

Sports

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Ice cold second half seals Lady Panthers' fate in BOTS Championship

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Hiawassee - The Union County Lady Panthers shot the ball well for a half but ran out of bullets in the second half in a 69-35 loss to Dawson County in the Battle of the States Championship Game.

After hitting 11 treys the night before, Union hit six from long distance in the first half but eventually succumbed to a very deep Dawson County squad from Class AAA.

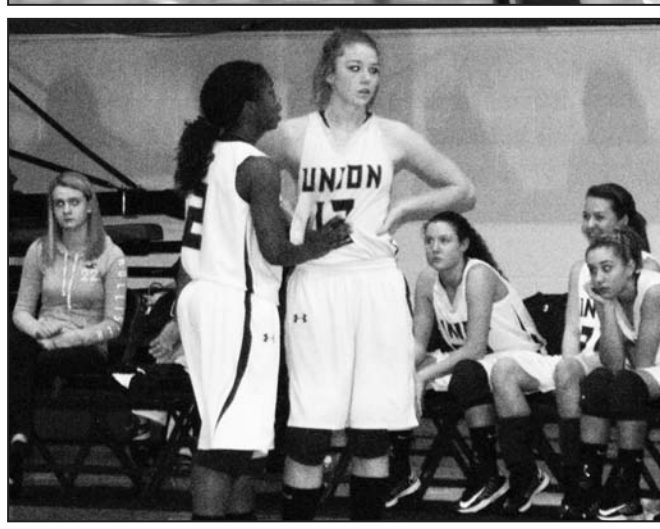
The Lady Tigers held a 39-30 lead at the break before blowing things open with a 20-2 third quarter that saw Union County go 7 minutes and 42 seconds without a point. Dawson would limit the Lady Panthers to three free-throws in the fourth quarter as they took home the championship trophy.

"Union County can be proud," Coach David Tucker said. "These girls will give it all they got every time out and that's something I'm proud of and something we can all be proud of."

Some of Union's momentum from the Towns County game carried over into the next game as the Lady Panthers opened with three straight treys giving Union a 9-4 lead. Dawson



The Union County Lady Panthers in action vs Dawson County in the BOTS finals. Photos by Lowell Nicholson and Todd Forrest



son rallied for seven straight to snatch the lead but four straight points from Jeanelle Arnold tied things back up at 13-13.

Dawson stretched its lead to 20-13 but a trey from Zollinger made it a four-point game after a quarter.

A trey by Shawna Brown got Union within one at 20-19 just 14 seconds into the second period until a quick 10-zip run from Dawson made it a 30-19 game with 6:09 to play in the first half. A bucket by Hannah Hughes, a trey and four free throws from Arnold, and a put back by Carly Adams kept Union within nine points at halftime.

Arnold scored all 14 of her team-high scoring performance in the first half, the All-Tournament selection also led the Lady Panthers with 2 steals. Zollinger finished with 6 points and 4 assists, Adams had 5 points, Brown scored 4 points and grabbed 4 boards, Hughes added 3 points and 4 rebounds.

Allie Stroman had a free throw and Ariel Maurer finished with 2 blocks.

Union will visit Murphy, NC on Thursday at 6 p.m. to face a Lady Bulldog squad that finished last in the Battle of the States Tournament before hosting Region 8-AA foe Greene County at 7 p.m. on Friday.

Panthers surge past Hayesville

By Todd Forrest
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Hiawassee - Union County answered the bell on Saturday following their first loss of the season and responded with a 62-56 victory over a 10-2 Hayesville, NC squad.

Zach Odom once again topped the ante on Day Three, delivering another career-high with 29 points as Union expunged a seven-point Yellow Jacket lead thanks to a 19-6 run in the final 5:39 of the game.

With the game tied at 43-43 entering the final frame, Hayesville appeared to have seized control with a 7-0 run to open the fourth. Rhett McCombs would nail a trey from the wing bringing Union back to within four. The Panther guard would then suffer from a pair of setbacks that only sparked his Panther teammates. McCombs, already playing through a sickness was hit hard from behind while chasing a loose ball that resulted in a no-call by the officials. On the ensuing Jacket possession, McCombs suffered from a brutal screen that laid out the senior at the top-of-the-key.

With McCombs dazed, Union Coach David Tucker called a timeout and gathered his troops. Apparently, the two shots on McCombs was just what the doctor ordered for No. 2, and the rest of the Panthers.

Following a Hayesville free throw, an inspired C.J. Byers, who had been quiet all night, went to work inside and scored two straight buckets, making it a 51-50 game at the 3:17 mark. Moments later, McCombs nailed a trey, giving Union the lead with 2:31 to play. The Panthers would force a Jacket turnover, resulting in two free-throws from McCombs.

Hayesville got within two points but Odom would rip out the Yellow Jacket stingers and watch the bees drop one-by-one along with each free throw sank in the waning moments. Odom went 4-for-4 at the line in the final 71 seconds as Union improved to 11-1 and avenged two ugly losses to Hayesville last season when Odom was out with a knee injury.

"We beat a good team tonight but we are a good team too," Coach David Tucker said. "These last two games showed what kind of character these boys have. I'm proud of these guys tonight."

