

Sports

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Panthers knock off Murphy, Towns; upset by Social Circle

Battle of the States Christmas Tournament opens Thursday with Armuchee

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It was a roller coaster week for the Panthers that began with their second win of the season over Towns County, followed by an upset-special courtesy of Social Circle.

On the heels of its second region loss in 5 days, Union County appeared dead in the water before storming back to beat Murphy, NC, 59-53 on Thursday.

Union County (5-4, 1-2) survived Monday's rivalry showdown at Towns County after weathering an early Indian onslaught in a 67-52 victory. Unfortunately, the Panthers had nothing left in the tank when they resumed Region 8-AA action Tuesday night, falling to an upset-minded Social Circle squad, 49-37.

Panthers 59, Murphy, NC 53 -- Two days removed from the Social Circle loss, Union County was back in action, hosting the always-dangerous Murphy (NC) Bulldogs. Leading 32-31 at the break, the Panthers watched as Murphy regained the lead in the opening minute before stretching its advantage to 45-36 during the final minute of the third quarter.

With 3 seconds left in the period, Pierson Allison was able to penetrate into the lane and knock down a short jumper to pull Union within seven.

That basket by Allison would trigger a 23-8 run that saw the Panthers turn a nine-point shortfall into a six-point victory.

Allison would finish with 14 points and Sawyer Drake scored 16.

While the duo of Allison and Drake may have carried Union County to the final lap, it was their teammates that pushed them across the finish line.

Senior Britt Waller finished with a career-high 11 points, but no points were bigger than the pair of free throws she sank with 2:40 to play or his



L-R: Junior Sawyer Drake goes up strong and delivers a two-handed slam dunk during the first half at Towns County. Drake would finish with a career-high 30 points in the win. Senior Britt Waller with a lay up in the second half against Social Circle. Against Murphy, Waller helped put the Bulldogs away with 6 points in the final five minutes. Photos/Todd Forrest

offensive rebound and put back at the 1-minute mark.

With the Panthers shooting a 1-and-1, Waller sank both shots from the line to give his team a 53-49 lead with 2:40 remaining. Following a scoring drought of more than 90 seconds, Union County was still clutching its 4-point advantage when Waller scored after crashing the offensive glass with just over a minute left -- opening up a 55-49 Panther lead.

Fellow senior Kanon Hemphill also delivered with 8 points and the game-clinching basket when his lay up pushed Union County in front by six at 57-51 with 21 seconds left.

The final nail in the coffin was furnished by Sawyer Brey, who sank 2-of-2 from the charity stripe with 4 seconds on the clock, locking down the 59-53 victory and giving the junior 6 points on the night.

According to Union County Head Coach Casey Jones, the Panther team-defense is what provided the spark that allowed Union County to race ahead of Murphy, then hold them to only two field goals

over the final 6 minutes -- one was an uncontested lay up coming with 10 seconds left while the Panthers were up six and guarding the 3-point line.

"I told the guys during a timeout late in the third, and again to start the fourth quarter, that we're going to win this game on the defensive end," Jones said. "I said, 'just make a stop and make a bucket.' We were down nine but once we started (getting stops) we started getting to the rim and knocking down our free throws. But it all started on the defensive end, making stops and getting rebounds."

During the second half, the game would slow down and turn into a grind-it-out defensive struggle after an up-tempo, hot-shooting first half. Both squads came out on fire before an 8-0 Murphy run opened up a 14-6 lead in the first quarter.

Union County responded with a 10-0 run as four different Panthers contributed to the turnaround. Allison, Brey, Jared Nelson and Cayden Rich each scored a deuce with Brey providing two baskets to give

Union an 18-14 lead.

The Bulldogs went on to outscore the Panthers 5-2 over the final 85 seconds of the opening frame to cut the Union County lead to 20-19 after one.

The first four points of the second also belonged to Murphy as they would use a 12-3 spurt to open up a 26-21 lead at the 6:31 mark of the first half. An Allison triple and a short jumper by Drake evened the score but the Bulldogs retaliated with a 3-ball of their own for a 29-26 advantage with 5:15 before halftime.

