

Sports

See the Sports Section at nghanews.com

Panther defense slams the door on Rebels 23-7

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nghanews.com

Friday night a Purple Swarm Defense did a number on the visiting Fannin County Rebels' offense.

The Union County Panthers made a 23-7 halftime lead hold up for victory against their former Region rivals.

The Panthers scored 16 unanswered points in the final six minutes of the first half to break loose from a 7-7 tie.

Senior quarterback T Bentley accounted for all three Union County touchdowns — throwing for two and rushing for another. Senior kicker Eric Hougrand nailed a 29-yard field goal with 10 seconds remaining in the first half to cap of the Panther's scoring for the evening.

Like last week, Union didn't score a point in the second half but with the Panther defense swarming all evening, not very much was required from the offense.

The Panthers took their opening drive 67 yards, punctuated by a 25-yard pass from Bentley to senior Cody Davenport at the 9:22 mark to take an early 7-0 lead.

"I just snuck around behind the linebacker and found a hole in the coverage, and T saw me and made a good throw," Davenport said.

The Rebels would take the ensuing drive all the way to the Union 17-yard line where the defense would force Fannin to turn it over on downs at the 15.

Following a quick Panther first down, Bentley's pass to senior Jared Crosky fell incomplete, but was ruled a fumble. Fannin scooped up the loose ball and rumbled down to



Chase Barnett and CJ Byers combine for a tackle on a Fannin County ball carrier. Photo/Todd Forrest

the 19-yard line where the Rebels' would take over, and one play later, Peyton Satterfield rushed for a Fannin score and the game was tied at 7 with 2:40 left in the first quarter.

A bad snap would derail the Panthers' next drive but the defense would force a Rebel fumble on the Union 38-yard line.

Bentley went to work, and on third down he found sophomore Jacob Rogers, who took the reception inside the



Sophomore Robert Prunier jams a Fannin County wide receiver at the line of scrimmage. Photo/Todd Forrest

Fannin 15-yard line, Faced with 3rd-and-9, Bentley was able to scramble for a first down, then finish the drive by taking it in himself from the 4-yard line.

Leading 14-7, Union took advantage of another fumble when sophomore Brett Dietz pounced on the loose football. Minutes later, Bentley found sophomore Robert Prunier on a 45-yard touchdown strike to increase the Union lead to 20-7 at the 4:47 mark



Matthew Spiwak and Luther Jones smother a Fannin County running back. Photo/Todd Forrest

of the first half.

The Panther defense held strong against Fannin's wishbone attack and stopped the Rebels on fourth down. The Panthers would use the final 2:22 to move inside the red zone to set up Hougrand's 29-yarder in the final seconds.

On Fannin's opening drive of the third quarter, the Panthers defense made an early statement when Matthew Spiwak picked off a Rebel pass at the Union 37-yard line.



Senior Wide Receiver Lalo Rivera. Photo/Todd Forrest

However, the Panthers were victimized by two penalty flags and were forced to punt.

Following the punt, Davenport picked up a key sack on second down to put the Rebels in third-and-long.

"It was a designed blitz and he never saw me coming," Davenport said. "The defensive line shifted and their tackle didn't see me."

On the next play, it was senior Craig Jones applying the pressure on Rebel quarterback Trevor Stone, forcing the junior to throw another pick, this time Jonah Whitmer got in on the action, intercepting the Rebel pass in the end zone.

Although a penalty flag brought the Panthers back to the 5-yard line, the offense was able to win the field position battle by picking up a few first downs.

"We did a nice job when we got backed up deep, by driving the ball out to the 50," Coach Brian Allison said. "It was a nice job by our offense, we didn't need to be punting from there. I thought we played solid."

During that drive, Bent-

ley went down with cramps and sophomore Ralston Drake ran five plays for the Panthers, resulting in one first down as the third quarter came to a close.

The fourth quarter would see both squads exchange punts with a Craig Jones sack forcing the second Rebel punt of the quarter.

Union melted the clock for the remainder of the game and left Fannin with just over a minute to play and not enough time for the Rebels to mount a comeback.

The Panthers improve to 2-0 on the young season and the win means these seniors will leave Union County High School with a 7-1 combined record over Towns and Fannin.

"That's how you do it, guys," a fired up Luther Jones told his teammates after the game. "It felt great. I'm glad we did it for the seniors. It feels great to win this for them."

As for the Union County seniors, their experience was the difference, as is usually the case in a rivalry game.

