

# Sports

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## Panthers' playoff run ends in low-scoring affair at Metter

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**Metter** - Union County's historic 2019 season came to a close following a 14-7 defensive battle at Metter in the second round of the State Tournament.

"I was expecting (scoring-wise) a game in the 20s so if you told me we'd hold them to 14, I would have thought that we'd have a very good night," Union head coach Brian Allison said.

Despite being held to lows on offense, finishing with 138 passing yards and 66 yards on the ground, the Panthers had the ball with a chance to tie -- or take the lead with a two-point conversion -- during the final minutes of Friday's Sweet 16 showdown.

Trailing 14-0, the offense finally came to life with just over five minutes to play. Taking over at its own 17 after stopping Metter on fourth down, Union County used an 11-play, 83-yard drive to slice the margin in half at 14-7 on an 11-yard scoring run by Jonah Daniel and the Mason McCombs point-after.

The drive was kept alive when Pierson Allison scrambled left and found McCombs for a 15-yard grab on 3rd-and-10. Later, Allison hit Drake for eight yards on 3rd-and-7, then Kyle Morlock pulled down an 11-yard sideline grab on first down to set up Daniel's touchdown on the very next play.

With 3:22 left in the season, Metter recovered the ensuing inside kick but the Union County defense stuffed the Tigers on 3rd-and-3 to force a punt with just over two minutes remaining. Unfortunately for the Panthers, the Metter kick rolled dead at the 6-yard line, leaving the offense 94 yards away with two minutes and no timeouts left.

"Our defensive coaches have done a great job all season putting our guys in a position to win," Coach Allison said. "It was a really great effort against a football team that has some really good players, especially at running back, but our defense hung in there."

Faced with a 4th-and-10 from the six, Pierson Allison tried to hit Morlock on the sideline but the defender arrived too



With a program record 10 wins in 2019, Union County Head Football Coach Brian Allison has now won 117 games at UCHS and 142 games overall. Photo/Todd Forrest

early and was tagged with a pass interference penalty to give the offense a fresh set of downs.

With a 4th-and-2 at the 28, Allison connected with Cayden Rich for a 5-yard gain to move the sticks with a minute to play. However, Allison's third-down pass was picked off at midfield with 40 seconds left and the Metter offense took a knee to escape with the victory.

Prior to the game's final five minutes, Union County's best scoring opportunity came in the first half after Metter got on the board but missed the extra-point. Starting at their own 36, Allison rolled left and hit Drake for a 19-yard pickup. Two plays later, he went back to Drake for 13 more but drive eventually stalled at the Metter 29 when a fourth-down interception handed the ball back to the Tigers.

The two defenses would force a pair of punts to end the first half as Union County went to the break trailing 6-0.

It could have easily been 10-0 or 14-0 as Metter's opening drive was stopped on 3rd-and-goal, resulting in a field goal attempt that was blocked when the low line drive kick was unable to clear the line of scrimmage.

The Tigers' kicking woes continued when they found the end zone on their second possession. Following the first Panther interception of the night, Metter took over at its own 44 and needed seven plays to punch it in from 10 yards out. The point-after, however, was yanked wide-left to keep the score at 6-0.

In the second half, the Tigers abandoned its kicking game when they stretched the advantage to 12-0, late in the third quarter. After a rare passing play from the Wing-T offense resulted in an 11-yard touchdown reception, Metter elected to go for two. On the conversion, the Tigers returned to their bread-and-butter as a toss sweep

resulted in two points and a 14-0 margin.

Metter finished the night with 292 rushing yards and 312 overall, but the majority of their damage came on first down where they averaged nearly 6 yards a carry - keeping them ahead of schedule on second and third down.

"We have not faced an offense like that with that many weapons at running back," Coach Allison said. "Banks was a similar offense and we played pretty well against them. But what hurt us against Banks is exactly what Metter tried doing to us, but I think we played them a little better than we did Banks. But in the end, Metter was just really good on defense and we were unable to get things rolling offensively."

Speaking of the offense, Daniel was the bright spot for the Panthers and will provide the program with a solid foundation entering 2020. The junior

running back was averaging six yards a carry and was also a factor in the passing game before Union County fell behind 14-0 and were forced to lean more heavily upon a vertical passing attack.

Meanwhile, with 33 wins over four years, the Panthers will say goodbye to the winningest senior class in program history. When asked what he will remember most about this past season and the senior class, Coach Allison said there are too many great memories to single out only one.

"What this group had to overcome makes it an extremely special season as far as I'm concerned," he said. "You go back and look at the summer and we played for a championship in (the Habersham) 7-on-7 tournament. I know that's not a big deal but you have to look at all the work those guys put in over the summer, beginning with 7-on-7 in June and the shoulder

pad camp in July.

"Yes we were successful and have showed progress ever since, but never did I expect us to get to where we were defensively at the end of the year."

"You can also go back to the start with the East Hall win and the Fannin County win because those are very tough places to play. But maybe the play of the year came against Elbert when we recovered the fumble and everything that happened as a result of that one play. Then we go down to Banks and win that one with a couple of guys out, and then we got our first playoff win over South Atlanta.

"I just want to add that I'm very thankful for the community support that we received during the season and especially during the playoffs. People were always coming up to me congratulating me on a win or they would say 'tough luck' after a loss. I'm just very thankful for all the support from everyone."

## UCHS plays host to Towns-Union Special Olympics Fall/Winter games



The Towns-Union Special Olympics, held earlier this month at UCHS, are always a treat for competitors, volunteers and everyone in attendance. The spring games will be held later in the school year. Photos/Todd Forrest