The lead was short-lived as Drake sank a pair at the stripe and Hemphill scored inside to put Union County back in command 30-29 as both offenses began to come down to earth before halftime. Over the final 74 seconds of the half, Murphy hit two free throws but Drake put the Panthers back in front 32-31 going into the break.

The third began with the Bulldogs scoring nine of the half's first 11 points for a 40-33 advantage. Hemphill sank 2-of-2 at the line but Murphy



drilled a three on the other end for a 43-35 lead at the 3-minute mark of the period.

Waller hit 1-of-2 but the Bulldogs added a deuce on the other end for their largest lead of the game, 45-36 in the latter stages of the third. But with time winding down, Allison drove into the paint for a basket to keep his team within striking distance at 45-38, entering the fourth.

Allison kicked off the final period with consecutive buckets to pull Union within three at 45-41 with 6:48 to play. After a Murphy jumper on the other end, Allison cut the deficit to two when he converted the conventional 3-point play. Drake followed with a dribble-drive to tie the game at 47-47 with 5:14 remaining.

A Waller put back on the ensuing possession gave the Panthers their first lead since the 32-31 halftime score. A minute later, still up by two, Drake made it a 51-47 game with another drive to the hoop.

Murphy halted the Union onslaught with a jumper at the 2:55 mark but Waller was

fouled moments later, sending him to the line for a 1-and-1.

The final 2:40 would belong to Waller, Hemphill and Brey as the Panthers held on for the win.

"I like playing Murphy, their coach is a good dude and they're a good team," Jones said. "Of course, we caught a break tonight, they had about three guys that didn't dress. If all of those guys are back for the Battle of the States, they'll be hard to handle."

Panthers 67, Towns County 52 -- On Monday night, Union visited Towns County to finally complete the season series following a pair of cancellations.

Drake would pour in a career-high 30 points and Allison added 18 as the Panthers pulled away in front of a hostile crowd at the Bill P. Kendall gymnasium.

The Indians had a formidable duo of their own in senior Will Travis and sophomore Kolby Moss, who combined for

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Lady Panthers win two-of-three heading into Battle of the States

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The Lady Panthers (7-2, 2-1) were denied a perfect week by Murphy, NC following a double-digit victory at Towns County and a rout of Social Circle.

Union County will enter this week's Battle of the States Christmas Tournament with a 7-2 overall record and a 2-1 region mark.

Lady Panthers 51, Towns County 38 -- Freshman Ava Hunter led the way with 19 points and 11 rebounds as Union County took care of the Lady Indians for the 16th straight time.

"Last time we played (Towns County) their (defensive) pressure got to us and sped us up a little bit," Union County Head Coach Corey Garrett said. "This time, it started with handling their pressure then we were able to force them to play a slow, grind-it-out game. Anything we can play our style of game, I like our chances."

The Lady Panthers jumped out front 7-2 and never looked back, leading 11-6 and 31-20 at the first half breaks. Union County would continue to pull away at 43-27 after three -- opening up its largest lead of the night at 48-27 with 5:25 to play.

Towns County was led by sophomore Kennedy Henson's 12 points while Demya Allen added eight and Vanessa Floyd scored six.

Hunter scored 11 in the first half -- seven coming in Union County's 20-point second quarter. Meanwhile, juniors Brooke Dockrey and Kait McCarter finished with 10 points each and junior Andelin Hill added nine. Brooke Dockrey also turned in team-highs with 5 assists and 3 steals.

"Brooke (Dockrey) did a great job (of handling the full court pressure), a much better job this time," Garrett said. "We were able to cut the turnovers down and were much better on defense this time around. When



L-R: Senior Adeline Dockrey battles for the loose ball on the floor against Murphy, NC. Freshman Ava Hunter scored 19 points in the win at Towns County and 17 points in the win over Social Circle. She had nine in the first half vs Murphy but was held scoreless in the second half. Photos/Todd Forrest

we do that we're pretty good."

After jumping out front 7-2, Towns County rattled off consecutive buckets to pull within a point but the Lady Panthers closed the quarter with field goals by Hunter and McCarter for an 11-6 lead.

