

Sports

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Panthers end three-game slide in Ellis-led victory at Fannin County

Round two of Towns County vs. Union County set for Friday night in Hiawassee

By Todd Forrest
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Union County (2-3) snapped out of its recent offensive funk, combining for 140 points last week during Friday's 71-58 victory at rival Fannin County and Tuesday's 73-69 loss to White County.

The Panthers host Murphy, North Carolina (1-1) on Tuesday before traveling to Towns County (3-2) for a Friday night rematch in Hiawassee. Union County's week concludes Saturday afternoon with a visit to Gainesville's Lakeview Academy (1-5).

Panthers 71, Fannin County 58 - Sophomore Jude Ellis scored 23 of his game-high 24 points during the second half to help Union County snap a three-game skid with a Friday night victory in Blue Ridge.

Ellis matched a career-high while leading the Panthers to their first win at Fannin County since 2018. Sophomores Houston Henry and Hayden Hughes finished with 15 and 12 points, respectively, as Union County found its 3-point stroke, hitting 55% on 12 of 22 shooting from long distance.

"Everything is starting to gel and I think we have some really good basketball ahead of us," said Union County head coach Corey Garrett, fresh off his first win at Fannin as the men's head coach.

Leading 24-19 at the break, the Panthers opened up a 14-point third-quarter advantage after two Ellis treys in two seconds extended a 32-24 margin to 38-24. After Ellis connected on his first trey from the wing at the 4:58 mark, Henry was shoved to the floor while jockeying for position under the basket, handing possession back to Union County. On the ensuing inbound play, Ellis found daylight in the corner for another triple, granting the Panthers their largest lead of the night at 38-24.

The Rebels refused to wilt, responding with a 16-4 run to slice their deficit to 42-40 with 1:18 left in the period. Without the services of Henry, who picked up his third foul earlier in the frame, the Panthers turned to Ellis, who put the team on his back until reinforcements arrived.

With 8 points already in the third and his team reeling, Ellis knocked down a fall-away 15-footer to slow the bleeding. Then, with time winding down, Ellis brought the ball up the court and went to work, driving right and pulling up from the elbow to spot Union a 46-42 lead after three.

Ellis began the fourth with a pull-up jumper off a Hughes screen, then junior Braylen Rader drilled a corner-3 for a 51-42 advantage near the 7-minute mark.

"[Rader] is an ultra-competitive, physical player that can guard just about every position on the floor unless it's a 6-foot-4, 6-foot-5 player," Garrett said. "Offensively he can sneak up on you. He can shoot the ball but he can also might not expect."

Ellis made a 54-44 game a minute later when Hughes collected his own miss and kicked out to Ellis on the right wing.

After a Fannin basket, Rader hit from the corner again,



Senior Eli Underwood logged career highs of 27 points and 23 rebounds last Tuesday vs. White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

then Ellis used a pump fake to blow past his defender for a layup with 4:22 remaining. He capped off his 24-point night on the next possession, drilling a 22-footer off a Rader feed that built a 63-48 margin.

"Fannin went man-to-man after halftime and if you try and guard Jude in man, he's going to be tough to stop. But that really goes for all our guys," Garrett said.

The Rebels answered with a 6-0 spurt but Henry hit two free throws at the 1:54 mark and senior Eli Underwood scored down low with a minute left. Sophomore Maddox Young's layup made it a 69-55 game and two more Henry free throws brought the final tally to 71-58.

Three first-quarter treys by Hughes and 6 early points from Henry helped spot Union County an 18-13 advantage after one quarter, then an Ellis free throw made it a 19-13 game early in the second.

"Some folks are surprised at how well Hayden Hughes can shoot the ball, but we've known that for a long time and we've been working with him on finding open spots [on the perimeter]," Garrett said. "A lot of it is confidence too. He struggled against Towns and Rabun Gap, but he got going against White County and I think we're going to see a lot more of that."

