

Sports

See the Sports Section at ngea.com

Hughes heats up in second half, Panthers prevail at Murphy Henry's 17, Combs' career-high 15 paces Union in win at White County

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
tforrest@nganews.com

Union County (9-2) enters this week's Battle of the States Christmas Tourney riding a four-game winning streak following road victories at White County and Murphy, NC.

Panthers 59, Murphy, NC 50 - Union County avenged its only home loss of the season behind junior Hayden Hughes' 16 second-half points and four 3-pointers on Thursday, Dec. 21.

Juniors Houston Henry and Kaden Combs added 13 and 12 points, respectively, as the Panthers pulled away in the fourth quarter, putting Murphy away via a late 7-0 run.

Up 36-33 entering the final frame by way of 5-straight Henry points to close the third, Union County never trailed in the fourth quarter, eventually putting the Bulldogs away in the final moments.

Murphy's Dominick Rummler, who battled foul trouble most of the night, scored on a putback, moving his team within a point to start the fourth. But Henry went on the attack, finding Combs underneath for 2 points and Hughes forced a turnover by diving on a loose ball at midcourt and calling timeout.

Henry hit Combs again on an inbound pass, bumping the Panthers' lead to 40-35 with 6:45 remaining. Later in the quarter, with Union nursing a 40-38 edge, Hughes drilled a pair of 3s to mount a 46-40 advantage near the 5:00 mark.

Zach Skogen and Rummler inched Murphy within a point at 46-45 with 3:30 to play until Henry hit Combs again for another layup. Then, a Cade Dockrey steal ignited a Union fast break that ended with a Hughes layup.

Rummer trimmed Murphy's margin to 50-47 with 2:07 to play until Henry's kick-out to Hughes for 3 points sparked the 7-0 spurt.

A steal by Henry on the ensuing Bulldogs possession ended with a 2-on-1 break and a Combs layup. Union capped the 7-0 run when Henry converted Ellis' full-court pass into a layup



Hayden Hughes jumps on a loose ball during the fourth quarter at Murphy. The junior forward hit 4 of 6 from 3-point range during the second half to lead Union County to its fourth-straight victory. Photo/Todd Forrest

and a 57-47 lead with 1:04 left.

A back-and-forth first half tipped off with Union County grabbing a 10-9 edge after one quarter, courtesy of 6 points from freshman Jaxon Totherow.

Later, with Union trailing 18-16 during another low-scoring period, Henry's 3 sent the Panthers into halftime with a 19-18 lead.

Union County pushed its lead to 23-18 during the third, but Murphy stormed ahead 31-28 when Hughes tied things up with his first 3 of the night.

Following a Murphy basket, Henry's trey put Union back in front 34-33 before the junior point guard added two free throws with under a second left in the period.

Henry ended his night with a career-high 6 steals and 5 assists; Combs had 4 rebounds and 2 steals; Hughes added 5 rebounds and 2 steals.

Totherow finished with 8 points and 3 rebounds; Jude Ellis had 6 points and a steal; Dockrey added 4 points, 3 rebounds, 3 assists and 3 steals.

Brayden Hogsed chipped in one assist.

Skogen led Murphy with 15 points and 16 rebounds. Rummler had 11 points and 8 boards.

Team stats: Union County shot 37% (23-62) from the floor, 78% (7-9) at the line and 25% (6-24) from long distance. Murphy hit 30% (16-53) overall, 73% (11-15) at the line and 25% (7-28) from 3-point range.

Murphy owned the glass by a 44-27 margin but Union outscored the Bulldogs 32-14 in the paint. Union forced Murphy into 20 turnovers while the Panthers committed nine.

Panthers 70, White County 64 - Union County seized control with a 17-0 third-quarter run at White County before holding off a late Warriors' surge and escaping with a 70-64 victory on Tuesday, Dec. 19.

