

# Lady Panthers one win away from locking down No. 3 seed

## Union County to conclude regular season vs Banks, at Oglethorpe

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The Union County Lady Panthers (17-6, 8-4) were eliminated from contention for the top-two spots in Region 8-AA following losses to Putnam County and at Rabun County.

Now, Union County needs just one win to lock down the third seed with fifth-place Banks County and last-place Oglethorpe County on this week's docket. Union is also within reach of their first 20-win season since 2008.

On Tuesday, the Lady Panthers host Banks as the Lady Leopards look to keep pace with fourth-place Elbert County, who visits Putnam County on Tuesday. On Friday, Union will travel to Oglethorpe County to face a struggling Lady Patriots' squad that is 0-10 in region play.

Securing a top-three seed is huge for the Lady Panthers' state tournament chances since they would avoid Banks or Elbert in the first round of region. Instead, Union would host Monticello or Social Circle -- two squads they defeated by an average of 26 points this season -- with a state playoff berth on the line. If they finish third, Union County will also host the first round of the region playoffs in both the men's and women's tournaments.

The location of the final two rounds have yet to be determined with Putnam and Rabun settling things on Friday night in Tiger. And it's a safe bet that almost all of Union County will be rooting for the rival Lady Cats.

After making the State Tournament every year but one between 2008-2016, the Lady Panthers have missed the last three. But now the seniors, who have been through three coaches in four years, have an excellent chance to reach their first postseason, and that wouldn't have been possible without their leadership and their dedication to the new system installed under first-year head coach Crystal Beach.



Senior Brooke Dockrey with family. Photo/Todd Forrest

"I know my system is different to what's been done in the past, but they've bought in and it's never easy for the players or the coaches," Beach said. "But I told them I wanted to make this their best year yet, and all of our success is due to (the seniors buying in). And when you look at our record compared to last year, and everything we've accomplished so far, it's obvious they've turned into some great leaders for this program."

**Lady Panthers 54, Social Circle 23** - Union County scored the first 20 points as they built leads of 24-2 after one and 41-4 at the break.

The Lady Panther starters would receive some much needed rest in the second half as Kyla Locklear, Rebekah Chambers and Riley Allison kept 37-point lead safe at 51-14 after three.

A conventional 3-point play from Ansley Collins was the only Union scoring during a 6-minute fourth.

Senior point guard Brooke Dockrey scored a career-high 18 points in the first half on 7-of-11 shooting and three steals. Sophomore Ava Hunter added 10 points and six rebounds, Andelin Hill scored 6 points and Ellie Cook chipped in five points and five steals to round out the first-half scoring.

Locklear finished with 6 points and five boards, Collins had 3 points while Allison added

2 points and four steals.

Chambers had 2 points and two steals, Kait McCarter had one rebound, one assist and one steal, Ivie Chapman grabbed three boards and Corinne Hill hauled in two rebounds.

**Lady Panthers 47, Putnam County 58** - A valiant comeback bid fell short as Union County was unable to overcome a 24-point, second-quarter deficit to the Lady War Eagles.

Still trailing 39-17 at the break, the Lady Panthers opened the third with seven-straight points to spark a 17-4 run. Hill came out firing away and scored eight of her team's first 12 points in the third quarter.

In the final minute of the period, Union managed to pull within nine on a Dockrey dribble-drive, but Putnam split a pair of free throws to push the margin back to 46-36 at quarter's end.

Seven points were as close as the Lady Panthers would get in the fourth as the two teams traded baskets for the first four-plus minutes of the period.

Despite missing four-straight at the line, Union finally started to chip away with two free throws by Hunter and a 15-footer by McCarter. Trying to cut into a 51-44 deficit with under three minutes to play, the Lady Panthers got the ball down low to Hunter but Putnam forced a tie-up and the possession arrow awarded them the ball.



Senior Andelin Hill with family. Photo/Todd Forrest

Cook would pick up her fifth foul at the 2:12 mark and the Lady War Eagles quickly stretched the margin back to 56-44. Hunter split a pair of free throws with 40 seconds to play, McCarter made two more at 25 seconds but it was too little, too late.

