

# Panthers fall in Region Semifinals despite Allison's heroics

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The Panthers are back in the state playoffs for the second-straight year, but this time around, it feels like a case of "what might have been."

On the heels of a convincing 66-49 victory over Elbert County in the opening round, the Panthers were tied 18-18 with Social Circle in the second quarter when the injury bug bit Union's four-year starting point guard, Pierson Allison.

**Panthers 58, Social Circle 62** - Early in the second, Allison was knocked to the floor on a drive to the hoop and suffered what appeared to be a quad injury. Prior to his spill, Allison had scored nine of Union's first 11 points, who went on to trail 18-16 after one.

Tied at 18-18 following a steal-and-score by Sawyer Drake, Allison went to the sideline where trainers worked vigorously on his upper-leg. Unable to return until the start of the fourth, Allison's teammates were hanging by a thread, down 46-35 after three.

When Allison left the floor, Social Circle immediately capitalized with consecutive baskets to take a 22-18 lead. A Drake free throw and Sawyer Brey's second bucket of the game cut the margin to one. The duo of Brey and Drake did their best to keep Union in the game, even converting a post-to-post lob pass resulting in a Drake lay-in. Moments later, Brey hit a pair of free throws to keep the Panthers within a point at 26-25.

Unfortunately, the final 3:20 of the half saw the Redskins outscore Union County 9-3 to take a 35-28 lead into the break.

Drake scored the first five points of the third quarter but the Panthers still trailed 44-33. Brey briefly cut the deficit back to single digits with a steal and a layup but Social Circle managed to end the quarter with an 11-point cushion.

Trailing 48-35 early in the fourth, Allison returned and immediately went back to work by assisting on two straight baskets. He began by penetrating and dishing to Drake for an open corner-3. On the ensuing possession, he weaved his way inside and found Kyle Morlock for a bucket and the foul.

Trailing 50-42, Allison took matters into his own hands, scoring the next 14 Union Coun-



Senior Pierson Allison almost pulled off his very own Willis Reed moment vs Social Circle. Photo/Todd Forrest

ty points. The onslaught was sparked by a triple that pulled his team to within 50-45 at the five-minute mark. Then, Allison answered a Social Circle free throw by putting back his own miss to trim the deficit to four.

Still looking at a six-point hole, Allison drove to the hoop for two, then hit two free throws for a 55-51 deficit with four minutes left.

After exchanging baskets for much of the fourth, Allison picked the pocket of a Redskins' ball handler, turning it into a layup and a 56-53 score with 2:41 remaining.

Social Circle appeared to put the game away with four-straight points but an Allison triple at 42 seconds pulled the Panthers to within four at 60-56. The Redskins would surprisingly clank a pair of free throws and Drake drove to the bucket to trim the Redskin lead to 60-58 with 11 seconds left.

With nine seconds on the clock, Social Circle would put the game away with two free throws and advance to the Region 8-AA Championship Game.

Allison scored a game-high 23 points despite sitting for two quarters. Drake finished with 18, Brey added eight, Logan Helcher knocked down a first-quarter trey for 3 points, Morlock added three, Cox had two and Rich chipped in a free throw.

Panthers 66, Elbert County 49 - Led by 25 points from Allison (10 in the first quarter), Union County blew things open with a 14-2 run that turned an 11-9 deficit into a 23-13 advantage.

Leading 23-15 with just over six minutes left in the first half, the Panthers doubled up the Blue Devils 10-5 to take a 33-20 halftime lead behind 13 first-half points from Allison and nine from Drake.

Union was never challenged in the second half and eventually put Elbert County away with an 11-1 run that spotted them a 48-26 advantage.

The Panthers continued pulling away in the fourth, building a 64-35 lead following a trey by Drake and a Helcher steal-and-score.

With the starters resting, a Landon Kight bucket kept the margin at 29 with 3:26 to play before Elbert closed the game with a 12-0 run.

Drake poured in 18 for Union County and Morlock scored nine.

**Up next** - The Panthers played Putnam County on Monday night for the No. 3 seed in Region 8-AA. A Union win and they will visit No. 6 Douglass (19-8) this weekend.

Douglass split its regular season games with Washington, including a 66-46 victory at home

in the second meeting. Washington faced Putnam County early in the season, easily handling the War Eagles, 69-40.