Junior Houston Henry led the way with 17 points, 8 rebounds and 7 assists, while Kaden Combs scored 11 of his career-high 15 points during the first half.

The Panthers built leads of 19-11 and 30-21 and took a

37-34 edge into the break, but White County quickly grabbed a 40-39 advantage early in the second half. But that's when Union rattled off 17 straight points to mount a 56-40 lead during the final minute of the third.

Henry sparked the 17-0 outburst with a dribble-drive just shy of the period's halfway mark, and then sophomore Cade Dockrey hit a pair of free throws for a 43-40 advantage.

A Combs steal turned into a Jude Ellis 3 in transition, followed by a Dockrey steal that led to a Henry layup. Junior Brayden Hogsed came up with another Warriors turnover, and the ensuing fast break ended with a Dockrey layup and free throw.

Coming out of a timeout, White County coughed it up again and Henry knocked down two free throws. Ellis capped the run with a corner-3, spotting Union County a 56-40 lead with 1:05 left in the third.

Out front 56-42 entering the fourth, Union County surrendered a 10-0 run, slicing the difference to 56-52 near the 5:30 mark. Henry stopped the bleeding with a triple, and Hogsed's backdoor feed to Ellis kept the margin at seven a minute later.

Two Henry free throws on Union's next possession bumped the margin to 63-54 until consecutive buckets by White County had the home team within five.

However, Combs delivered down the stretch, tipping

in Dockrey's miss with 2:50 remaining. But with the Panthers clinging to a 65-59 lead with under a minute remaining, a costly turnover led to a White County and-1, cutting the difference in half with 49 seconds left.

That's when Combs provided the game's pivotal sequence, beginning with a fast-break putback of Hayden Hughes' miss, and then pulling down a defensive board on the other end with 20 seconds to play.

Ellis and Hughes put the game on ice at the free throw line for a Panthers squad that finished a season-best 85% (11 for 13) at the charity stripe.

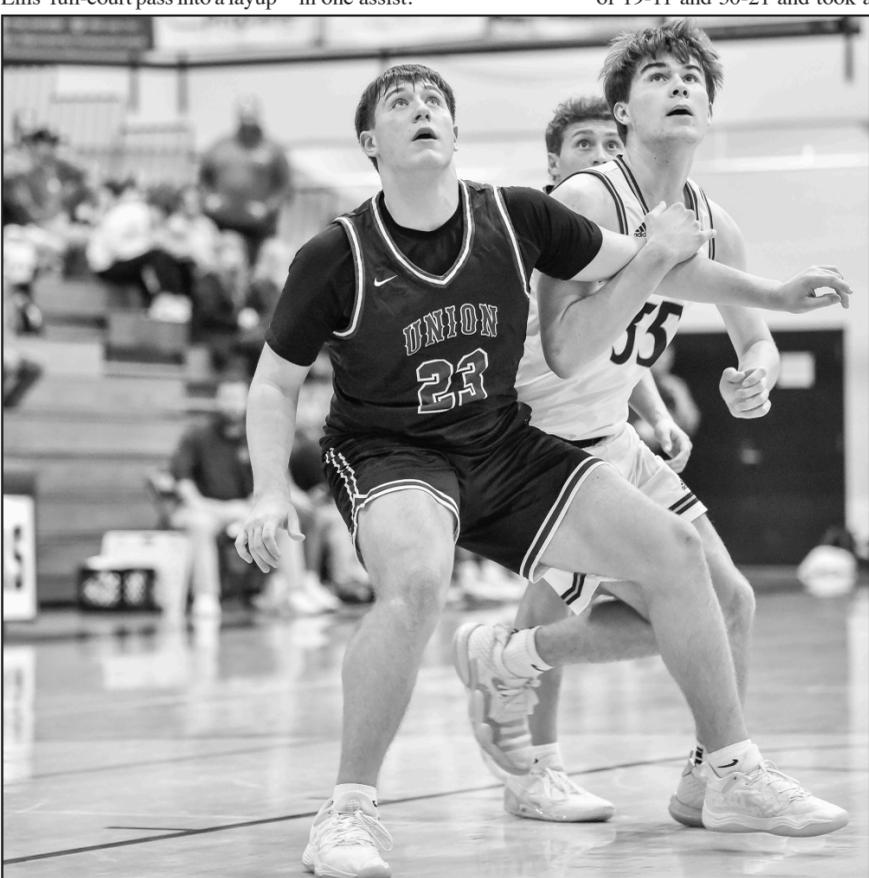
Combs added 5 rebounds and 3 steals to his 15-point night; Dockrey went for 14 points, 6 rebounds and 4 assists. Ellis finished with 10 points and 3 assists; freshman Jaxon Totherow scored 8 points; Hogsed had 3 points and 3 assists; Hughes chipped in 3 points and 7 boards.

