

# Sports

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## Lady Panthers 2-0 in region following wins over Elbert, Monticello

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

Region play opened last weekend with the Lady Panthers recording victories over a pair of State playoff teams from a year ago.

After taking the night off on Tuesday, Union County took care of business at home on Friday night, knocking off Elbert County 58-46. A day later, the Lady Panthers went on the road and thumped Monticello, 56-39.

Union County (7-1, 2-0) has two games left on its schedule before the Battle of the States Christmas Tournament gets underway on Dec. 26. On Tuesday, Union will visit Social Circle for another Region 8-AA showdown before hosting Gilmer on Saturday in a non-region contest.

**Lady Panthers 58, Elbert County 46** - The Lady Panthers led wire-to-wire as they kicked off region play with a 12-point victory over the defending 8-AA runner-up and a Sweet 16 squad from last season.

Union would take control early, jumping in front 14-3 and 15-5 before Elbert closed the first with six-unanswered for a 15-11 score after one.

Sophomores Ava Hunter, Riley Allison and senior Andelin Hill accounted for 14 of Union's 15 first-quarter points.

Leading 15-12, the Lady Panthers used a 16-1 run to take control 31-13 at the midway point of the second quarter. Five different players contributed to the run with Hill sparking and closing the 16-point outburst. At the 7:20 mark of the period, Hill would sink a baseline jumper; later, she hit two free throws after drawing the foul on a putback attempt with 3:55 left in the half.

Unfortunately, the Blue Devils refused to go away, responding with an 8-0 run to pull within 10 before a basket by Hunter and a Brooke Dockrey free throw gave Union County a 36-25 lead at the break.

The Lady Panthers quickly seized control in the third as two free throws by Hunter and corner three by Hill stretched the margin out to 16 just two minutes into the second half.



Sophomore Ava Hunter (L) scored a game-high 21 at Monticello to surpass 500 career points in just her 33rd game; senior Andelin Hill (R) knocks down a third quarter trey en route to a season-high 19 points during Friday's 58-46 victory over Elbert County. Photos/Todd Forrest

The Union County defense would limit Elbert to seven points on three field goals during the third quarter, building a 49-32 lead entering the fourth.

Over the final eight minutes, Dockrey hit 3-of-6 at the line and Hill sank both of her attempts from the charity stripe as Union County coasted home to a 58-46 victory.

Hill finished with a season-high 19 points on 7-for-7 at the line and a pair of 3-pointers. Hunter scored all of her 16 points in the first three quarters, going 6-for-9 at the foul line.

The backcourt duo of Allison and Dockrey contributed 8 points each, sophomore Rebekah Chambers added three.

**Lady Panthers 56, Monticello 39** - Union County was able to gain a bit of revenge on the road Saturday afternoon by defeating a Monticello squad that ended its season in the Region Tournament last February.

After falling three times to the Lady Hurricanes in 2018-19, Union County was all business in the first meeting of the new season, jumping out a

14-6 lead after one and 32-17 at the break.

Hunter scored 15 of her game-high 21 in the first half as seven different Lady Panthers scored during the first 16 minutes.

Freshman Ellie Cook would score six of her 10 points in the third quarter while Union opened up a 20-point advantage at 48-28.

A pair of fourth-quarter buckets by Hunter and one field goal each from Chambers and Dockrey proved more than enough for the Lady Panthers to hang on and take a 17-point victory back to the mountains.

In the win, Hunter surpassed 500 career points, making her one of the youngest players in program history to reach the mark. As a freshman, Hunter put up 353 points over 25 games for an average of 14.1 points per game. This season, she has tallied 152 points through eight games (19 ppg).

With Hunter's milestone, the Lady Panthers now have three current players with more than 500 career points: McCarter (700+), Hill (500+) and Hunter (500+). Additionally,



Dockrey could surpass 500 career points by season's end.

In other news and notes, the Lady Panthers are 2-0 in region play for the first time since 2015-16 -- the same season of their last State playoff win and appearance, as well as their last Region Championship Game appearance.

**Up next** - Union County will visit a Social Circle squad that finished 0-12 in region play last year. This year's Lady Redskins squad doesn't feature a senior on the roster and is off to another tough start at 2-7 overall and 0-2 in the region with blowout losses to Putnam County and Monticello.

The final home game of 2019 will be Saturday against a 6-2 Gilmer squad whose only losses were a pair of nailbiters at Fannin County (40-39) and at Murphy, NC (61-59).

The Battle of the States will get underway on Dec. 26 when Union County faces Walhalla, SC (2-2) at 1 p.m.

The Lady Panthers will share the bracket with the top-two teams from last year's tournament as undefeated Murphy, NC and 7-4 Lumpkin County will provide a first round rematch of the 2018 BOTS title game.

After surviving an overtime slugfest vs Hokes Bluff, AL -- the champions in two of the previous three tournaments -- during the first round of last year's BOTS, Union and Murphy battled down to the wire in round two before Bulldogs scored on a game-winning putback at the buzzer.

On the other side of the bracket, blowouts were the norm as Lumpkin and Towns County cruised into round two where Lumpkin blasted the hosts 56-17 in contest that was over by halftime.

As a result, the well-rested Lumpkin and Towns County squads capitalized on the fatigued Lady Bulldogs and Lady Panthers in their respective day three matchups.

