

Sports

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Panthers hand Towns County first loss, rematch Friday

White County's rally falls short, Panthers hang on 64-59

By Todd Forrest
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Union County improved to 5-1 by way of last week's victories over Towns County and White County ahead of this Tuesday's meeting with Murphy, NC and Friday's rematch at Towns.

Despite shooting just 9% (6 for 66) from 3-point range over the last 13 quarters (dating back to a 0-6 fourth quarter vs. Habersham Central on Nov. 20), the Panthers sit at 5-1, marking their best six-game start since 2017-18 and the program's best start under fifth-year head coach Corey Garrett.

"I know we're talking about [a 5-1 team] here, but we just have to find our confidence," Garrett said. "For a team that can shoot it as well as we can, I'm not sure why our confidence is down. But we have to figure out a way to spark that confidence. We're a good team with a lot of potential but we have to get better."

Panthers 57, Towns County 48 - In a game of runs, Union County ended a three-game home skid vs. the Indians courtesy of an early 19-4 outburst and a 10-0 fourth-quarter spurt.

"That's something we talk about, we know we're a very streaky team," Garrett said. "I feel like all of our games have been that way. We know those peaks and valleys are going to happen, we just need to figure out a way to stay in the middle."

Towns County, trailing 22-8 in the second on the heels of Union's 19-4 run, sliced the deficit to single digits near the 3-minute mark via Zane Floyd's layup and corner-3 until Houston Henry's backdoor feed to Jude Ellis bumped the margin to 24-13.

But the Indians fired back with another 5-straight when Dustin Barrett answered with a layup on the other end, and Gage Rogers' steal led to Floyd's 22-footer.

"[Towns' zone defense is] tough to figure out, and it's always going to slow you down, you just have to find ways to penetrate and score," Garrett said. "You're always going to have lower scoring games against zone defenses than you do against man, but



Juniors Houston Henry (L) and Jude Ellis (R) combined for 33 points, 8 assists and 6 steals in Union County's 57-48 home-opening win over Towns County on Tuesday, Nov. 28. Photo/Todd Forrest

I thought we executed and finished the third and fourth quarters strong."

With Union County nursing a 26-20 edge late in the second period and Towns County starting to find an offensive rhythm, two costly Indian misses at the charity stripe resulted in a key sequence ahead of the intermission.

A Panthers' foul with 38 seconds left led to a pair of missed free throws and a Brayden Hogsed rebound, promptly followed by Ellis' kick-out to Hayden Hughes for an open 3. As a result of the 5-point swing, Union County entered the break harboring a comfortable 29-20 cushion.

Despite the second-quarter setback, the Indians opened the third firing on all cylinders, utilizing a 10-1 run to even the score at 30-30. Two Kade McConnell treys in the opening minute ignited the surge before Floyd went to work inside for 2 points.

Hughes split two free throws, but Floyd's runner knotted the game at 30-30 near the quarter's 5:25 mark. Henry, who finished with a game-high 18 points, put Union back on

top for good with a floater in the paint, then Ellis' 3-point play completed a Panthers' fast break.

After Rogers and Henry traded buckets, Hughes sank two free throws and Henry scored off an inbounds play to close an 11-2 run, spotting Union a 41-32 advantage entering the fourth.

But as was the case all night, Towns answered Union's run with one of its own when Rogers' trey, followed by Tanner Cunningham's turnaround jumper and corner-3, had Towns within a basket less than 2 minutes into the fourth.

The Indians had a chance to tie or take the lead moments later, but an errant pass led to freshman Jaxon Totherow's deuce on the other end, initiating Union's back-breaking 10-0 run.

Towns' next three possessions ended in turnovers as the Panthers began pulling away. Henry found Ellis inside for a 45-39 lead, and then Totherow cleaned up misses on consecutive trips, mounting a double-digit advantage. Union County eventually opened up a 51-39 gap at the 3:30



mark when Hughes scored on Henry's inbounds feed.

