

Sports

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Defense and special teams spark Panthers in 52-19 rout

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The Union County Panthers are 5-0 for the first time since 2001 following a 52-19 beatdown of Social Circle.

The Panthers scored in all phases of the game but it was the defense and special teams that began the scoring onslaught.

On the Redskins' first possession of the game, junior safety Andrew Brown scooped up a fumble on the far sideline and 45 yards later he put Union on the board at 7-0.

On Social Circle's ensuing possession, the Panthers defense forced a three-and-out. On the punt attempt, sophomore Bo Lynch broke free around the right side and blocked the kick, then carried it to the Redskins 55-yard line.

On the Panthers' first play from scrimmage, senior Chase Barnett took the handoff and powered his way into the endzone from five yards out.

Following another Social Circle three-and-out and punt, Union took over on their own 37-yard line and on second down, Barnett broke loose for a 22-yard carry. Four plays later, junior quarterback Joseph Mancuso connected with junior receiver Sam Gilbert for a 23-yard scoring strike - spotting the Panthers to a 21-0 lead.

The Redskins offense was unable to put together three first downs when they took over at their own 20 but the drive would stall. However, an excellent punt pinned Union at their own 1-yard line with 2:44 to play in the first.

On first down, sophomore Nic Rodriguez, who led the Panthers in rushing during the game, tore off a 28-yard gain, then after a 12-yard carry, he was stripped and Social Circle took over in



Junior safety Andrew Brown trips up a Social Circle running back. He also returned a fumble 45 yards for a score. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union territory. The Redskins struck quickly with a 25-yard pass and a 7-yard carry but just like the Panthers, were victimized by a fumble. Senior Billy Elder came up with the loose football and Union set up shop at their own 19 with 1:11 left in the quarter.

On the first play of the drive, Mancuso found Gilbert again, this time for 43 yards. A 9-yard completion to senior Robert Prunier and a personal foul on Social Circle moved Union into the redzone.

A first down incompletion and a 9-yard run by Lynch put the Panthers in third-and-inches but Mancuso converted with an 8-yard carry to the 1-yard line. On first-and-goal, the give was to Lynch and he found paydirt from a yard out.

Leading 28-0 the purple swarm defense continued to

make life easy for their offense. This time, junior Tyler McCoy recovered a fumble and handed the ball back to Mancuso and company.

On the first play following the turnover, Mancuso hooked up with senior Jacob Rogers for a 34-yard touchdown pass. With 11:16 left until halftime it was all Union at 35-0.

The Redskins offense moved into Panther territory once again but the drive stalled around the 23-yard line. With just under 9 minutes left in the half, Social Circle's attempt at a 40-yard field goal sailed wide right and the Panthers offense was on the march again.

This time, Union served up a steady dose of Rodriguez on the ground and the sophomore carried seven times during the drive with his sixth rush going for 30 yards and putting the Panthers into field



The Union defense limited the Redskins to just 6 points in the first three quarters. They also forced four turnovers and recorded its first touchdown of the year. Photo/Todd Forrest

goal range. Junior Knox Kiernan, who was 0-for-1 on field goals for the year, erased that goose egg on the stat sheet by nailing a 28-yarder with 3:44 before halftime.

With his team leading 38-0, Kiernan made a touchdown-saving tackle on the ensuing kick when he brought down the Redskins' returner at the 40-yard line with nothing but green behind the Panthers' kicker.

Social Circle would still put six on the board thanks to a 51-yard touchdown pass. The point after failed and Union's lead was now 38-6 at the 2:45 mark of the second.

On the Panthers' final drive of the half, a 62-yard touchdown pass to Prunier was called back after offsetting personal foul flags were thrown some 50 yards behind the action. Union would let the time expire and take a 38-6 lead to the locker rooms.

With a running clock for the remainder of the game, Mancuso's pitch-and-catch to senior Brett Dietz went for 53 yards. Lynch capped off the two-play drive with a 28-yard scoring run with just over 10 minutes to play.

Already sporting a 45-6 lead, Union sophomore Zach Stone picked a Redskins pass and returned it inside the 5-yard line.

With Prunier at quarterback and freshman Cole Dockery at running back, the Panthers scored two plays later when Prunier punched it in from four yards out.

After three quarters, Union was up 52-6. With 6:34 left in the game, Social Circle made it 52-13



Bo Lynch (5) and Josh Daniel (20) celebrate following Lynch's blocked punt to set up Daniel's second touchdown. Photo/Todd Forrest

and on the last play of the game, a halfback pass went for six more.

Mancuso completed 8-of-12 passes for 184 yards and 2 touchdowns in less than three quarters of action. He also carried four times for 39 yards.

Rodriguez carried 8 times for 107 yards - a career high. Lynch rushed 10 times for 65 yards and two scores. Barnett and Prunier added a rushing touchdown each.

Sophomore Slade Thompson ran for 25 and Dockery got 4 carries.

Gilbert caught three passes

for 70 yards and a score. Rogers had one catch for 34 yards and a score. Dietz caught one pass for 53 yards and Prunier had two grabs for 26 yards.

On Friday Union will face its first 8-AA road test when they travel to Oglethorpe County for a 7:30 kickoff.

The Panthers are looking to make it five-in-a-row over the Patriots. Last year Union rallied for a 46-26 win.

In the 2012 meeting at Oglethorpe, the Panthers held on for a 21-14 road win. In 2008 at Oglethorpe, Union won 37-34.