Odom added 3 steals and a 13-for-13 performance at the line to go along with his 29-point outing. McCombs scored 10 of his 22 points in the final 5:39 while adding 3 steals.

James Rowe had another solid all around performance, leading the way with 9 rebounds, 4 assists, 4 steals, and chipped in 4 points. Byers scored four while hauling in 6 boards. Dylan Coyne also



James Rowe sends back a Jacket shot attempt. Photo/Todd Forrest



Zach Odom is fouled early in the game. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



Rhett McCombs was named to the All Tournament Team after scoring 22 points in the win over Hayesville. Photo/Todd Forrest

produced 4 steals and grabbed 7 rebounds.

Union County was back at the gym at 7:30 a.m Monday morning getting ready for a

rematch at Murphy, NC on Thursday and its first Region 8-AA contest of the season on Friday, when Union hosts Greene County at 7 p.m.

Purple reigns in third meeting

By Todd Forrest
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Hiawassee - The Union County Lady Panthers knocked down 11 three-pointers and erased a 17-4 deficit en route to a thrilling 65-56 victory over the previously unbeaten Towns County Lady Indians.

Trailing 31-30 early in the second half, the Lady Panthers torched Towns County with a 14-2 run sparked by the hard nosed defense of Jeanelle Arnold and the sharpshooting of Lauren Zollinger, Hannah Hughes, and Madison Rich.

Leading 47-39 entering the fourth, Zollinger opened the quarter with a corner jumper, followed by a trey from Arnold, and another trey from Zollinger, for good measure.

Zollinger led all scorers with 21 points.

With 6:50 to play, the Lady Panthers held a commanding 55-39 lead. Towns narrowed the gap to 10 points at 55-45 then both teams exchanged a free throw and a field goal to keep it a double-digit game inside the 2:00 mark.

Arnold went 1-for-2 from the line, giving Union a 59-48 lead with 1:31 to play. The Lady Indians nailed a quick three, then a Lady Panther turnover resulted in a quick bucket and Union looked up and saw its lead trimmed to six points.

Arnold went back to the line where the senior again hit 1-of-2 and following a pair of Lady Indian misses, Zollinger sank two from the stripe, and Hughes hit one, stretching Union's lead back to 10 with 33 seconds left.

The win over Towns was just Union's second in the last eight meetings but Union goes into the off season with a win over Towns for the second consecutive season. The difference



Union County heated up in a hurry from the outside during a second half flurry of 3-pointers. Photos by Todd Forrest

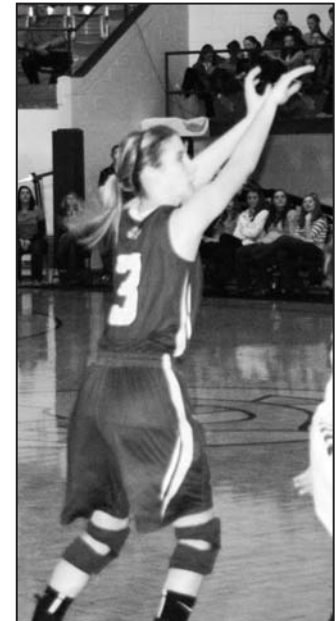
this time around was Union's no holds barred defensive approach, led by Arnold, that resulted in Union sticking dagger after dagger into the Lady Indians in the form of transition 3-pointers.

"We can shoot," Coach David Tucker said after the game. "But we had a pretty good game plan coming in, especially on the defensive end. Everybody played hard and that's all you can ask and just let the chips fall. But we shot the ball well and played good defense."

Another part of the game plan that worked to perfection was allocating more of the ball handling duties to Arnold, that allowed Zollinger to put up 21 points and 6 assists after only scoring 17 points with 3 assists in the first two meetings with Towns combined.

"Jeanelle didn't get into foul trouble tonight and that was a big thing," he said. "We haven't been able to use her for an entire game yet, so having her on the floor was a good thing."

Arnold finished with 12 points, 6 rebounds, 4 assists, and 3 steals.



Early on it looked as if Towns would cruise to another easy victory over Union but the Lady Panthers would have none of it. Union rallied from a 13-point hole with eight unanswered to close the first quarter. Two treys from Zollinger and a bucket by Arnold got Union to within five at 17-12 after one.

A Carly Adams lay in to open the second frame pulled Union to within three and a 3-pointer from sophomore Kaitlyn Day moved the Lady Panthers to within two points.

Towns County answered Union's spurt with an 8-0 run of their own, but consecutive treys from Day and Zollinger, a free throw from Hughes and a late trey by Adams drew Union to within two points at the break.

Hughes added 12 points, seven from the line in the Union win. Day scored 6, Rich and Adams had 5 points each, and Shawna Brown had 4 points.

Sophomore Ariel Maurer had another stellar defensive performance, grabbing 6 boards, blocking 6 shots, and picking up 2 steals.



Seniors Shawna Brown and Hannah Hughes lead Union County off the floor following their victory over Towns County. Brown, Hughes, Jeanelle Arnold, and Carly Adams will leave UCHS on a winning note vs the Lady Indians. Photo/Todd Forrest