Fannin County tied things up at 19-19 near the 3-minute mark of a low-scoring second frame, but a post-up by Underwood and Hughes' fourth triple opened up some halftime breathing room at 24-19.

An Ellis free throw, a Young layup, followed by two free throws and a trey by Henry built a 32-21 margin at the 5:40 mark of the third. Fannin answered with a quick 3-pointer but Ellis fired back with 6 points in 2 seconds.

Ellis finished 9 of 20 from the floor and 4 of 6 from deep. The sophomore guard picked out three assists while picking up one steal and a rebound. Henry went 7 of 8 at the line with a team-high five assists, five rebounds and three steals in 26 minutes. After spending much of the second half in foul trouble, Henry ended the night with a



Sophomore Jude Ellis goes off in the second half at Fannin County, scoring 23 of his game-high 24 after halftime. Photo/Todd Forrest

team-leading +23 plus/minus (PM). Hughes went 4 of 7 from downtown, collecting five boards with one assist and one steal. Underwood faced two and three defenders in the post most of the night but contributed in other ways, nabbing a career-high six steals to go with 5 points, nine boards, three assists and a +13 PM.

"We were trying to pound it into the post early on to get Eli going, but Fannin had two big guys that they were allowing to play super physical," Garrett. "Around halftime, we decided to stop hitting our head into that wall and try to get more inside-out looks. But after halftime, Fannin switched to man and it's pretty well-documented that we're better against man-to-man, and that's when we really got rolling."

Rader and Young scored 6 points apiece with Young hauling in three boards and Rader doling out two assists. Freshman Cade Dockrey chipped in 2 points and two boards in 17 minutes of work.

Junior Ben Bloch led the Rebels with 19 points, freshman Jordan Richerson had 14 and senior Bryson Wright added nine.

Ellis and Henry's 39 combined points marked a career best for Union County's sophomore duo. "Those two compliment each other really well and have great chemistry," Garrett said. "They play together during the offseason and they know what the other one likes to do. That whole sophomore class, and even the entire team, have all played together for a long time."

Team stats: Both squads hit an identical 42.1% from the floor on 24 for 57 shooting. Fannin County, however, was unable to match the hot-shooting Panthers from 3-point territory, making just 6 of 22 (27%). Union County's 12-of-22 night is its best 3-point performance by totals and percentage in at least three years.

The Panthers hit 10 of 16 (63%) at the line and Fannin went 4 of 10 (40%). Fannin dominated the points-in-the-paint category 34-16 as Union elected to bomb away from deep. Fannin held a 35-31

edge on the boards but committed 14 turnovers to only eight for the Panthers, which is a stark improvement from their 32 turnovers during last December's overtime loss in Blue Ridge.

Panthers 69, White County 73 - The Warriors scored the game's final 4 points after Dockrey knocked down a game-tying triple with 39 seconds remaining on Tuesday night.

White County came out firing on all cylinders during last week's border clash in Blairsville, drilling a trey on the game's first possession en route to a 29-14 second-quarter advantage.

"Coming in, we thought [a zone defense] was our best option, but obviously it wasn't, so we switched to man-to-man," Garrett said. "Our zone started collapsing a little bit. We like playing zone but sometimes it puts us on our heels."

"I also think we just forgot the scouting report. One of the things I've talked about with the guys the last couple years is knowing the scouting report. But at times we forget and don't use it during the game."

Underwood finished with career-highs of 27 points and 23 rebounds (11 offensive), scoring eight of his team's 11 first-quarter points and keeping Union County in the game during the early going.

"[Underwood] was huge for us," Garrett said. "Getting 23 rebounds with 11 on the offensive end, that was just a huge spark for us."

The Panthers stormed back to even the game at 37-37 courtesy of a 15-0 run, beginning with four straight to close the half, followed by 11-in-a-row to start the third.

A see-saw battle ensued the rest of the way before a Hughes trey beat the third-quarter horn and broke a 55-55 tie. With Union leading 61-57 following an Underwood putback, Ellis and Henry each collected their fourth foul during the first 96 seconds of the fourth.