This year, the other side of the bracket features Towns County vs Polk County, TN and Hayesville, NC vs Hokes Bluff, AL.



Sophomore Riley Allison (L) and senior Brooke Dockrey scored 8 points apiece vs Elbert. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Panthers split last weekend's region action with Drake sidelined

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

Following the return of its football players earlier this month, the Panthers were at full strength for two games when the injury bug bit prior to the Fannin County game on Saturday, Dec. 7.

Sawyer Drake, a two-time all-region selection in both 8-AA and 7-AAA, suffered a broken hand and will be out until at least Christmas, according to head coach Corey Garrett. As a result, Union County opened region play last weekend without a major contributor.

On Friday, the Panthers were able to overcome a slow start to race past the defending region champion Elbert County, 63-45. Saturday, however, was a different story as Union County was unable to score a road win at Monticello, coming up short 56-50.

Even at full strength, the Panthers would have their hands full with each of the upcoming opponents, beginning with a Social Circle squad that is already 2-0 in Region 8-AA, followed by the 5-2 Gilmer Bobcats, who have won three-of-four including a 50-48 victory at Fannin.

**Panthers 63, Elbert County 45** - Pierson Allison scored 16 of his game-high 23 points in the fourth quarter as Union County pulled away from the Blue Devils with a 22-14 final period.

The Panthers recovered from an early 5-0 deficit for an 8-7 lead in the final minute of the first quarter. They would never trail again, opening up a 21-10 advantage before taking a double-digit margin into the locker room at 29-19.

Senior Kyle Morlock carried the load early on, scoring 10 of his 12 points in the first half as Allison struggled to find a rhythm, missing seven of



Senior Pierson Allison (L) scored 23 vs Elbert County and 29 at Monticello; his first eight shots.

The third quarter began with a 7-2 spurt from the Panthers as two baskets by Sawyer Brey and a Lake Hughes trey gave them a 36-21 lead. Union County would eventually build a 40-24 advantage before taking a 41-27 lead into the fourth.

Elbert answered with its own 7-2 spurt to start the fourth, pulling within single digits at 43-34 at the 5:43 mark. That's when Allison took over, scoring the next 14 Panther points to build a 57-42 advantage with 93 seconds remaining.

Allison did the majority of his damage at the charity stripe, hitting 12-of-14 at the line during his 16-point fourth frame. After starting 1-for-7 from the floor, the senior point guard made 4-of-5 to finish 5-for-12 overall and 13-for-16 at the foul line. He would chip in five boards and a team-high

four steals.

Morlock scored 12 points on 6-of-8 shooting with seven rebounds, three steals and a team-high four assists. Brey and Hughes added 8 points apiece with Brey pulling down seven boards and Hughes recording a steal and an assist.

Sophomore Landon Cox had 6 points on 3-of-4 shooting with three rebounds, one assist and one steal. Senior Cayden Rich also added 6 points with three boards and two assists.

Junior Kaston Hemphill grabbed seven boards and senior Bryson Lariscy added two rebounds and an assist.

**Panthers 50, Monticello 56** - Allison's game-high 29 points wasn't enough as Monticello outscored Union County 23-12 in the third quarter to hand the Panthers their first region loss of the year.



Senior Sawyer Brey (R) finished with eight vs Elbert County and five at Monticello. Photos/Todd Forrest

Whitlock went off with 16 third-quarter points on four 3-pointers to put Union in a 45-36 hole entering the final frame.

Allison answered with 12 in the fourth on two triples but it wasn't enough as his supporting cast only provided one field goal over the final eight minutes.

Morlock finished with 6 points, Brey added five, Hemphill and Hughes scored three each and Lariscy chipped in two.

Whitlock ended up with 24 points for the Canes on six 3-point field goals.

**Up next** - Union County visits 7-4 Social Circle, who already owns a 54-48 victory at Monticello and a 50-43 win over Putnam County. Last year, the Redskins defeated the Panthers twice, holding Union to an average of 36 points in the two meetings.

The final game before

next week's Battle of the States will be vs Gilmer on Saturday. The much-improved Bobcats have rebuilt their once-struggling program around a roster loaded with sophomores and juniors.

Tuesday's girls' tip-off is scheduled for 5 p.m. at Social Circle with the guys to follow. The Gilmer girls game will get underway at 6 p.m. with the guys to follow.

The Battle of the States opens Dec. 26 with last year's champion, Walhalla, SC at 2:30.

Prior to claiming its BOTS championship trophy in 2018, Walhalla defeated Union County, 63-57 in the semifinals. They would go on to demolish Lumpkin County, 78-24 in the title game.

Later in the year, Walhalla would reach the State Tournament, where they fell to the eventual State Champ in the Elite 8. This year, Walhalla

is currently undefeated and already own a 77-58 victory over Rabun County. However, it should be noted that Rabun County's football team -- which featured eight basketball players -- was eliminated from the postseason just three days prior to the Walhalla loss.

Like the girls, the Panthers' day two opponent will be either Lumpkin County or Murphy, NC.

The Bulldogs are currently 2-1 with a 58-52 loss to Gilmer and blowout wins over Nantahala, NC and Rosman, NC.

Lumpkin is 4-7 but own victories over Fannin County and East Hall. They also suffered a 64-45 loss to Banks County and a 92-73 loss to rival White County.

The other half of the 2019 BOTS bracket includes Towns County vs Armuchee and Hayesville, NC vs Polk County, TN.