Rogers' 12-footer halted the run on the ensuing possession, and Cunningham pulled down Floyd's miss and went back up for 2 points. Trailing 51-44, the Indians made it a two-possession game when Floyd converted an offensive board with 65 seconds left.

But that's as close as they'd get as Henry hit two free throws and Floyd's pull-up trey caught the back iron. Four more Henry free throws extended the Union lead to 57-46 before Rogers' layup in the final seconds capped the scoring at 57-48.

Rogers finished with 11 points, 10 rebounds and 3 assists on 5-of-10 shooting. Floyd paced the Indians with 16 points, 7 boards and 2 assists.

Along with his 18 points, Henry added 7 assists, 4 steals and 3 rebounds. Ellis ended with 15 points, 4 rebounds and 2 steals. Hughes added 10 points and 2 rebounds while hitting just 1 of 10 from downtown.

Totherow chipped in 8 points, 9 rebounds and a block. Other contributors in-

cluded Vince Marevka's 3 points and 5 rebounds; Hogsed had 2 points and 2 steals; Kaden Combs added 1 point and 3 rebounds; Cade Dockrey grabbed 4 boards to go with 2 assists; Ethan Hogsed pulled down one rebound.

Team stats: Union County shot 33% (20-61) from the floor, 5% (1-19) from deep and 70% (16-23) at the line. Towns County hit 38% (31-57) overall, 23% (6-26) from long distance and went 0-2 at the line.

The Indians out-rebounded Union 42-32 but lost the turnover battle 22-9. The Panthers outscored Towns 38-22 in the paint.

Panthers 64, White County 59 - Union County overcame a sluggish start and a sloppy finish to hold off the Warriors on Friday, Dec. 1.

"It's very concerning," Garrett said. "We have to be better at the end of games and make better decisions. That's something we talk about every day and work on in practice."

Despite trailing 8-0 and 15-6, the Panthers outscored White County 39-22 during the second and third quarters to help build a 60-43 fourth-quarter margin.

But with Union missing 10 of 12 shots in the final frame, White County's 16-2 run narrowed the gap to 62-59 with under a minute to play before Dockrey's timely steal led to a Henry layup, putting the game out of reach.

With Union clinging to a 62-57 lead, a turnover resulted in a Warriors' layup with 40 seconds remaining. Later, another Panthers miscue had the Warriors off and running, but as White County's David Boman attacked the paint with 15 seconds left, Dockrey poked the ball into the hands of Ellis, who immediately fired ahead to Henry for the game-sealing layup.

Henry finished with a game-high 25 points; Boman led the Warriors with 23.

Bookending Union's win was a pair of White County runs, beginning with an 8-0 start that put the Panthers into an early 15-6 hole until Hughes sparked the Panthers' rally with a putback and a fast-break layup.

Totherow scored on back-to-back trips, Ellis added a free throw and Totherow connected again, cutting the deficit to 19-17 after one.

Totherow, who poured in a career-high 13 points, tied the game at the charity stripe to start the second, but White County answered with a 6-2 spurt for a 25-21 edge.

Union pushed ahead via Hughes' drive, plus a free throw and a putback from Combs, before Henry's 21-footer bumped the lead to 29-25. Hughes' layup made it 31-27 with a minute to play before halftime, but White scored the last 4 points to even things up at 31-31.

The Panthers raced ahead in the third via a 13-2 run, beginning with Dockrey's layup off an Ellis miss. Dockrey hit 1 of 2 at the line on the next possession, and then Henry went coast-to-coast for a 36-31 advantage.

After White responded with 2 points, Hughes sank three free throws, Totherow added one more and Ellis hit a baseline runner.

That's when Totherow got involved on the defensive end, batting away a Warriors' pass at midcourt and running the floor to finish the break with a layup. Two Ellis free throws stretched the Union lead to 46-33, and later, Totherow crashed the offensive glass for a 50-36 score at the third quarter's 2-minute mark. Henry's deep trey ended the period at 56-41 following Combs' block in the paint seconds earlier.