With two Union starters on the bench, the Warriors rattled off seven straight to regain the lead at 64-61 at the 4:30 mark, prompting the return of

Henry. Unfortunately, he collected No. 5 via a ticky-tack foul with 4:06 remaining when Henry attempted to swipe an errant pass near midcourt as he and a White County player both went airborne for the ball.

"Houston has the keys to our offense and anytime he's on the floor, everything seems to flow pretty well," Garrett said. "When he's not out there, it leaves us looking elsewhere and hunting for someone that gives us the best matchup. Sometimes that's [Ellis], and other times it might be someone else."

With Union still behind 64-61 with 3:38 left, Underwood tied the game by converting a traditional 3-point play after scoring on a putback. The Warriors made it 67-64 via a free throw and a breakaway layup off a turnover, but Rader answered on the other end to keep the Panthers within a point.

Another Union turnover extended White's lead back to three at 69-66 with 2 minutes left, leading to Dockrey's game-tying trey with under 40 seconds remaining.

Needing a basket, White County turned to its star freshman Jadon Yeh, who scored on a backdoor layup with 27 seconds left. After a Union miss on the other end, Yeh used a pair of free throws to put the game away and finish with a game-high 36 points on 12-of-21 shooting and 4 of 6 from downtown.

"We lost track of [Yeh] a few times and he really hurt us," Garrett said. "You can't do that with a player like that."

Hughes scored 12 points on 4 of 9 shooting from 3-point territory, sparking the Union County rally with all four treys coming in the third frame.

"Picking them up in man-to-man really helped us on both ends of the floor," Garrett said. "Of course, Hayden Hughes getting super hot from the 3-point line helped a lot on the offensive end."

The Panthers entered the third facing a 37-26 deficit after consecutive buckets from Underwood cut into White's 37-22 margin over the final 40 seconds of the half. Henry opened the second half with two treys, sandwiched around

a Hughes 3-pointer, moving Union within two at 37-35.

Ellis tied the score with two free throws at the 6:04 mark, but White responded with consecutive buckets before another Hughes' 3 kept the Panthers within a point. Union evened the game at 43-43 when Henry hit 1 of 2 at the line and Ellis sank a pair. A Dockrey jumper answered a Warriors 3-point play, allowing Union to take its first lead at 49-48 courtesy of an Underwood offensive rebound. Ellis put Union back in front 51-50 with a dribble drive, followed by a Hughes 3 and an Underwood free throw. With time running out, Hughes' fourth triple awarded Union a 58-55 lead at quarter's end.

Henry and Ellis each scored 10 points, with four assists and four rebounds apiece. However, both struggled from the floor, combining to shoot just 6 of 25 from the floor.

Dockrey finished with 5 points, three boards and a team-leading +3 PM. Young had 3 points, coming on a corner-3 at the 7-minute mark of the first frame. Sophomore Kaden Combs added two rebounds and one assist. Fellow 10th grader Brayden Hogsd also saw action off the bench.

Team stats: White County shot 48% (27 for 56) from the floor to Union's 41% on 26 of 64 shooting. White hit 50% (8 for 16) from deep and 65% (11 for 17) at the line. The Panthers were 9 of 26 for 35% from 3-point range and 8 for 13 (62%) at the charity stripe.

Led by Underwood, Union County controlled the boards 43-28 and outscored White 21-12 on second-chance points. The Warriors won the points-in-the-paint battle 36-32 and forced 17 Union turnovers, compared to only 11 giveaways for White County.

Up next: Union hosts 1-1 Murphy on Tuesday beginning at 6 p.m. The Bulldogs are coming off a 71-29 victory over Highlands, North Carolina. Murphy also suffered a 91-62 loss at Gilmer.

"We don't know much about Murphy, but we saw them in the summer and we know they are long and physical," Garrett said.

Union travels to Towns County at 7 p.m. Friday looking to bounce back from last month's 34-29 loss to the Indians.