A Union loss to Putnam and the Panthers will travel to fifth-ranked Therrell (21-7) in



Sawyer Brey glides to the hoop for two of his 8 points. Photo/Todd Forrest

round one. Like Douglass, the closest thing to a common opponent is Washington, who defeated Putnam County 63-47.

Although, it should be noted that Putnam was in the midst of an eight-game losing

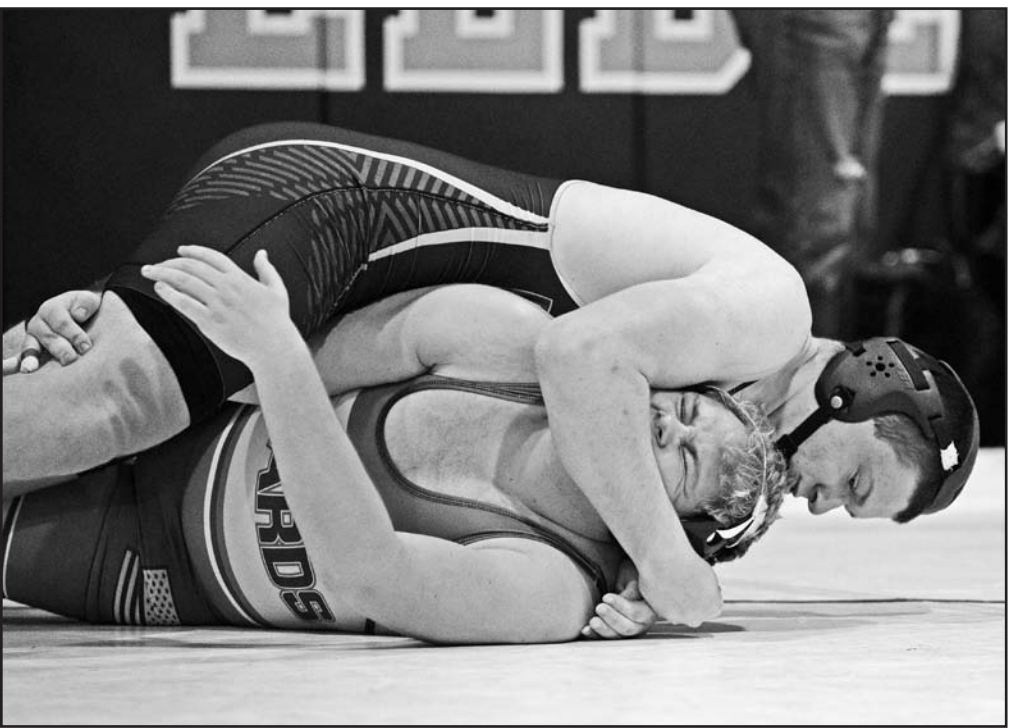
streak to start the season when they lost to Washington back on Dec. 7.

Since starting 0-8, the War Eagles were an even 9-9 entering Monday's contest with Union County.



Sawyer Drake scored 18 despite drawing double and triple teams with Allison sidelined. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Wrestling: Two Panthers qualify for State Championships in Macon



Junior Eli Smith-Foot scores a pinfall victory during the Area Tournament at Elbert County. Photo/Todd Forrest

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**Barnesville** - Sophomore Brady Guild (152 pounds) and junior Eli Smith-Foot (285) will continue on to this week's State Championships following a pair of top-six performances at Sectionals over the weekend.

