

Sports

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Panthers survive a thriller at North Hall to remain undefeated

By Todd Forrest
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CLERMONT – The Panthers improved to 7-0 overall and 2-0 in region play with an emotional 55-49 victory in front of an inhospitable home crowd at North Hall on Friday.

Union County was dealt a devastating blow in the early going when its leading scorer, senior Crawford Colwell was ejected with 3:38 to play in the first quarter. Sophomores Pierson Allison (21 points) and Sawyer Drake (19 points) would pick up the slack, however, combining for 40 points to lead the short-handed Panthers past the Trojans, beginning with a 20-7 onslaught to close the first half.

Trailing 6-2 at the midway point of the first, Crawford Colwell was ejected for a flagrant foul at the 3:38 mark after the official claimed, “he elbowed a (North Hall) player in the back of the head.” Union County Head Coach was hit with technical foul moments later for voicing his displeasure with the ejection.

“I sent the tape into the head of officiating and he said it shouldn’t have been an ejection,” Jones said. “Their feet just got tangled up and that’s why the (North Hall) guy went down.”

The Trojans went on to hit 2-of-4 from the line for an 8-2 advantage that turned into a 13-8 lead after one when North Hall’s Noah Holman hit an off-balance 16-footer at the buzzer.

The Trojans would extend its margin to nine at 21-12 with 5:27 left in the second but Union responded with six unanswered to spark a 20-7 run over the final 5:14 of the half.

Allison initiated the Panther rally with a floater in the paint, followed by a driving layup from Drake then two free throws from Allison to pull Union within three at 21-18. Candler Colwell sank two from the line to keep the deficit at three before North Hall scored on a putback to extend its lead to 25-20.

Drake went 2-of-2 at the line then turned a Trojan turnover into a deuce. Seconds later, Allison converted a steal into another layup for the Panthers’ first lead of the game, 26-25 with 1:52 before halftime.

Allison answered a North Hall layup with one of his own to regain the lead during the final minute. Senior Patrick Baggett capped off the Union surge with a



Sophomore Sawyer Drake scored 8 of his 19 points in the fourth quarter at North Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

3-point play when he was fouled on a layup after the Trojans coughed up the ball once again.

Leading 32-28 entering the third, a pair of dribble drives by Allison and one from senior Cole Davis led to three baskets in the paint and a 38-31 Union County advantage with 3:12 remaining in the third.

North Hall would respond with an 8-0 run to regain the lead 39-38, early in the fourth period but the Panthers quickly seized the momentum with a 10-0 run of their own.

The run opened with a slashing layup by Drake for a 40-39 lead. The next six points belonged to Allison with an and-one at the 5:12 mark, followed by a pull-up layup from the top of the key 39 seconds later. On the ensuing Trojan possession, Drake came away with a steal that led to a lay-in on the other end – spotting Union its largest lead at 48-39.

North Hall refused to go away and immediately drilled a trey to pull within six at the four-minute mark. Seconds later, the Panthers would miss the front-end of a 1-and-1, allowing the Trojans to pull within four with a putback at the 3:22 mark. Following a Union turnover, North Hall made it a one-possession game at 48-45 with a 1-for-2 trip to the charity stripe.

Reeling from six-unanswered Trojan points, the Panthers offense came up empty once more, then a foul sent North

Hall to the line for a 1-and-1 opportunity with 2:28 left. Fortunately for Union, they would misfire on the first attempt and Baggett delivered a dagger-trey 12 seconds later to stretch the lead back to six.

Prior to his clutch three, Baggett had missed every 3-point attempt on the night, but with ice water in his veins, he drained the biggest shot of the game to reignite his squad for the stretch run.

“He has the green light at all times,” Jones said. “He can miss five straight but it doesn’t matter, he can heat up in a hurry and make five straight.”