Hunter finished with 16 points and Hill scored 12 of her 15 in the second half. Cook added eight, McCarter scored six and Dockrey had two.

Despite coming up short, Coach Beach can use the second half as a building block entering the final week of the regular season.

"What concerned me most was what team was going to take the floor coming out of halftime," Beach said. "But they showed me they have heart and some fight and that's what you need at this point of the season."

**Lady Panthers 39, Rabun County 72** - The Lady Cats blew things open in the second quarter with an 11-0 run that spanned 68 seconds. Rabun would go on to win the second quarter 24-12 to take control 39-21 at halftime.

With her team trailing 13-6 early, Hill used a Euro step to get to the basket for two, then she hit 1-of-2 at the line to keep the Lady Panthers within striking distance at 15-9 after one.

Down 15-11 and already in the bonus with fouls piling up on the Lady Cats, Union County

appeared to have Rabun right where they wanted them.

That's when the Lady Cats reminded everyone why they've won 10 of the last 11 region titles.

In a span of 42 seconds, Rabun turned a four-point edge into a 23-11 advantage.

Trailing 26-11 with just under six minutes left in the half, a Locklear basket and an Allison free throw momentarily slowed the bleeding before the Lady Cats answered with a 10-1 spurt to build a 36-15 lead.

Following a Dockrey free throw, Hill sank two at the line before drilling a triple to pull Union within 39-21 at the break. Hill's 8 points would lead the Lady Panthers in the first half, while Hunter added six, Allison had three, Locklear scored two

and McCarter and Dockery had one each.

"My hat's off to Coach (Dee Dee) Dillard and Rabun," Beach said. "They are a great program and that's the type of environment that you should look forward to playing in. I think we went in focused but one bad stretch can result in what happened that night. We just have to stay focused and put together four good quarters of basketball."

A Hunter putback to open the third pulled Union within 16 but that's as close as they would get. Rabun scored the next six points before Hill hit a pair from the line and Dockrey scored in the paint.

The Lady Cats responded with an 8-0 run before baskets by Hunter and Dockrey made it a 53-31 game after three.

Leading 60-38 with four minutes left, Rabun finished with one last outburst, closing the game on a 12-1 run and shutting out Union over the final 2:15.

Hunter led the Lady Panthers with 14 points. Hill had 10, Dockrey scored six and Allison added five. McCarter and Locklear chipped in two apiece.

**Up next** - Union County hosts Banks County on Tuesday and visits Oglethorpe County on Friday. If the Lady Panthers win one game this week, they will finish third and UCHS will host the first round of the region playoffs.

Both games tip at 6 p.m.



Senior Brooklyn Shields with family. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Kait McCarter with family. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Sarah Sanchez with family. Photo/Todd Forrest

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drought lasted a little bit longer as the Redskins never trailed in the final period.

That didn't mean the Panthers didn't find a way to keep it interesting. Down 47-44, Morlock hit two clutch free throws to pull within a point at the 1:43 mark.

Still trailing 49-46 a minute later, Allison forced a steal and converted a lay-up on the other end with 41 seconds remaining.

Social Circle, however, was flawless at the line down the stretch, making 10-straight free throws in the final minutes to keep the Panthers at bay. The Redskins would eventually put the game away for good, hitting two free throws with 7.5 seconds left to take a 53-49 lead.

After shooting 50% on 13-for-26 in the first half, Union County, shot just 4-of-15 (27%) in the third and 2-of-15 (13%) in the fourth for a 20% shooting performance (6-for-30) in the second half. The Panthers finished

at 34% from the floor while allowing 50%. Neither team was effective behind the arc -- Union hit 1-of-6, the Redskins were 2-for-7.

As for Social Circle, they only took 11 shots during the second half (making four). But they didn't need to do much from the field -- they shot 82% on 22-for-27 at the line.

Union won the turnover battle 23-13 but were outscored 19-11 on points off turnovers. The Panthers' inability to convert miscues into points can be attributed to the multitude of missed layups and being unable to finish at the basket during the second half.

Social Circle also owned the glass 30-23, despite losing 10-4 on the offensive boards.

**Up next** - Union County hosts Banks County on Tuesday as the Leopards look to remain alive for the No. 1 seed. A Union win and the top-three is secure with Social Circle followed by Banks and Union.