Four Henry free throws stretched the lead to 60-43 with 4:51 to play before White County's late surge resulted in a tense finish.

A Warriors' trey at the 2:14 mark sliced the difference to 60-53, but Ellis followed up a Hughes miss 20 seconds later, boosting the lead back to nine. However, a pair of Union misses allowed White to climb within 62-57 at 1:02.

Henry had 5 rebounds, 1 assist and 1 steal to go with his 25 points on 3 of 8 from downtown. Totherow's 13 points included 5 boards and 2 steals.

Hughes scored 11 points with 9 rebounds, 3 assists and 3 steals.

Ellis added team-highs of 4 assists and 4 steals to go with 7 points and 5 boards. Dockrey had 3 points, 4 rebounds and 2 assists; Combs finished with 3 points and 7 boards; Marevka added 2 points and a block; Brayden Hogsed had 2 steals, a rebound and a block.

White County's Braxton Anderson finished with 11 points, 7 assists and 4 steals.

Team stats: Union County shot 36% (22-62) from the field, 15% (3-20) from long range and 74% (17-23) at the line. White County hit 44% (23-52) of its shots, 30% (6-20) from deep and 58% (7-12) at the line.

Union held a 38-32 edge on the boards and won the turnover battle 18-12. The Panthers outscored White 36-28 in the paint.

Up next: Union County hosts Murphy, NC on Tuesday, Dec. 5. The girls will tip off at 6 p.m. with the guys to follow. The Panthers defeated the Bulldogs three times last season. Both JV teams will be in action beginning at 3:30 p.m.

The Panthers and Indians will meet Friday Dec. 8 in Hiawassee, beginning with the Lady Panthers at 7 p.m. JV action gets underway at 4 p.m.



Sophomore Cade Dockrey's late-game steal secured Union County's 64-59 victory over White County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman Jaxon Totherow scored a career-high 13 points vs. White County and had a career-best 9 boards vs. Towns. Photo/Todd Forrest

No. 10 Lady Panthers' hot start sinks undefeated Towns County

Union overwhelmed by No. 6 White County; Murphy, Towns up next

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The 10th-ranked Lady Panthers notched their seventh-straight win over Class A's No. 8 Towns County on Tuesday, Nov. 28, before suffering a 62-36 loss to Class AAA's 6th-ranked and undefeated White County on Friday, Dec. 1.

Union County (2-4) hosts Murphy, NC on Tuesday, Dec. 5 and visits Towns County on Friday, Dec. 8.

No. 10 Lady Panthers 59, No. 8 Towns County 46 - Union County hit five first-quarter 3-pointers as they built leads of 23-7 after one and 36-18 at the break.

"I was really pleased with the girls," head coach Thomas Nelson said. "We live and die by the 3 but the girls have worked really hard, coming in before school and shooting and you can see they've gotten a lot better."

Three Lady Panthers 3s during the first 90 seconds, two from Mull and one by Robertson spotted Union a 9-3 edge. Then, Ariel McCarter's trey made it 12-5 near the 5-minute mark before consecutive buckets by Lara Turner pushed the margin to 16-5 a minute later.

McCarter added a steal and score and another triple to mount a 21-5 Union lead with 3 minutes left in the first period.

Sporting a 23-7 lead after one, the Lady Panthers cooled off over the next three quarters but did enough to protect their double-digit margin.

Turner scored five in



Senior Lara Turner scored 15 points in Union County's 59-46 win over Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest

the second while McCarter and Robertson each connected from downtown to help Union County increase its lead to 18 at halftime.

Following a low-scoring start by both squads during the third, Turner's feed to Katelyn Brown moved Union out front 39-18 at the quarter's halfway point until Brelan Sieveking's trey and assist to Emma Lallement sliced the difference to 41-23.

McCarter answered with a trey on the other end, but Sieveking fired back with two triples, trimming the margin to

44-29. Union closed the third quarter on top 46-29 following Hope Taylor's putback and a Hensley Adams steal.

