty added a 7-yard catch.

Schuknecht carried eight times for 40 yards, and Rader rushed twice for 4 yards.

Meanwhile, Brown led all rushers with 177 yards on 21 carries but finished 73 yards under his per-game average.

As for Tanner, he ends an impressive first year behind center with 2,893 yards passing and 24 touchdowns to only eight interceptions. Goble wraps up 2022 with 1,016 receiving yards and nine scores on 87 catches.

Young finishes his senior season with 55 grabs, 838 yards and nine touchdowns. Rader piled up 805 yards and eight scores on the ground, while Schuknecht amassed 504 yards and four touchdowns.

Junior kicker Ethan McBride made 47 of 48 extra-point attempts, connecting on 27 straight to close the season.

"I'm just really proud of our guys and what they accomplished this season," Perry said. "It's a testament to our great senior leadership. We beat Fanning, had a six-game winning streak and won the program's first road playoff game. We have a lot to be proud of, considering where we came from after last year."

Swimming: Foster, Kazmierzak lead the way for Union at Habersham's Pirate Plunge

UCMS TOP 10 FINISHES

PIRATE PLUNGE MEET, CLARKESVILLE, GA
NOVEMBER 19, 2022

<p>200 Medley Relay- MS Girls: 4th</p>	<p>100 IM- Clara Kazmierzak: 2nd</p>	<p>50 Butterfly- Ava Wheeler: 10th Wyatt Chandler: 3rd</p>
<p>100 Freestyle- Clara Kazmierzak: 3rd Ian Lander: 6th</p>		<p>200 Freestyle Relay- MS Girls: 5th MS Boys: 7th</p>
<p>50 Backstroke- Kimberly Simpson: 8th</p>		<p>50 Breaststroke- Ava Wheeler: 7th John Tippens: 5th Logan Tercero: 8th</p>

UCHS TOP 10 FINISHES

PIRATE PLUNGE MEET, CLARKESVILLE, GA
NOVEMBER 19, 2022

<p>200 Medley Relay- HS Girls: 3rd</p>	<p>200 Freestyle- Lily Helton: 3rd</p>	<p>100 Butterfly- Reese Jones: 4th</p>
<p>50 Freestyle- Courtney Foster: 6th Olivia Loyd: 10th Nicholas Nushtayev: 1st</p>		<p>100 Freestyle- Lilly Collins: 8th Nicholas Nushtayev: 4th</p>
<p>200 Freestyle Relay- HS Girls: 3rd</p>		<p>100 Breaststroke- Lily Helton: 3rd Eli Gwynn: 7th</p>
	<p>100 Backstroke- Courtney Foster: 2nd Reese Jones: 3rd Nicholas Nushtayev: 5th Eli Gwynn: 7th</p>	

UCMS Football: Setzer recaps 2022 title run

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The North Georgia News sat down for an interview last month with Union County Middle School football coach Neil Setzer following his team's league championship victory at White County. The 28-7 win over the Warriors on Oct. 11 capped off a 7-2 season for the UCMS Panthers.

NGN: During the championship game, is there anyone else who stood out besides the players that accounted for the touchdowns?

NS: The defensive line did a great job containing [White County's] quarterback. I'm very proud of those guys because [White County's quarterback] is a very good ball player. But I'm extremely proud of all our players and coaches. We lost two regular season games and we avenged both those losses in the playoffs.

NGN: What do you think led to that turnaround in the playoffs?

NS: We lost both of those games early in the season and we had some injuries at that time. The year before we went 0-6, so I think it was a matter of finding ourselves and gaining confidence. And as the year went on, we gained that confidence. We got healthy at the right time and started gaining momentum as we went on. I think that was the key.

NGN: Was there a moment when everything clicked, when you knew you had a shot to win it all?

NS: I don't remember



UCMS players and coach Neil Setzer celebrate their league championship victory last month at White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

when it was, but we just started looking like a football team and it all started in practice. The offense started clicking and our timing really improved. You could see it in the championship game. White County left the middle of the field open and we hit them twice with a post [route] for a touchdown. The offensive line also became more physical as the season went on, especially as we got healthy.

NGN: Special teams were perfect on extra points in the championship game; what development did you see from them this year?

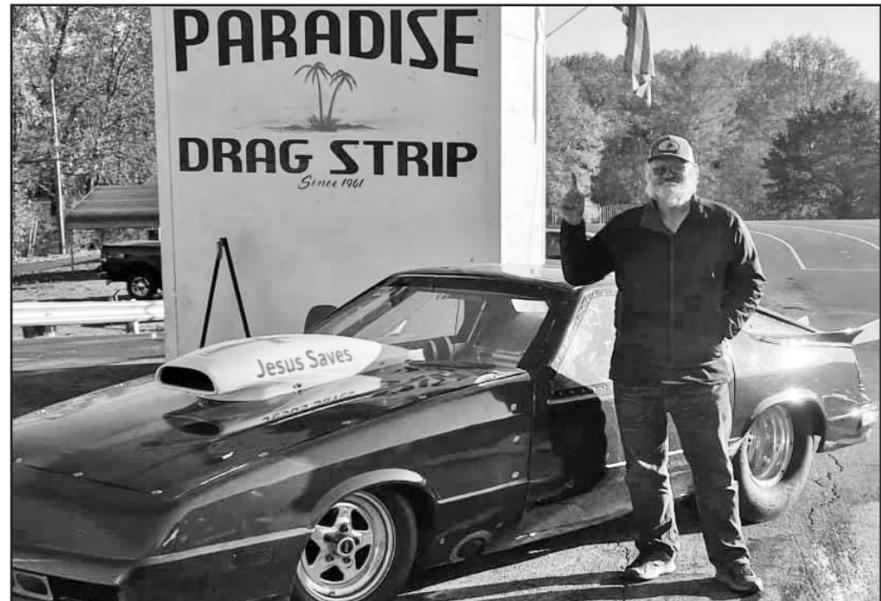
NS: Grant Smith is our kicker, and again, he had some issues early in the season. But we started working with him and he got some things squared away. Our special teams were

very instrumental for us, especially in the semifinal game. They also came up big in the championship because we kicked all of our extra points, so as I said, we started looking like a football team. We had 41 players this year and have had really good [turnout] numbers over the last two years, and we hope that translates to the varsity program next year because that's what we're all about - we want our varsity program to be good for a long time.

NGN: Is there anyone else you want to mention?

NS: I'm really proud of our assistant coaches, our fans and our parents. But I'm most proud of these young men. I believe we're building something special here with Union County football.

Collins takes home first at Paradise Drag Strip



Congratulations to local driver Harold Collins for picking up a first-place finish in his 1987 Dodge Daytona on Sunday, Nov. 12 at Calhoun's Paradise Drag Strip.