Consecutive buckets by Hunter opened the second but the Lady Indians used a pair of threes to keep it close at 17-14. Towns then answered a Riley Allison three with two buckets in 21 seconds to pull within 20-18 at the 2:39 mark.

The next 11 points belonged to Union County as they closed the half leading 31-20. McCarter contributed five points to the run while Brooke Dockrey scored four and Hunter had two during the 11-0 outburst over the final 2:11.

Ava (Hunter) and Kait (McCarter) are so interchangeable," Garrett said. "They can both play inside or outside, although Ava hasn't got to play outside much because what we were doing now is working, but we can flip those two and

they're tough to guard."

Offensive struggles and missed free throws hindered any Lady Indian comeback hopes in the third as they missed the and-one opportunity at 7:02 then split a pair at 6:36.

On the other end, Hunter continued to work down low, scoring six points during the first five minutes as the Lady Panthers pulled away 41-23 at the 3:17 mark. A Brooke Dockrey free throw at 2:54 stretched the lead to 42-23 before a Towns County lay up halted the run on the ensuing possession.

In the final seconds of the period, the Lady Indians connected on 2-of-2 at the stripe to pull within 43-27 after three.

A charge on Hill gave the junior four fouls early in the fourth but she stayed on the floor and proceeded to deliver the knockout blow with a basket at the 5:50 mark followed by a transition three 25 seconds later to open up the largest margin of the night at 48-27.

Towns County answered

with a 7-0 run to trim the deficit to 48-34 at the three-minute mark but it was too-little, too-late as Hunter pushed the lead back to 16 at 50-34. The Lady Indians cut the margin to a dozen at 50-38 as the clock ticked under a minute but a Hunter offensive board led to a Hill free throw with 37 seconds left -- the final point of the night.

Allison finished with 3 points to round out the scoring for Union County while Adeline Dockrey grabbed 6 boards and dished out 4 dimes. Sophia Shook had 5 points, Taylor Cornett 3 scored points, Remington Parker and Kristen Berys chipped in two apiece for Towns.

Union County shot 17-of-37 (46-percent) from the floor but struggled from distance, hitting only 3-of-21 from downtown. The Lady Panthers would connect on 14-of-24 (58-percent) at the line.

Towns County finished 15-for-46 (33-percent) from the floor, 3-for-12 (25-percent) from deep and 5-for-13 (38-

percent) at the line.

The Lady Panthers won the rebound battle 37-23 overall and 8-4 on the offensive glass. Meanwhile, Towns would turn it over 17 times and force Union County into 22 turnovers.

Lady Panthers 74, Social Circle 27 -- On Tuesday, Union County hosted the Lady Redskins, who entered with a somewhat deceptive 3-4 record. Despite a win over Lincoln County and two victories vs Mount de Sales Academy, Social Circle sat winless in region play with a pair of losses coming by an average of 28.5 points.

And region loss number three went pretty much as expected.

The Lady Panthers jumped out to a 15-2 lead after one quarter behind 5 points from Hill and four from Hunter. Union County also hit three treys in the opening eight minutes while the Lady Redskins got on the board 52 seconds into the contest and wouldn't score again until the 6:40 mark

of the second.

The Lady Panthers stretched their lead to 33-11 by the intermission as Hill scored 13 of her 17 points in the first half. Hunter, meanwhile, had nine points in the first two quarters, en route to a 17-point outing.

Leading 54-24, Coach Garrett turned to his bench in the fourth and freshman Rebekah Chambers posted a career-high 9 points over the final eight minutes. Brianna Hemphill scored five while Ansley Collins and Landry Baenninger added 3 points apiece as the Lady Panther reserves outscored Social Circle 20-3 during the final frame.

As previously mentioned, Hill and Hunter led all scorers with 17 each as Hunter pulled down 8 rebounds and blocked two shots. Hill would grab 5 rebounds and dish out 3 assists.

Rounding out the Union scoring was Brooke Dockrey with 8 points and 7 assists; Kait

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