"We're looking to get our offense flowing because we know what they want to do defensively, we just have to find our flow and keep shooting the ball and running the floor," Garrett said.

The Panthers visit Lakeview at 3:30 p.m. Saturday to face the 1-5 Lions, who are much better than their win-loss record suggests. Lakeview losses came at the hands of Athens Christian (twice), Banks County Lumpkin County and Rabun County. All but one of Lakeview's five losses were by single digits, an 83-73 defeat vs. Lumpkin County. The Lions' lone win is a 63-48 victory over Class 6A Jackson County.

"Lakeview is a good team," Garrett said. "They added some transfers from Cherokee Bluff so we know some of those guys from last year. I've watched a lot of film on them and they are going to be tough. That 1-5 record definitely does not tell the whole story."

Lady Panthers overwhelmed in losses to No. 6 White, No. 5 Fannin

By Todd Forrest
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Union County (2-4) ran into a pair of local powerhouses last week, dropping one-sided contests to Class AAA's sixth-ranked White County and Class AA's fifth-ranked Fannin County.

Things don't get much easier this week when the Lady Panthers host reigning Smoky Mountain Conference champion Murphy, North Carolina on Tuesday. Later in the week, Union County pays a visit to 10th-ranked Towns County on Friday looking for its fifth straight win over the Lady Indians. The Lady Panthers travel to Lakeview Academy on Saturday to face the 1-5 Lady Lions.

Lady Panthers 48, No. 6 White County 69 - Union County couldn't keep pace with the Warriors on Tuesday night in Blairsville, surrendering two critical runs that allowed the visitors to pull away.

Leading 14-9 early, White County used a 13-2 run to open up a 27-11 advantage that had the Lady Panthers playing catch-up the rest of the night. White County put the game out of reach during the fourth period, capping a 26-3 outburst that built a 62-31 margin with 7:16 remaining.

Sophomore Ariel McCarter led Union County with 13 points, and senior Corinne Hill scored 12 points with three rebounds and two steals. Junior Lara Turner added 11 points and three boards.



Katelyn Brown scraps for a loose ball in the paint at Fannin County. The sophomore collected seven boards vs. White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

White County raced out of the gates with a 9-2 lead, eventually stretching it out to 19-9 at quarter's end and 27-11 at the 5:50 mark of the second. Turner halted the run with a jumper, then McCarter converted a fast-break layup and Hill hit a jumper to slice the deficit to 29-17.

The Lady Panthers battled back to within 32-22 at the break via a free throw by freshman Mady Adams and two more buckets by Hill.

McCarter, Turner and se-

nior Ivie Chapman kept Union County inside single digits at 32-24, 34-26 and 36-28 when White County delivered the knockout blow via a 26-3 onslaught, beginning with 6:19 left in the third period.

Freshman Paula Robertson had 3 points. Junior Katelyn Brown finished with 2 points and seven rebounds. Junior Kamryn Mull added 2 points and five boards; Chapman and freshman Lola Hunter each chipped in 2 points. Adams finished with one free



Sophomore Ariel McCarter had a team-high 13 points during last Tuesday's loss to White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

throw.

White County senior Naomi Roberts ended with a game-high 27 points.

Team stats: White County shot 40% (27 for 67) from the floor; Union County hit 35% (17 for 48) of its shots. White made 5 of 20 from 3-point range (25%), and the Lady Panthers went 0 for 3. Union went 14 of 27 at the line for a 52% clip. The Warriors made 10 of 18 for 56%.

White County out-rebounded Union 39-35 and

outscored the home team 40-14 in the paint. The Lady Panthers turned it over 21 times and forced 12 on the defensive end.

Lady Panthers 21, No. 5 Fannin County 47 - Union County couldn't recover from an early 8-0 hole and Fannin County broke away 14-4 after one, 29-8 at halftime and 36-15 after three.

Adams accounted for the Lady Panthers' first field goal with 1:53 remaining in the opening frame. Earlier,

McCarter hit two free throws at the 4:10 mark to stop Fannin's 8-0 run.

