

Sports

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Darlington edges Lady Panthers 68-64 in first round of State

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With Mother Nature wreaking havoc across north Georgia, the Union County Lady Panthers and the Darlington School waited until Saturday to duke it out in the opening round of the Class AA State Tournament in Blairsville.

Despite record low temperatures all week and a four-day delay, both offenses remained hot for the majority of the contest and showed no signs of rust. Union hit 10-of-29 from long distance and Darlington connected on seven treys.

"I'm proud of our girls," Union Head Coach David Tucker said. "We laid it all on the line and lost by four. We made our shots and everybody played hard. That's the way a State Tournament game should be. I have no complaints about anything, but it was just one of those nights."

The dagger in the back of the Lady Panthers was the Lady Tigers' 8-for-9 performance at the foul line in the fourth quarter. When the smoke cleared and the final buzzer sounded, it was Darlington that was advancing to the second round, with a 68-64 victory.

"I knew they had good shooters but what surprised me was how well they could pass the ball," Coach Tucker said. "When there was an open player, they got them the ball and they made the shots."

Coach Tucker got 22 points from senior Lisa Nalaschi, who connected on 4-of-7 from 3-point range, and hauled in 9 rebounds. Senior Brooke Maddox scored 17 points, dished off 6 assists, and recorded 5 steals, while senior Kaitlyn Day scored 10 points and grabbed 5 boards.

The Lady Panthers came out firing on all cylinders and put up 19 points in the opening frame. Nalaschi posted 8 points, Day had 6 points, Maddox hit a pair of free throws, and junior Layne Colwell nailed a trey to build a 19-14 lead entering the second period.

Union would cool off dramatically in the final 8 minutes of the half and were unable to connect on a field goal, allowing the Lady Tigers to



The Union County Lady Panthers after finishing third in the Battle of the States. Despite getting knocked out in the first round of State, the Lady Panthers provided its fans with a memorable season, reaching State for the 17th time in school history. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

take a 27-26 advantage into the intermission.

Four free throws from Colwell, two from Maddox, and one by Nalaschi were the only points the Lady Panthers could generate in the second frame.

The Union offense quickly defrosted and put up 38 points in the second half. Unfortunately, Darlington scored 41 points over the final 16 minutes.

The Lady Tigers were led by junior Keara Evans who posted 12 points in the third quarter, en route to a game-high 24 points.

The Lady Panthers were led by Maddox who scored 10 points in the third but Darlington was able to extend its lead to 50-46 entering the final frame.

Union got a pair of treys by Nalaschi, who scored 8 points in the fourth. Junior Kim Coyne connected from downtown, Maddox recorded 3 points off a basket and a free throw, and Colwell chipped in a bucket.

The fourth quarter saw Darlington hit 8-of-9 from the charity stripe, but overall, the Lady Panthers and Lady Tigers were dead-even at the line. Both teams hit 18-of-24 (75 percent) at the charity stripe.

Union's scoring output of 64 points matches the fourth highest total of the season. Entering the Darlington contest, the Lady Panthers were 12-0 when scoring 60-or-more points. The season's highest point totals are as follows: vs Towns County 76-24, vs Washington Wilkes 65-37, vs Social Circle 65-15, at Greene County 64-16.

SCORING: Nalaschi 22, Maddox 17, Day 10, La. Colwell 9, Coyne 3, Stroman 3 REBOUNDS: Nalaschi 9, La. Colwell 6, Day 5, Maddox 4, Stroman 4, Coyne 1, Lariscy 1 ASSISTS: Maddox 6, Nalaschi 1, Stroman 1, Day 1, STEALS: Maddox 5, La. Colwell 1, Coyne 1, Stroman 1, BLOCKS: Stroman 1 UC SHOOTING: 2-pt shooting 10-for-18 (56%) 3-pt shooting 10-for-29 (35%)

Overall 20-for-47 (43%) Free throws 18-for-24 (75%)

Union County finished its 2014-15 campaign with a 19-7 overall record and a 10-1 Region record. They just missed a 20-win season despite playing two fewer games than the guys, due to Riverside Military Academy being an all-boys school.

"We did everything that we could do," Coach Tucker said. "We were never out of a game and were always in it. We never quit. This season was all positive. The way the parents and the community got behind this team, it was all positive."

"Everybody gave a full effort, night-in, and night-out. I have no excuses, no complaints and nothing negative to say. Our girls just got after it."

After suffering a heartbreaking loss to Rabun County a week earlier, Coach Tucker had no worries that his girls would put it behind them and leave it all on the floor vs Darlington.

"They were hurt (after

Rabun) but we didn't make any excuses. The girl (from Rabun) made an unbelievable shot but we were right there, and once again, we played hard. When we took the floor on Saturday, we did all that we could do and laid it all on the line."

"Coming into the season, I knew that we would be good,

but I didn't know we'd be this good. We had a chance to win every single game we played this year. When you have the kids and the parents behind you, that's what makes it fun."

Union's seven losses is the fewest by a Lady Panthers squad since the 1993-94 Region Championship squad that finished 24-7 and reached the Elite 8.

In recent history, the 2012-13 team finished with eight losses. The 2011-12 squad saw the Lady Panthers' last 20-win squad with 21, but they also dropped nine games.

Union's 2007-08 team finished 20-8 with the late Coach Mike West at the helm. That group reached the State Tournament for the first time in seven years and is responsible for bringing Lady Panthers basketball back to life, launching the program from the cellar of 8-AA, and starting the recent trend of seven State Tournament appearances in eight years.