Two more buckets by Turner kept Union ahead 50-33 in the fourth, but the Lady Indians closed within 12 until Brown split two defenders in the paint with 3:56 remaining.

"It looked like we ran out of gas a little down the stretch," Nelson said. "We were pressing them early and doing some good things offensively, working it inside and out. But as the game went on, we got a little tired and



Junior Ariel McCarter led the Lady Panthers with 17 vs. Towns County and 9 points vs. White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

started relying too much on the perimeter, and sometimes that doesn't work out so well for you."

Scotlyn Fain's trey resulted in the second half's narrowest margin at 52-41, but Turner's 14-footer, a Robertson layup and McCarter's 3 pushed the margin back to 59-41 with 90 seconds left.

McCarter finished with a game-high 17 points, Turner added 15 and Robertson had 9 points. Mull scored 6 points; Adams, Brown and Taylor chipped in 4 points each.

Fain had 16 points,

Sieveking scored 11 points and Laura Mauldin added 7 for Towns County. Lallement had 5 points, Kaleigh Beavers scored 4 points and Ansleigh Hardin chipped in 3 points.

No. 10 Lady Panthers 36, No. 6 White County 62 - Early 3s from Brown and McCarter spotted Union a 6-3 lead, then Brown's layup awarded Union its final lead at 8-7 as White closed the quarter with a 15-3 run.

The Warriors, up 22-11 after one, kept the Lady Panthers doubled-up at halftime, holding a 40-20 edge. Union

County managed just three third-quarter buckets as White County extended its advantage to 61-26 ahead of the mercy-rule-shortened fourth.

"White County puts so much pressure on you that you end up playing faster than you want to," Nelson said regarding a Warriors squad that's won all seven games by an average of 35 points. "They have some girls that can stretch the floor and they're very athletic inside. [White is] a really good team and our girls played hard early. We were still trying at the end, it's just a situation where some nights you don't have it."

McCarter led Union with 9 points, Robertson had 8 points and Brown scored 7 points. Adams scored 3 points while Sloane Dyer, Mull and Taylor added 2 points each. Morgan Warren knocked down one free throw.

Emma Lightsey had 21 for White County, Kylie Watkins had 13 and Zoe Burkett scored 9 points.

Up next: Union County hosts Murphy, NC on Tuesday, Dec. 5 at 6 p.m., where Coach Nelson will face his alma mater for the first time as a head coach.

"We played them a couple of times in the summer, and it's always nice to play them and see all the good people [from Murphy]," Nelson said. "But I know our girls will play hard and we're going to do what we need to do to get a win."

The Lady Panthers and Lady Indians square off on Friday, Dec. 8 at 7 p.m. in Hiawassee.

Wrestling: No. 2 Union County takes fourth at Jackson County

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Hoschton - Union County placed six wrestlers in the top four, finishing fourth overall out of 24 teams at Jackson County's two-day Panther Invitational on Dec. 1-2.

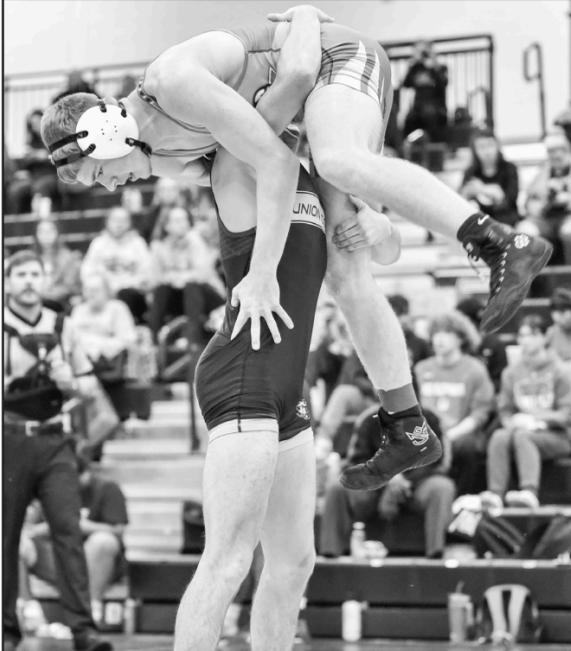
Anderson Clouse (144 lbs), David Heredia (190), Payton Legatt (165) and Asa Smith-Foot (175) all finished second; Paxon Legatt (150) came in third and Eli Flowers (113) placed fourth.

