

# Football: Panthers survive 19-7 behind stingy defense, 2 TDs from Daniel

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**Homer** - Union County (3-2, 1-0) overcame a subpar offensive performance to eke out a 19-7 victory at Banks County in the Region 8-AA opener.

Returning from an ankle injury that sidelined him for six weeks, senior running back Jonah Daniel scored two touchdowns, including a backbreaker with 1:26 to play that opened up a 12-point Union advantage.

The Panthers' offense generated just 203 total yards - their lowest output since a 47-7 loss to No. 3 Greater Atlanta Christian (158) in September 2017.

"It really seems like we're a slow starting team on offense, but part of our issue is, we have some youth on the offensive line," Union head coach Brian Allison said. "We have one returning starter on the line, we were off for three weeks and I think I just did a poor job of getting us ready to play [at Banks]. As coaches, we simply did a poor job of preparing our team



L-R: Jonah Daniel puts the game away with a late touchdown catch. QB Logan Helcher is off to the races during his 66-yard score. Photos/Todd Forrest



Noah Underwood anchors a defense that's allowed 21 points in its last two games. Photo/Todd Forrest

to play that ball game. And that falls on me."

Meanwhile, the Union County defense limited the Leopards to 201 yards and 1 for 12 on third downs. They also overcame three giveaways by the offense in Panther territory, turning Banks County away each time.

"I think we did a good job defensively, and what a lot of people probably didn't realize is, [Banks switched to] a totally a different offense than we saw on film and prepared for. When they went to that inverted-wishbone, shotgun formation, that was something they had not done all season, but I think we did a pretty job against it and adjusting to it."

Following a scoreless first quarter that saw the two teams combine for three punts, Union County became careless with the football, fumbling a handoff that gave the ball to Banks at the Panthers' 49-yard line. The defense

rose to the occasion, forcing another punt, but the offense gave it back to the Leopards with an interception at the Union 14-yard line.

"We could not get in sync offensively," Allison said. "Maybe it's because we lost the summer due to COVID and we've only played three games in six weeks, but we're out of sync. But I'll tell you, Banks did a very good job of switching defenses and keeping us off balance."

"We wanted to get the ball out wide to our wide receivers but [Banks] did a good job preventing us from getting the ball to those guys."

On Banks County's first play after the turnover, senior Noah Underwood pounced on a fumble to dodge a bullet and spark the Panthers' first score of the night.

Junior quarterback Logan Helcher went to work from the Union 18 where he broke a pair of runs, the first going for 16 and

the second a 66-yard touchdown carry with 7:58 before halftime.

With Union County leading 6-0 following a blocked extra point, the defense forced another punt but the offense stalled near the Leopards' 40 as time ran out in the first half.

The second half got underway with Union going 70 yards on seven plays to take a 12-0 lead at the 8:15 mark of the third. Helcher tore off a 36-yard keeper, then hit junior wideout Keyton Chitwood for 30.

Following another Helcher keeper, a 10-yard strike to Chitwood and a short first-down completion to Underwood, Daniel punched it in from a yard out for his first touchdown of 2020.

The defense forced another punt but Union's second interception awarded the ball to Banks near midfield. Once again, the Panthers' D did its job and kept the Leopards off the board, but another Union three-and-out gave new life to Banks County

with 10:10 to play.

The Leopards answered with a 7-play, 73-yard drive, capped off by a 36-yard touchdown run, pulling the home team within five at 12-7 as the clock read 6:52 in the fourth.

"[Banks] ran a counter and they outnumbered us on the weak side and we just missed a couple of tackles," Allison said.

Another Union three-and-out gave the ball to the Leopards at their own 27 with 5:37 to play. Three plays later, on 4th and 12, senior defensive back J.J. Littles broke up a double-pass to set up the Panthers at the Leopards' 25-yard line.

Facing a fourth down of its own, Union County turned to Daniel, who hauled in a throwback screen from Helcher and raced untouched into the endzone from 24 yards out, putting the game out of reach at 19-7.

Helcher finished 11-of-21 for 124 yards, one score and two picks. He also rushed 10 times for 128 yards and a touchdown.

Daniel rushed six times for 9 yards and a score. He had two catches for 28 yards and a touchdown.

"Our plan was to get [Daniel] maybe seven or eight carries and 15 to 18 total plays," Allison said. "He got 18 plays but he didn't get seven carries because we had blocking [issues]."

"He hasn't played in six

weeks but near the end [of the game] he started to look like the Jonah of old. We're in a situation where we have two good running backs, but we also want to get the ball out wide to Kaston [Hemphill] and Keyton [Chitwood] more often and start executing better."