The Trojans weren’t finished as they scored on an offensive rebound to trim the Panther lead to four with 1:17 to play. Union missed another front-end of a 1-and-1 and North Hall went back inside for two more at the 1:00 mark.

Trailing by two, the Trojans had a chance to tie or take the lead but the Panthers forced North Hall into a turnover that resulted in two Drake free throws with 23 seconds left. With the home team on the ropes, Drake delivered the knockout with a steal that drew an intentional foul when he tried to throw down a one-handed slam with 8 seconds remaining.

Drake would miss both free throws but the Panthers kept possession, allowing the sophomore to redeem himself by sinking both attempts with 5 ticks

left on the clock.

“Drake and Allison came up big for us,” Jones said. “A couple of times I was telling them to slow it down but (Allison) hit a pull-up three and (Drake) drove inside for the and-one. After that I just sat down and kept my mouth shut. That was a big time performance from a couple of sophomores.”

Union County joins East Hall and Dawson County as the only unbeaten teams left in Region 7-AAA play and is the only team in the region with an unblemished overall record. The Panthers will host East Hall in the first game back from the Christmas Holidays on Jan. 3.

With Crawford Colwell out this week due to the GHSA’s mandatory two-game suspension that follows an ejection, Union will have its hands full trying to remain unbeaten heading into next week’s Battle of the States.

After Monday’s game was canceled, the Panthers will visit Class AAAA Gilmer (3-7) on Tuesday in a rematch from opening night. The Bobcats actually led by double-digits for much of the first half until an injury struck one of its key players and the Panthers regained the lead in the third and pulled away in the fourth. Gilmer also enters Tuesday on the upswing, fresh off a 90-56 rout of Region 7-AAA’s Lumpkin County on Saturday.

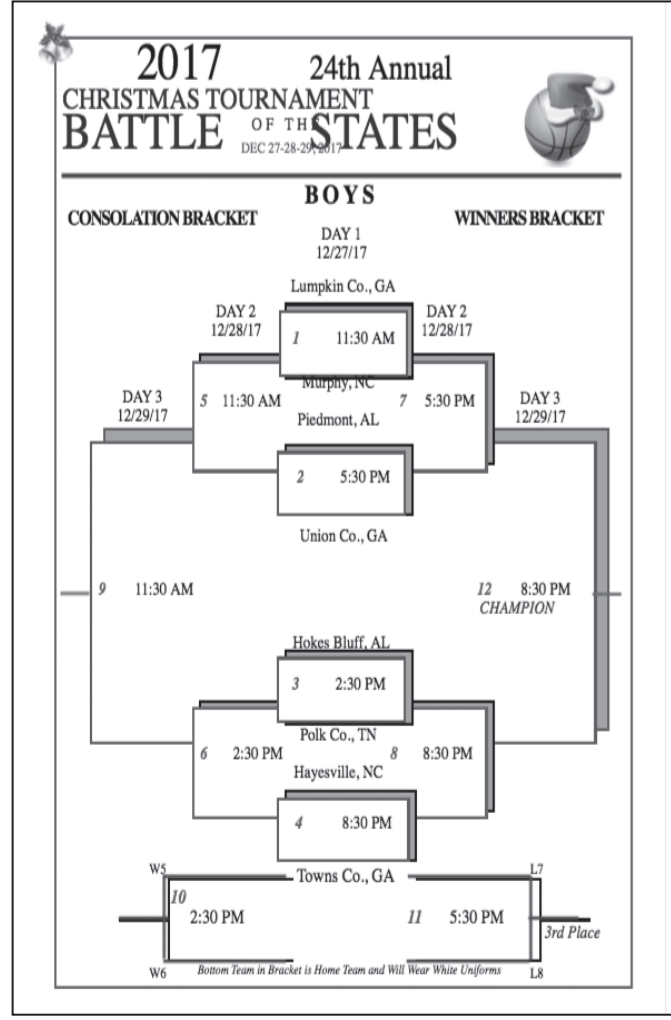
On Thursday, Union will host Pickens County, another Class AAAA squad who is cur-



Pierson Allison led all scorers with 21 at North Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

rently sporting a 3-5 record that includes an 80-79 win over Gilmer and a 70-46 blowout of Fannin County.