Prior to that season, the Lady Panthers finished with double-digit losses from 2002-2007.

The 2000-01 State Runner Up squad finished with a 23-8 record. Two of those losses came to the eventual State Champion, Greater Atlanta Christian.

As for the rest of Region 8-AA last week: Union was the only team to not lose by double-digits. Top seeded Rabun fell on their homecourt, 61-51 to Dade County. Model smoked Greene County 70-29 and Armuchee took out Oglethorpe County 63-49.



Coach Tucker and the Lady Panthers during a timeout. Photo/Todd Forrest

State Tourney: Panthers come up short at Coosa despite red-hot start

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Rome - The Union County Panthers (17-12) fell victim to the Coosa Eagles last Saturday night in the opening round of the Class AA State Tournament.

Union got a game-high 17 points from Kyle Hamby, 16 from Tyler Odom, and 15 from Hunter Hughes, but it wasn't enough as Coosa held on 68-62.

"I thought we fought hard," Union County Head Coach Casey Jones said. "I told the guys before the game that if we're going to get beat, then we need to get beat by a better team, not because we beat ourselves. I thought they left it all on the floor but just came up short."

However, in the early going, the Panthers blind-sided the Eagles and jumped out to a 14-2 advantage.

Coosa (21-6) called a timeout to regroup and went on a 11-2 run to close the quarter and enter the second frame trailing 16-13.

Junior Chase Shook led the Panthers with 6 points in the first

period, while Hughes hit a trey and a pair from the charity stripe for 5 points.

The Eagles continued to wield the hot hand and used a 21-12 second quarter to take the lead early in the period and pull away for a little bit of breathing room going into halftime at 34-28.

Odom and Hughes each hit a trey in the second and Hamby added a basket and a 1-for-2 trip to the line for 3 points.

After a slow start for the Panthers coming out of the break, the third quarter was played almost dead-even, but that didn't bode well for the Panthers who were trying to erase a deficit that grew to as many as 14 points in the second half.

"They (Coosa) have seven seniors and they showed a lot of maturity," Coach Jones said. "They came out in the third quarter and continued to press and caused us to turn it over a few times."

Entering the final frame, Union was still within striking distance at 47-39.

The Panthers mounted a furious rally in the final 8 minutes

and trimmed the Coosa lead to four but could get no closer.

Union was led by Odom and Hamby's 9 points each in the fourth. Hamby connected on three treys in the quarter. The Panthers' seniors refused to end their careers quietly and threw everything they had at the home team.

Odom went 4-for-4 at the line, to go along with a deuce and

a trey over the final 8 minutes.

Senior Jacob Rogers knocked down a trey in the fourth and Hughes went 2-for-2 at the line.

The Eagles were led by junior guard Stephvon Faust's 17 points - matching Hamby for the game-high.

SCORING: Hamby 17, Odom 16, Hughes 15, Shook 8,



Panthers huddle before the opening tip. Photo/Todd Forrest

Rogers 3, Drake 2

"We lose six seniors and we're going to miss them, they are a great group of guys," Coach Jones said. "I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to coach them, not only in high school, but in middle school, as well."

The Panthers finish the 2014-15 season with 17 wins and their second consecutive trip to the State Tournament.

"This year we did things a little bit different and didn't set any goals in the preseason," Coach Jones said. "We said that we want to put forth the effort that we needed to reach our potential."

"However, as we got close to the State Tournament we began to talk a little bit about reaching the State Tournament and trying to win a game and reach the Sweet 16. We came up a little short on that goal but we're not going to write the season off and say it wasn't a success."

The Union County men have reached the State Tournament 17 times - equaling the Lady Panthers' total.

"I told our guys that reaching State in back-to-back years is something that we're proud of. That's something that we haven't accomplished in 12 years (2003)."

Union County Head Coach Casey Jones also becomes the first Panthers basketball coach to reach the State playoffs in each of his first two years as the head coach.

Prior to this season, Jones joined former Head Coaches Jerry Helton (1982) and Gary Barnes (2003) as the third coach to reach State in his first year at the helm.

He also becomes the third Panthers head coach to reach back-to-back State Tournaments, joining Earl Odom and Jones' former coach, Ben Corley. Next season, Jones could join Odom as the only head coaches to reach three consecutive State Tournaments.

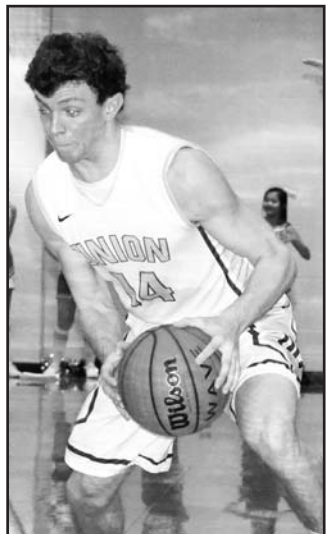
As for the rest of Region 8-AA in the State Playoffs. No. 1 Greene County beat Armuchee 83-75 before getting eliminated by Thomasville in round two. No. 2 Rabun defeated Darlington 83-69 but lost to Seminole County in round two. No. 4 Washington Wilkes fell 72-52 at No. 1 Model.



Senior Lake Arnick



Senior Jacob Rogers



Senior Tyler Odom



Senior Hunter Hughes



Senior Ralston Drake



Senior Kyle Hamby