At home games, the Union County Cheerleaders and band help amp up the crowd before the Panthers take the field. They also increase crowd involvement on Friday nights. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers take seven-game win streak into Region semifinals

By Todd Forrest
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A doubleheader at Washington Wilkes was little more than a speed bump on Union's road to six consecutive trips to the Class AA State Tournament as the Lady Panthers secured the No. 2 spot and a bye into the semifinals of next week's 8-AA Region Tournament.

Union County took care of business by pounding the Lady Tigers 11-0 in the first game and 14-6 in game two.

The Lady Panthers went to White County on Thursday and took care of the Lady Warriors 7-3 to wrap up the regular season with a 24-4 record and set a new team record with 24 regular season victories. The win total surpassed the 22 wins set by the 2011 Region Championship squad. The 2010 Region Championship and State Runner Up team finished its regular season with a 21-1 record.

"I feel pretty good about going into the Region Tourna-



Union County sophomores Laken Chambers (left) and Kendra Tanner (right) are each approaching team records as the postseason opens. Photos by Todd Forrest

ment, I think the girls are ready to see how they will perform," Union County Head Coach Jessica Stewart said. "This is what we have been working for all season."

Sophomore Laken Chambers recorded her 34th RBI of the year at White County - tying her with April Harper for the third highest RBI total in a season. She is now three RBIs shy of breaking Hannah Hughes' team record of 36 from the 2012 season.

In the opener at Washington Wilkes, Union scored in each of the first five innings during an 11-0 rout that saw the Lady Tigers commit four errors, issue six walks, and hit two batters. With that kind of assistance, the Lady Panthers managed to put up 11 runs without an extra base hit. Where Union did most of its damage was on the base paths. The opportunistic Lady Panthers stole seven bases, turning many of Union's eight singles into

doubles or triples.

Senior Crystal Busbee, Junior Karley Nix, and sophomore Kendra Tanner swiped two bases each and freshman Braden Poteete added one theft of her own. Crystal Busbee finished with a 2-for-4 day with three runs, Karley Nix was 1-for-3 with a walk and 2 runs, meanwhile Tanner went 0-for-2 with 2 walks, a run, and an RBI.

The heart of the Union lineup consistently delivered with runners aboard. Junior Maddie Garrett went 1-for-3 with 2 runs and 2 RBIs. Senior Courtney Busbee had a 1-for-2 performance with a run and 2 RBIs and Chambers drove in a run off 2 hits in 4 at bats. She also worked five scoreless innings, yielding 3 hits, 3 walks, while punching out four.

Senior Kelsey Nix drove in Union's final run of the game with a ground out to second base in the fifth inning. She was hit by a pitch in the first and



singled in the second. Pophomore Lydia Arrowood picked up an RBI with a sacrifice fly that scored senior Halle King who reached with a walk.

Poteete scored as a courtesy runner in the third and fifth innings.

During the second game, Washington Wilkes jumped out to a 2-0 lead but it was short-lived as Union poured out 14 runs in five innings to take a 14-6 victory.

The Lady Panthers got four runs in the first and one in the second, but the Lady Tigers answered with two of their own in the third to get within a run at 5-4, but that's as close as they could get. Union tacked on two more in their half of the third and four in the fourth before Washington Wilkes got two back in the top half of the fifth. With an 11-6 lead, the Lady Panthers added three in the bottom of the fifth to end the game early once again.

In game two, defensive



Logan Seabolt

woes were a factor for both teams as they combined for nine errors. Union's Logan Seabolt got her second start of the year but the freshman pitcher was handcuffed by four Lady Panther fielding errors.

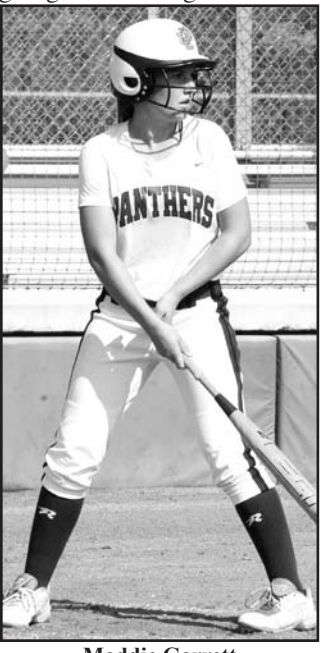
With the defense kicking the ball around, Seabolt brought her A-game and picked up her second win (2-0) of the year. In five innings she allowed two earned runs, struck out five, and

most importantly, didn't walk a batter. On the flip side, the Lady Tigers pitching staff issued 12 free passes. At the plate, Seabolt helped her own cause with 4 RBIs during a 1-for-3 game that included a bases-loaded walk in the fourth.

Kelsey Nix went 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs, 3 runs, a triple, a steal, and a base-on-balls. Crystal Busbee also drove in two runs - going 1-for-2 with 2 runs, 2 walks, and a stolen base. Courtney Busbee, Arrowood, Garrett, and sophomore Channa Carroll each drove in a run. Tanner was 1-for-3 with a run, an RBI, and a stolen base. King walked twice and scored, freshman Jillian Lawn went 1-for-2 with 3 runs and 2 walks. Meanwhile fellow freshmen Maci Everett and Anna Owenby each scored a run.

The regular season finale at White County saw the Lady Panthers blow things open with

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Maddie Garrett