Bentley went 15-18 with 227 yards and two touchdowns. The senior signal caller also rushed 17 times for 65 yards.

"For the second week in a row, T has played pretty well," Coach Allison said. "He may have missed a few reads at the end, but overall, he played well."

Lalo Rivera finished with six catches for 70 yards, Prunier and Davenport each caught two passes and scored. Josh Kim hauled in two passes for 41 yards and Clay Burnette pulled in a 19-yard reception.

Sophomore Chase Barnett rushed for 39 yards and senior Jonathan Hughes had three carries for 22 yards, despite missing the entire second

See *Football*, page 11A

Lady Panthers clinch top-two in 8-AA Tourney

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nghanews.com

The Class AA 9th-ranked Union County Lady Panthers have guaranteed themselves no lower than a No. 2 seed in the 8-AA Region Tournament later this month.

The Lady Panthers will host Social Circle on Tuesday for Senior Night and a win will result in Union County getting a No. 1 seed and playing host to the Region Tournament. A loss means a second place finish but still provides a first round bye to Union in the tournament.

Last week the Lady Panthers faced non-region foe, Dawson County, hosted Rabun County, then traveled to Watkinsville over the weekend for the Veterans Tournament.

Union finished the weekend with a 2-1 record despite rain cancelling Union's final two games on Saturday.

Dawson County 6 Lady Panthers 1

Junior Chelsey Cook threw four shutout innings against Jenna Abbott and Class AAA's 5th-ranked Dawson County Tigers last week.

Abbott, an Auburn commit also tossed four shutout innings but in the end it was the Lady Tigers prevailing with the 6-1 victory thanks to a four-run sixth.

Despite taking the loss, Cook didn't allow Abbott to get the win.

"Facing Abbott will help us in the post season, Coach Jessica Stewart said. "Dawson is a very good team. They are ranked in AAA and two of our four losses have come from them. I think Chelsey did a great job on the mound. We didn't help her out much at the plate. We will face Dawson again on Monday and hopefully have a better outcome."

After Dawson got on the board first with a run in the fifth, the Lady Panthers got it back in the bottom half of the inning following a Courtney Busbee walk, a bunt by Carly Adams and a base-hit from Bailey Byers.

Dawson, sparked by two bunt singles to open the inning, answered with four in the sixth and one on the seventh.

Madison Rich got Union's first hit of the game and added a walk later. Byers and Madison Garrett also added



Sophomore catcher Courtney Busbee blocks the plate before tagging out a Dawson County runner. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior third baseman Amber Seeba (#8) attempts to snag a foul ball over the railing of the Dawson County dugout. Photo/Todd Forrest

base-hits and Karly Nix scored a run for the Lady Panthers.

Cook struck out two, walked seven and allowed 10 hits, but fell victim to three Union County fielding errors.

Abbott struck out nine of the first 10 batters she faced until Rich's single. The lefty finished with 11 strikeouts in four innings of work.

Lady Panthers 7 Rabun County 4

Union County dug its way out of a 3-0 hole with



Junior pitcher Chelsey Cook Photo/Todd Forrest

seven unanswered runs thanks to a 3-for-3 day from Bailey Byers. The senior pitcher drove in three runs to help her own cause while striking out four in seven innings.

The Lady Wildcats opened the game with four consecutive hits that included a three-run homer to take an early lead.

Union responded with a run in its first at bat when Hannah Hughes doubled home Crystal Busbee.

The Lady Panthers took the lead in the third following another two-bagger from Hughes, a RBI single from Courtney Busbee, a single by Madison Garrett, and a bases clearing double from Byers.

"Our team has proved several times this season how resilient they are," Coach Stewart said. "They do not get down when the score isn't in their favor. It seems to motivate them to work harder. I think Byers was just a little shaky from having almost a week off but after the first inning she got loose and settled down and pitched a good game."

They would add three more in the sixth when Court-

ney Busbee singled and later scored, Garrett reached on an error, Byers doubled, and Amber Seeba walked.

Lady Panthers 2 Elbert County 5

WATKINSVILLE-Union County opened last weekend's Veterans Tournament with a 5-2 loss to Class AAA's Elbert County.

Shawna Brown's 3-for-3 game wasn't enough to get Union past the Lady Blue Devils on Friday.

The Lady Panthers took a 1-0 lead into the bottom of the fourth where Elbert scored five runs to secure the win.

Crystal Busbee walked to open the game and later scored on a Brown single.