During his finals match vs. Elbert County's Carter Fleming, Clouse scored the first 3 points via a first-round takedown and a second-round escape but suffered a second-round pinfall.

Clouse punched his ticket to the finals with a 16-8 semifinal decision over Franklin County's Will Ballenger. Clouse edged Commerce's Jack Fowler 4-0 in the quarters and Greenbrier's Bilal Afzali in the round of 16.

Heredia, matched up vs. West Virginia-commit Hoke Hogan of Commerce, suffered a second-round pin during the championship bout.

Heredia's late reversal earned him a 7-6 decision over Flowery Branch's Griffin Harper in the semis. On Friday, he recorded a 6-2 decision over West Laurens' Jayden Watkins and a 10-3 decision over White County's Eli Troyer.



Senior Anderson Clouse (black) during his 144-lb semifinal victory over Franklin County's Will Ballenger. Photo/Todd Forrest

Junior Payton Legatt dropped a 6-0 decision to West Laurens' JT Bowers in the title match, surrendering 5 points during round two.

Payton Legatt defeated Christian Keheley of White County 11-5 in the semis; Loganville's Matthew Medina 5-0 in the quarters and Gainesville's Christopher Pierre-Lewis 7-1 in the round of 16.

Smith-Foot ran out of time in his finals bout, falling behind 4-1 before rallying to

within an 8-6 decision in round three vs. Franklin County's Brady Simms.

Smith-Foot defeated Greenbrier's Rick Ramble 6-1 in the round of 32, Gainesville's Peyton Fields 7-1 in the round of 16, East Hall's Aaron Brock 6-0 in the quarters and Flowery Branch's Jason Clark via pin in the semis.

Freshman Paxon Legatt dropped a 6-1 second-round decision to Franklin County's Jacob Baughcum, but stormed



Senior David Heredia takes control during the third round of his 190-lb semifinal bout with Flowery Branch's Griffin Harper at Jackson County's Panther Invitational. Photo/Todd Forrest

through the consolation bracket via wins over Flowery Branch's Leland Temple, East Hall's Levi Kinney, West Laurens' Dawson Lumley, Jackson County's David Warr and East Jackson's Cole Smith.

Flowers dropped his semifinal bout via a 6-2 decision to Winder's Mason Kutylowski. Flowers defeated Peyton Durham of West Oak, SC 7-5 to earn a spot in the consolation finals, where Jackson County's Donovan Spry notched a 10-0 decision.

Flowers edged East Jackson's Isaac Robbins 2-0 in his first bout, Lanier's Eli Thoman 4-0 in the round of 32 and West Laurens Jayden Starley 16-1 in the quarters.

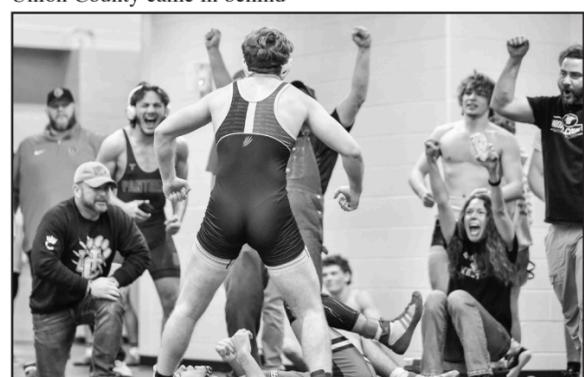
In other action, senior Zander Rotko (157) advanced to the quarters, where he dropped a 5-0 decision to Jack-

son County's Daylan Maxwell. Riley Mortenson (120), Jaden Lee (126) and Dusty Aaron (215) each dropped their opening bouts.