Team stats: Union County shot 42% (26-62) overall and 35% (7-20) from long distance. White County hit 40% (24-60) from the floor, 19% (4-21) from deep and 80% (12-15) at the line. After the 3-point shot kept them in the game early, the Warriors cooled off considerably after halftime, going 0-for-8 from downtown over the final 16 minutes.

White County held a 37-35 edge on the boards but was outscored 38-26 in the paint. Union County committed 11 turnovers to the Warriors' 14.

Senior Noah Futch paced White County with 14 points, 11 rebounds and 4 assists; John Phillips had 12 points and 9 boards.

Up next: Union plays Franklin, NC (6-1) at 2:30 p.m. on Dec. 28 at Towns County's Battle of the States Christmas Tournament.



Kaden Combs fights for position with White County's Noah Futch during last Tuesday's victory in Cleveland. Combs finished with a career-high 15 points on 7-of-12 shooting. Photo/Todd Forrest

2023 29th Annual CHRISTMAS TOURNAMENT BATTLE OF THE STATES

DEC 28-29-30, 2023

CONSOLATION BRACKET

DAY 1
12/28/23

Murphy High, NC

DAY 2
12/29/23

1 11:30 AM

Coosa High, GA

DAY 3
12/30/23

5 11:30 AM

Franklin High, NC

2 2:30 PM

Union Co., GA

9 11:30 AM

Polk Co., TN

3 5:30 PM

Rabun Co., GA

6 2:30 PM

Hayesville High, NC

4 8:30 PM

Towns Co., GA

10 2:30 PM

W6 Bottom Team in Bracket is Home Team and Will Wear White Uniforms

WINNERS BRACKET

DAY 2
12/29/23

7 5:30 PM

DAY 3
12/30/23

12 8:30 PM
CHAMPION

8 8:30 PM

11 5:30 PM

3rd Place

L8

Lady Panthers sink Murphy, NC with 22-1 first-half run

No. 6 White County hits 12 treys in 79-41 win over Union County

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Playing without the services of its second-leading scorer Paula Robertson, Union County split two road games last week at White County and Murphy, NC.

The Lady Panthers (5-6) enter the this week's Battle of the States Christmas Tournament looking to climb over .500 for the first time this season.

Lady Panthers 68, Murphy, NC 39 - Union County broke open a 12-12 tie courtesy of a 22-1 second-quarter run, building a 34-13 margin and a 34-16 halftime lead.

Junior Ariel McCarter scored 15 of her game-high 19 points in the first half as the Lady Panthers were never threatened after the break. Junior Sloane Dyer connected three times from 3-point range, en route to a career-high 11 points; senior Lara Turner added 10 points in the win.

Union County jumped out to a 12-6 lead until Murphy rattled off six straight to knot the score early in the second. But it was all Lady Panthers the rest of the way, scoring the next 17 points to trigger the 22-1 onslaught, putting the Bulldogs away.

McCarter and Dyer combined for four 3s and 14 points during Union County's 22-point second period. Turner scored four in the quarter, Mull had two, Adams and Brown added one apiece.