Byers still held a 1-0 lead until the senior pitcher allowed five consecutive hits, all coming with two outs in the inning.

In Union's final at bat, Hughes would leadoff with a double and would score on a Courtney Busbee sacrifice fly.

Unfortunately that was all the offense Union could muster in the inning as they fell short in the opening game of the tournament.

Byers and Crystal Busbee combined to pitch the entire game for Union with Crystal Busbee throwing the final 1 1/3 innings. Byers took the loss while allowing eight hits and two walks.

Seeba provided Union with a double and Hayle King also reached on a base hit for Union.

Lady Panthers 10 Bryan County 5

Union County responded to its loss by overcoming a 5-1 deficit with four in the third in-

See *softball*, Page 11A



Madison Garrett connects vs Dawson. Photo/Todd Forrest

UCHS Football Schedule

Sept 14 vs Andrews, NC (Recognizing Middle School Team)
Sept 21 - Bye Week
Sept 28 vs Washington Wilkes (Recognizing Rec Dept Teams)
Oct 5 @ Oglethorpe County
Oct 12 vs Riverside Military Academy (Homecoming)
Oct 19 @ Greene County
Oct 26 @ Rabun County
Nov 2 vs Social Circle (Senior Night)
Nov 9 @ Jefferson

Joe
Collins



Tips from the Range

A score that qualifies as a legal USGA round of golf consists of 18 holes. You are only allowed 14 clubs under the rules of golf if you are using a stipulated round to confirm or establish your handicap. Your handicap is based on an average score total of at least 10 legal rounds. The score of each round is the base number used to confirm a USGA handicap. Nothing affects this base score more than the "short game".

When we talk about the short game, we are talking about what we do on and around the green. Chipping is the act of hitting really short shots from the edge of the green and trying to get the ball as close to the flag as possible. Putting is in direct association with the ball lying on the green and our efforts to roll said ball into the hole. These short shots have the most positive or negative influence in relation to our total score of any of the shots we hit in a legal round of golf. Trust me on this!

You are only allowed 14 clubs as I mentioned earlier. What is the only club that one uses, theoretically, on every hole? Answer: the putter. If the putter is the most used club in a given round then it will probably have the biggest influence on your score. If short putts are easier than long putts, then chipping becomes the second biggest influence on your score. Get the picture of how important the short game is? The short game really affects your total score and by relation your handicap.

It's hard to be consistent with your short game unless you play a lot of golf and even then it's difficult. The fundamentals we use in performing the short game are based on one concept and that is acceleration. The club must be speeding up as it goes through impact on a short shot. If it's slowing down, then you will have problems.

The proper fundamentals of correctly hitting a chip shot are simple. First, place almost all your weight on the front foot and open your stance to the line you want the ball to travel on. This line will be determined by the

slope and speed of the green. You must play the curvature of the green with a chip the same way you would a putt. Your feet will typically be closer together than on a full shot. Next, place your hands in front of the ball with the grip of the club ahead of the club head. Use the same grip you would use to hit a full shot. Your hands will stay in front of the club head all the way through the shot. Never let the club head outrun the hands. Finally, use only your shoulders to move the club not your wrist and hands. Keep the backswing short and accelerate through the impact area while keeping your eye on the ball until it is gone on its way.

The fundamentals of putting are simple but very difficult to do correctly. First, find a balanced stance the same way you would on a long shot. Center yourself over the ankles with your weight distributed equally from the front of your feet to the heels. Next, let your arms fall limp under your shoulders to determine the placement of the putter grip in relation to your stance. Grip the putter with a reverse overlap so that the forward index finger is lapped over the bottom hand fingers. Work with this concept because grips are very independent from golfer to golfer. The point is that the forward wrist never breaks down. This will cause the putter head to close and you will pull the putt. Most importantly never move your head until the ball is rolling down the intended line. Head movement is the number one fault of a bad putt. Finally, use your shoulders to move the putter head and not your hands and arms. The small muscles of the hands and arms are extremely detrimental to a good stroke.

Practice is the key to maintaining a solid short game and it does not have to be done on the course. Putting and chipping at home on the carpet drives my wife crazy but it is the only way that I can get enough practice in to keep my short game sharp. Besides, she calms down when I bring home some "skins" money and take her out to dinner.

Try these fundamentals and hopefully you will lower your scores but remember that practice is the key. For every hour you practice swinging, spend two hours on your short game.

Good luck and I will see you on the course!