Brown sank two from the charity stripe with 7:08 left in the first half, then a Turner jumper at 35 seconds brought the halftime tally to 29-8.

Two McCarter jumpers and one from Turner moved Union within 17 at 31-14, but that's as close as the Lady Panthers would get.

McCarter, Hill and sophomore Aubrie Akins cracked the scoring column in the fourth quarter.

Team stats: As of Monday morning, team stats were unavailable from Saturday's game, and the individual scoring totals are incomplete.

Up next: Union County hosts Murphy, NC on Tuesday at 6 p.m. The Bulldogs are off to an 0-2 start with losses to Highlands, NC and Gilmer.

The 10th ranked Towns County Lady Indians (2-3) welcome Union County at 7 p.m. Friday night. The Lady Panthers have won five straight at Towns County and four-straight overall in the series.

Union County travels to Lakeview at 3:30 p.m. for a Saturday matchup. The Lions are 1-5 on the year, coming off ugly losses to third-ranked Rabun County and No. 6 White County by a combined total of 165-65.

However, Lakeview battled Class AA's sixth-ranked Banks County to a 50-43 loss and suffered two narrow losses to Athens Christian. The Lions defeated Class 6A Jackson County 54-38.

Wrestling: Union takes ninth at Jackson County; Senior Night Friday

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Hoschton - Union County wrestling continues its rise to an elite Class AA program with a 9th place showing at the 24-team Panther Invitational at Class 6A Jackson County.

Junior David Heredia returned in a third-place performance, defeating Greenbrier's Jacob Braddock in the 175-lb consolation finals. In the finale, Heredia jumped ahead 9-3 when a frustrated Braddock walked off the mat in a forfeit.

Three Panthers took home fifth, Anderson Clouse (138), Payton Legatt (165) and Asa Smith-Foot (157).

Clouse scored a 13-2 major decision over Winder's Jayden Draper. In other fifth-place matches, Legatt defeated Greenbrier's Cooper Comer in an 8-4 decision and Smith-Foot pinned West Laurens' JT Bowers.

Heredia reached the consolation finals by way of a forfeit win over Lanier's Aiden Owens. Heredia also scored wins over Jackson County's Brayden Byram and Flowery Branch's Quinn McDowell. His lone loss came via top-seeded Zeke Harris of North Hall.

Clouse dropped a 4-2 decision to Banks County's Elijah Mullins ahead of his final match following wins over Greenbrier's Braden Weeks and Athens Christian's Eli Vaughn. His quarterfinal loss to Franklin County's Will



With his right eye swelling shut, junior David Heredia took home a bronze medal at 175 lbs from Jackson County's Panther Invitational on Saturday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Ballenger dropped him into the consolation bracket.

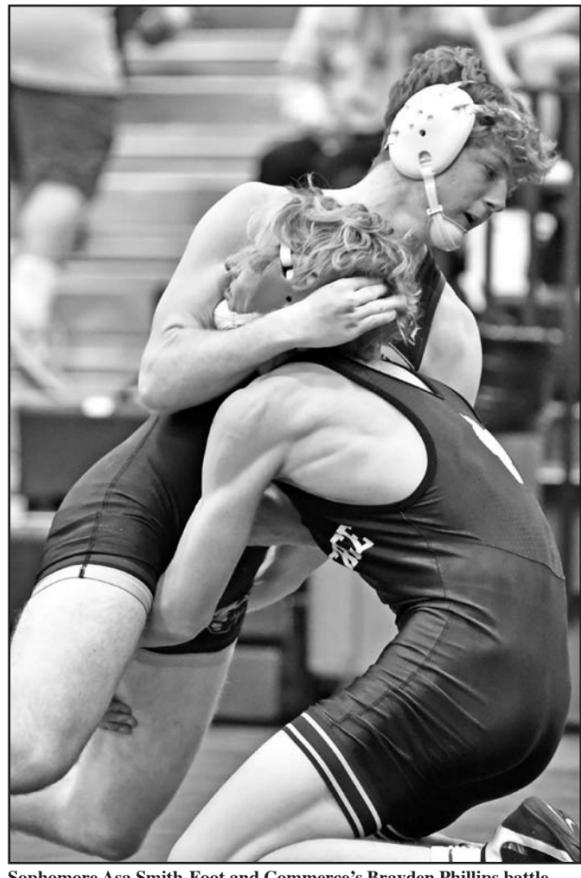
Legatt entered as the top seed at 165 but dropped a 5-3 semifinal decision to Austin Kilgore of Hillcrest, South Carolina. He suffered a pinfall in his first consolation match to Habersham Central's Justin