In the team standings, Union County came in behind

first-place Jackson County, second-place Commerce and third-place Franklin County.

Union travels to Pickens on Wednesday for the 515 Classic.



Coaches, family and teammates celebrate with 175-lb junior Asa Smith-Foot after he pinned Flowery Branch's Jason Clark in the semis while trailing 6-2 on points. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union swimmers make splash at Jingle Jam

UCHS SWIM TEAM TOP 10 FINISHES
JINGLE JAM MEET | DEC. 1 | CLARKESVILLE

<p>200 MEDLEY RELAY BOYS A: 5TH- NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV, ANDREW NUSHTAYEV, COLE ORLANDO, & WYATT CHANDLER GIRLS A: 7TH- LILLY COLLINS, LILY HELTON, REESE JONES, & ISABEL HOOVER</p> <p>200 FREE LILLY HELTON: 3RD REESE JONES: 6TH</p> <p>200 IM WYATT CHANDLER: 10TH</p> <p>50 FREE NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV: 1ST ANDREW NUSHTAYEV: 6TH LILLY HELTON: 8TH</p>	<p>100 FLY WYATT CHANDLER: 7TH</p> <p>100 FREE NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV: 2ND COLE ORLANDO: 10TH</p> <p>200 FREE RELAY BOYS A: 5TH- NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV, WYATT CHANDLER, COLE ORLANDO, & ANDREW NUSHTAYEV GIRLS A: 6TH- LILLY HELTON, SOPHIA LICAVOLI, ISABEL HOOVER, & REESE JONES</p> <p>100 BREAST ANDREW NUSHTAYEV: 2ND LILLY HELTON: 3RD REESE JONES: 5TH ISABEL HOOVER: 6TH DELILAH HERNANDEZ: 8TH</p>
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Overall
Boys: 5th out of 14
Girls: 8th out of 15

Clarkesville - The Union County middle school and high school teams collected 37 personal-best times over the weekend at the Jingle Jam meet.

UCHS' Nicholas Nusstayev posted a first place time in the 50 free to lead the men to a fifth place finish. He also came in second during the 100 free.

Andrew Nusstayev came in second in the 100 breast.

Lilly Helton placed third in the 200 free and 100 breast events.

Reese Jones came in fifth in the 100 breast. The 200 Medley relay and 200 free relay teams also logged top-fives.

In UCMS action, Ian Lander finished fourth in the

100M. John Tippens was fourth in the 50 breast. Chloe Iler placed fifth in the 50 back.

The UCMS boys finished sixth overall; the girls were seventh.

The middle school team will conclude their season this Friday at Tallulah Falls, while the high school team will swim Saturday at Murphy, NC.

12U Soccer 2nd at Rec Rocks tourney



Union County's 12U boys team placed second at the Rec Rocks Tournament in Cumming, Ga on Nov. 18-19. On Saturday the 18th, they secured No. 1 seed with two shutouts. In the first game (a 6-0 win), Union found the net via a hat trick by Sergio Salazar, and one goal each from Chase Laporte, Owen Laporte and Cannon Robinson. In the second game (a 3-0 win), Union scored on a PK by Owen Laporte and two goals by Chase Laporte. However Union County lost 7-1 in the finals to LSC Aston Villa from Tyrone, GA. Pictured -- Back row (L-R): Assistant coach Alicia White, Owen Laporte, Charles Miller, Wesley Miller, Nathaniel Wantland, Riley Livingston, Elijah Huber and head coach Chris Robinson. Second row (L-R): Kayden Card, Sergio Salazar, Chase Laporte, Cannon Robinson, Jaxon Poshard and Harrison McDonald. Christopher Bryant, Thomas Johnson, Zack Murray are not pictured.