Senior Kamryn Mull knocked down a pair of 3s in the second half to finish with



Senior guard Kamryn Mull hit four 3s at White County to lead Union County with 12 points. Photo/Todd Forrest

8 points; junior Hope Taylor scored all of her 7 points after halftime; sophomore Hensley Adams hit two 3s during her 7-point outing.

Junior Aubrie Akins scored all of her 6 points over the final two quarters and junior Katelyn Brown finished with 2 points and 10 rebounds. Adams added 9 rebounds; Akins had seven; Taylor pulled down 6 boards; McCarter and Turner grabbed 4 rebounds apiece. Dyer had

3 rebounds; freshman Ragan McCarter, Mull and senior Morgan Warren collected two each.

Dyer led the way with 5 assists, McCarter had 4 dimes and Ariel McCarter had three. Mull, Turner and Warren had one assist apiece.

Ariel McCarter picked up 6 steals, Turner had five, Dyer added three and Ragan McCarter pitched in two. Adams, Akins, Brown and Mull had one steal each.



Junior Sloane Dyer connected three times from long distance during a career-best 11-point outing at Murphy, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

Junior Cayla Greer led Murphy with 12 points on four 3-pointers.

Lady Panthers 41, No. 6 White County 79 - The Warriors (11-1) outscored Union 64-29 over the final three quarters to break things open following a 15-12 first frame.

White County's Emma Lightsey drilled six second-half 3-pointers to finish with 8 treys and 31 points.

The Lady Panthers were led by four 3s and 12 points

from Mull. Turner finished with 8 points; Adams and Brown had 7 points apiece; Ariel McCarter scored 6 points.

White County's Kylie Watkins and Zoe Burkett each added 15 in the win.

The Warriors opened up a 37-19 halftime lead courtesy of 8 second-quarter points from Watkins and six by Burkett.

White County's 22-9 third frame put the game out of reach at 59-32 entering the

fourth. Lightsey scored 13 in the period before adding 9 more in the fourth.

Up next: Union County meets Franklin, NC in the opening round of Towns County's Battle of the States Christmas Tournament at 1 p.m. on Dec. 28.

Franklin (4-3) and Rabun County have met twice this year, splitting the two meetings. Additionally, Franklin owns a 43-32 win over Hayesville, NC.



Senior Lara Turner had 10 points, 5 steals and 4 rebounds during Union County's blowout victory at Murphy, NC last week. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Ariel McCarter led all scorers with 19 points during the win at Murphy, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

Wrestling: Smith-Foot logs 100th career win



Junior Asa Smith-Foot celebrates with teammates following his 100th career victory during Berkmar's Gorilla Warfare X tournament in Lilburn. Last week, Union County attended the Ugly Sweater Duals tournament in Travelers Rest, SC. Event coverage will be included in next week's newspaper.



Asa Smith-Foot in action during a recent tournament. Photo/Todd Forrest

2023 29th Annual CHRISTMAS TOURNAMENT OF THE STATES

DEC 28-29-30, 2023

CONSOLATION BRACKET

DAY 1
12/28/23

Murphy High, NC

DAY 2
12/29/23

1 10:00 AM

5 10:00 AM

9 10:00 AM

W5

10 1:00 PM

W6

GIRLS

DAY 1
12/28/23

Murphy High, NC

DAY 2
12/29/23

1 10:00 AM

2 1:00 PM

3 4:00 PM

4 7:00 PM

Polk Co., TN

3 4:00 PM

6 1:00 PM

7 4:00 PM

Rabun Co., GA

8 7:00 PM

Hayesville High, NC

4 7:00 PM

Towns Co., GA

11 4:00 PM

17

WINNERS BRACKET

DAY 2
12/29/23

7 4:00 PM

DAY 3
12/30/23

12 7:00 PM
CHAMPION

3rd Place

18

Bottom Team in Bracket is Home Team and Will Wear White Uniforms