Tuesday at Gilmer the girls tip-off at 6 p.m. On Thursday the tip is scheduled for 7 p.m. vs Pickens at home.



North Hall too much for Lady Panthers; tough tests ahead this week

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CLERMONT - The Lady Panthers ran into a red-hot North Hall squad on Friday night and came out on the wrong end of a 58-36 score to drop to 4-3 overall and 1-1 in region play.

North Hall turned 28 Union County turnovers into 16 points while converting 16 offensive rebounds into 14 second chance points.

In the early going, the two squads were swapping leads with Union County holding an 11-9 edge late in the opening period before the Lady Trojans stormed ahead with a 10-2 run to take a 19-13 lead into the second.

A Bailey Daniel layup was followed by a pair of Brooke Dockrey buckets to give the Lady Panthers a 6-5 advantage. Later, sophomore Andelin Hill rattled home a three to regain the lead at 9-7, then Brooke Dockrey drove inside for a deuce to make it 11-9.

Unfortunately, sophomore post Kait McCarter was hit with her second foul at the 3:26 mark of the first and was forced to sit. The Lady Trojans would hit 8-of-8 at the line to help open up its six-point advantage after one.

A short jumper by Daniel early in the second brought Union to within four but North Hall answered with a trey, followed by a putback then a steal-and-score for a 26-15 lead. A pair of putbacks by Hill momentarily stopped the bleeding but the Lady Trojans continued to dominate the offensive boards and capitalize on turnovers to hold a 30-19 advantage at the break.

Junior Aubree Pack and Brooke Dockrey each scored



Jordan Rogers goes up for two during the second half at North Hall on Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

early in the third to keep Union County within single digits but North Hall continued to crash the offensive glass and extended its lead to 39-24 after three. The Lady Panthers struggled at the line during the third, missing 5-of-6 attempts.

The first five points of the fourth went to the Lady Trojans to open up a 20-point lead before a free throw by junior Jordan Rogers and five-unanswered points by McCarter pulled Union to within 15 at the four-minute mark.

McCarter was tagged with her fifth foul moments later and North Hall put the game away with a 7-0 run.

Hill led the Lady Panthers with 10 points, 4 rebounds and a blocked shot. Brooke Dockrey scored 8

points with one assist.

McCarter ended up with 5 points and 6 boards; Daniel had 4 points and 5 rebounds.

Pack also scored 4 points with 6 boards and 2 assists. Rogers added 4 points and 4 boards; Wischmeyer had 1 point, 6 rebounds, and 2 steals; Adeline Dockrey had 1 rebound, 1 assist, and 1 steal.

The Lady Panthers shot just 1-of-6 from beyond the arc while North Hall connected on 6-of-29.

The Lady Trojans hit 16-of-19 free throws - making more than Union County (9-of-15) was attempted.

The Lady Panthers shot 32 percent from the floor (13-for-41). Meanwhile, North Hall has now won five of its last six games with the lone defeat

coming at top-ranked GAC.

Union will return to action on Tuesday when they visit Gilmer County, who they defeated 44-39 at home on opening night. The Lady Bobcats have won six-of-nine since their loss to Union, including a 55-53 win over Lumpkin County on Saturday. One of the losses, however, was a 42-39 defeat to Fannin County back on Nov. 20.

On Thursday they will host Pickens County, who is currently 8-0 and ranked third in Class AAAA. The Lady Dragons already own a pair of one-sided victories over Gilmer (57-24) and Fannin County (53-29).

Tip-off is scheduled for 6 p.m. Tuesday at Gilmer and 7 p.m. Thursday vs Pickens.



Sophomore Andelin Hill scored 10 at North Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