Whitney but bounced back with a fifth-place victory.

During the first three rounds, Legatt didn't surrender a point during his pinfall wins over Franklin County's Zane Puff and Johnson's Logan Caughman, along with his 8-0 major decision vs. Fischer

West of Commerce.

Smith-Foot fell into the fifth-place match after dropping a heated bout vs. the defending Class A State runner-up and top-seeded Brayden Phillips of Commerce. Smith-Foot earned wins over Hart County's Peyton White, Lo-



Sophomore Asa Smith-Foot and Commerce's Brayden Phillips battle during an intense bout in the 157-lb consolation semis on Saturday at Jackson County. Photo/Todd Forrest

ganville's Christian Noblett and North Hall's Parker Carlton. Smith-Foot's quarterfinal loss to Jackson County's Xavier Cepican dropped him into the consols.

Other Union County wrestlers taking part at Jackson County were Thomas

Gary (126), Strauss Miller (132), Zander Rotko (144), Damon Wallace (150), Huck Whisenhunt (190) and Lane Lance (285).

This week, Union County will host Senior Night on Friday Dec. 9 at 6 p.m.

Swimming: UCMS notches a pair of top-seven finishes at Adairsville meet

UCHS TOP 10 FINISHES

TIGER PLUNGE MEET, ADAIRSVILLE, GA
DECEMBER 3, 2022

<p>200 Medley Relay Boys: 9th Girls A: 8th</p> <p>200 Freestyle Eli Gwynn: 6th</p> <p>100 Butterfly Lily Helton: 4th</p> <p>100 Backstroke Eli Gwynn: 10th Reese Jones: 9th</p>	<p>200 Freestyle Relay Girls A: 9th</p> <p>200 IM Reese Jones: 10th</p> <p>500 Freestyle Nicholas Nushtayev: 3rd</p> <p>100 Breaststroke Nicholas Nushtayev: 5th Lily Helton: 3rd</p>
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OVERALL
Boys: 14th out of 19
Girls: 10th out of 20

UCMS FINISHES

TIGER SPLASH MEET, ADAIRSVILLE, GA
DECEMBER 3, 2022

<p>200 Medley Relay Boys: 6th Girls: 2nd</p> <p>50 Freestyle Ian Lander: 10th Grayson Shadden: 40th Eddie Richardson: 46th Isabel Hoover: 3rd Ava Wheeler: 9th Ella Fisk: 11th Riley Allison: 32nd Isabella Reuter: 39th</p> <p>200 Freestyle Relay Boys: 7th Girls: 2nd</p>	<p>100 IM Logan Tercero: 11th Clara Kazmierzak: 2nd Kimberly Simpson: 6th</p> <p>100 Freestyle Wyatt Chandler: 7th Ian Lander: 11th Clara Kazmierzak: 2nd Ella Fisk: 30th</p> <p>50 Butterfly Wyatt Chandler: 4th Ava Wheeler: 9th Kimberly Simpson: 10th</p> <p>50 Backstroke Andrew Nushtayev: 2nd Grayson Shadden: 26th Riley Allison: 27th Isabella Reuter: 29th</p> <p>50 Breaststroke Andrew Nushtayev: 2nd Logan Tercero: 4th Eddie Richardson: 25th Isabel Hoover: 4th</p>
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OVERALL
BOYS: 7th out of 15
GIRLS: 4th out of 17