The Banks game won't mean a lot for us standings-wise, but it still means a lot," Garrett said. "We want to play well and we want to win. There's not much else to say. We want to play better than we did the last time (a 79-44 loss

in Homer)."

On Friday, the regular season concludes with a trip to Oglethorpe County. Both girls games will tip at 6 p.m.

For updates on the region standings, plus region tournament dates and start

## UCHS attends Swim Meet in Athens

Union County High School attended a swim meet this Saturday January 18th at the University of Georgia Aquatic Center in Athens. Steven Williams qualified for State in his 100 Backstroke. Also, Brian Williams and Hannah Sheffield set UCHS Swim Records in the 100 Butterfly. Most of our swimmers had personal best times. Please take a moment to congratulate these swimmers!

200 Yard Medley Relay: 4th Place - HS: Brian Williams, Hunter White, Alden Wilkes and Steven Williams

200 Yard Individual Medley: 1:59.51, Personal Best/School Record/State Qualified - Brian Williams

50 Yard Freestyle, 24.05, Personal Best - White; 26.12, Personal Best - Blake Caputi; 27.02 - Wilkes; 27.01, Personal Best - Sheffield

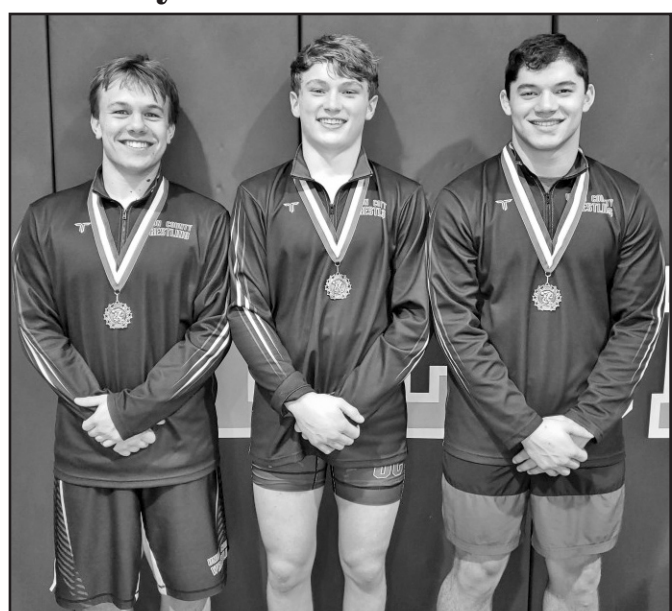
100 Yard Butterfly: 53.29, Personal Best/School Record/State Qualified - Brian Williams; 1:06.91, Personal Best/School Record - Sheffield

100 Yard Freestyle: 52.90, Personal Best - Steven Williams; 57.01 - Wilkes; 1:05.31 - Caputi

200 Yard Freestyle Relay: 16th Place, HS: Steven Williams, Caputi, Wilkes and Brian Williams

100 Yard Backstroke: 59.97, State Qualified - Steven Williams.

## Wrestling: Individual Area Tourney this weekend at Elbert



L-R: Sean Phillips was second, Brady Guild placed third and Cristian Martinez finished second at Elbert County last weekend in their final tune-up before Area. This weekend, Union County wrestling will return to Elberton for the Traditional Area Tournament, looking to once again secure multiple berths in the upcoming State Tournament. The action will begin Friday night in Elbert County and finish up on Saturday. State gets underway on Feb. 7 and 8 with Sectionals. The State Championship tournament will be Feb. 12-15 in Macon.

## MUSA teams up with UGH Sports Medicine program



Representatives from UGH and MUSA met earlier this month. Photo/Todd Forrest

Mountain United Soccer Association (MUSA) would like to thank Union General Orthopedics and Sports Medicine for their support of youth soccer. They will be our Premium

Jersey Sponsor and will be represented on our jerseys for the 2020 season. With their support, the league will be able to continue to expand and improve upon its coaching development

programs.

We also hope to offer injury prevention education for our coaches with the help and guidance of Union General's highly qualified staff.



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Players will be serving as assistant coaches for every team.

\*Volunteer Coaches Needed