Clayton Lester paced the defense with 8 tackles, Hunter Young had six while Littles and Trace Wright had four stops each.

Aaron Helton and Underwood finished with 3 tackles for loss each; Kaston Hemphill recovered a fumble to go with 3 tackles. Connor Cook added 2 TFL and Elijah Helton had 1 TFL.

**Up next:** Union County hosts Elbert County at 7:30 p.m. Friday in a region showdown that will likely determine the No. 2 seed and home-field advantage in the first round of State.

The Blue Devils have lost four straight following a season-opening victory vs Whitfield Academy. Elbert also suffered a 55-28 loss at Commerce, but Coach Allison says the Blue Devils' 1-4 record doesn't accurately reflect their roster's talent level.

"They have a new coach but they're still the same animal," Allison said. "The offense is a little different and the defense plays more man-to-man, but they still have some really good players. Their speed and size on both sides of the ball is always a concern. All we can do is prepare and work our butts off to get ready for them."

Like Union County last Friday, Elbert is coming off consecutive bye weeks after COVID issues forced a cancellation of last Friday's meeting with Haralson County.



JJ Littles breaks up a fourth-down pass attempt. Photo/Todd Forrest

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high 6 kills, Saylor Noe added five, while Swartz and Allison had three apiece and Haley Noe chipped in one.

Fussell's 6 aces were also tops on the team. Saylor Noe had three, Allison, West and Whicker added 2 aces. Haley Noe finished with one.

Haley Noe turned in a team-high 32 digs; Saylor Noe and West had nine each. Whicker finished with 7 digs, Fussell and Allison added six each.

Whicker's 16 assists were tops on the team, while Swartz and Blocker accounted for one block each.

**Up next:** Union County will travel to Augusta on Wednesday for an Elite 8 showdown with the Davidson Fine Arts Magnet School.

DFA is the top seed from Area 2 and earned home-court vs. Union by way of the Georgia High School Association's universal coin toss. If the Panthers advance to the Final Four, a separate coin toss will be held to determine home court.

Wednesday's contest is tentatively scheduled for 4 p.m.

DFA currently sports an 11-7 record and hasn't dropped a set during the State tournament, but the two teams they defeated have combined for only 12 victories on the year.

Union County and DFA don't have a common opponent, but Oglethorpe County and Putnam County played a few teams from the Augusta area. And for what it's worth -- based on scores alone, which mean little -- DFA appears significantly better than Putnam but similar to Oglethorpe.



Union (top) celebrates a point during a thrilling second-set victory over Armuchee. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Cross County: Region Meet Thursday at Unicoi



Senior Luke Gambrell is looking to go out as a Region 8-AA Champion when Union County competes at Unicoi this week. The racing action gets underway at 1 p.m. Thursday in Helen. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Fall Sports Preview - Correction

Last month's North Georgia News Fall Sports Preview incorrectly spelled the name of senior cheer captain Braydi Burnett.

In the cheerleading section of the preview, Braydi's last name was incorrectly listed as "Burnette."

The correct spelling is "Burnett."

Braydi was also a member of the Union County High School 2020-21 Homecoming Court.



Captain Braydi Burnett

## Learn to play Pickleball

Learn to play Pickleball: Beginner's Lessons every Saturday, 10 AM (weather permitting). No charge and all equipment provided. Courts are located behind the Health Department. For more information contact: blairsvillepickleball@gmail.com.

## Local Racing Report: Tri-County

**By Blake Lynch  
Racing Reporter  
North Georgia News**

**Brasstown, NC** - Tri-County Racetrack hosted the biggest race of the season - the Tarheel 50 - \$10,000 Super Late Models and \$1,200, 602 Thunder Series.

Here are the top five from each division.

**Street Stock** - Coming in first was No.14 Charles Devine

Jr.. In second was No.91 Clint Watkins. Coming in third was No.169 Jim Weller. In fourth was No.12 Roger Beaver. Placing fifth was No.01 Jacob Lynch.

**FWD** - Coming in first was No.19r Sean Rice. In second was No.21T Trenton Moss. Coming in third was No.3 Josh Deese. Placing fourth was No.3 Jason Young. Coming in fifth was No.192r Robby Lynch.

**602 Thunder Series** - Coming in first was No.44 Bobby

Elkins. In second was No.88 Ricky Smith. Coming in third was No.28 Michael Barnett. Finishing in fourth was No.35 Dillon Daves. In fifth was No.51 Randy Dillard.

**Super Late Models** - Coming in first was No.76 Brandon Overton. Second went to No.25 Shane Clanton. Finishing in third was No.17m Michael McDowell. Coming in fourth was No.7 Ricky Weiss. In fifth was No.7m Donald McIntosh.