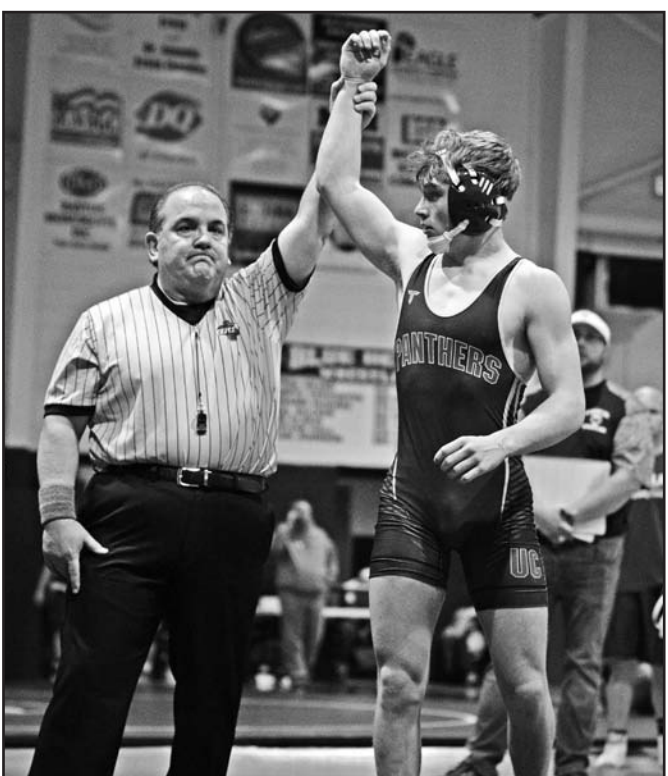
Smith-Foot's day began with a 7-4 decision over Jeff Davis' Caleb Osteen before falling to East Laurens' Kaleb Canon in round two.

In his first consolation bout, Smith-Foot scored a pinfall over Vidalia's Tommy Walker to punch his ticket to the State meet. He would go on to drop his next two matches to finish sixth.

Guild also began his day with a win in the 152-pound division, scoring a pinfall in less than two minutes vs Toombs County's Jeremy Brantley.

In round two, Guild fell to Cory Young of Lamar County via major decision. He would bounce back with a pinfall victory (3:57) in the consols over Fitzgerald's Lathan Curry.

Following a 5-2 decision over Swainsboro's Kyle Phillips, Guild dropped a 12-8 decision to Oglethorpe County's



Sophomore Brady Guild is victorious during a match at the Area Tournament earlier this month. Photo/Todd Forrest

Clay Frost.

In the fifth place match, he defeated Jeff Davis' Javarion Coleman in a 7-4 decision.

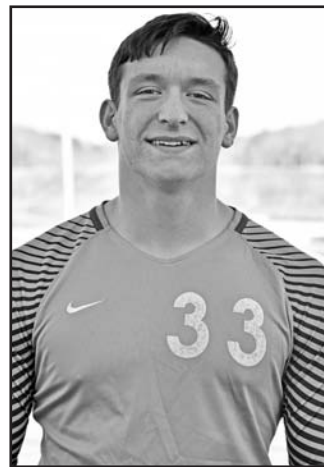
fell one win shy of a berth, scoring a pinfall victory in his first round match before dropping two straight decisions.

Turner Cone also came one win short of advancing to the State Championships.

## Soccer: Panthers open 2020 by blanking North Hall 2-0



The Union County Panthers 2020 Men's Soccer Team with coaches. Photos by Todd Forrest



Aaron Helton



Kobi Robbins



Kyler Robbins

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**Clermont** - The defending Class AA State Runner-Up Union County Panthers began their quest for a State Championship with a 2-0 victory at North Hall.

Union County returned to the pitch last Tuesday, Feb. 4, where they used two goals from senior Kobi Robbins to take down Class AAA North Hall in the 2020 season opener.

Sophomore Kyler Robbins set up both goals with two corner-kick assists - one in each half. The two goals proved more than enough for junior goalkeeper Aaron Helton and the Union County

defense.

The Panthers needed only nine minutes to grab the lead on the first Robbins-to-Robbins corner-kick goal. They would maintain their 1-nil advantage into the second half where Union County extended its lead to 2-0 during the 68th minute.

The Panthers will continue their tour of Region 7-AAA when they travel to Lumpkin County on Tuesday. The Indians are coming off a disappointing 2019 campaign that saw them fall 3-2 to Union in the season opener.

On Thursday, the Panthers will welcome Gilmer for the 2020 home opener. Last year, Union County took care of the Bobcats by a 5-2 score.

The final non-region tune-up will take place on Feb.

18 when Union County hosts Riverside Military Academy.

Region play gets underway on Feb. 21 with a home meeting vs Banks County.

As for the Lady Panthers, they open the season at Lumpkin County on Tuesday then host Gilmer on Thursday.

With the Riverside game a guys only contest, the Union County ladies will begin region play in game three - the Feb. 21 showdown vs Banks County.

Non-region play resumes for both UCHS squads on Feb. 25 and Feb. 29 when they host Fannin County and Darlington, respectively.

Those two games are sandwiched around a region match at Putnam County on Feb. 28.