

Sports

See the Sports Section at nganews.com

Lady Panthers avenge Towns loss; stumble late at No. 6 Stephens

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

The Union County Lady Panthers (1-2) split a pair of road games over the weekend after winter weather canceled last Tuesday's home contest with Gilmer.

The Lady Panthers cracked the win column on Friday night, taking a 54-44 victory over Towns County (1-2) in Hiwassee. Trying to avoid back-to-back losses to the Lady Indians for the first time since 2012, Union County jumped out front 24-16 at the half, en route to the 10-point win.

On Saturday evening, Union had its hands full at Class AAA's sixth-ranked Stephens County (4-1). Trailing 30-25 at the break, the Lady Panthers fell off the pace during the second half as Stephens pulled away 64-44.

Individually, junior Ava Hunter reached 900 career points over the weekend, scoring 20 at Towns County and 21 at Stephens County. Union County has three games this week before visiting Gilmer on Dec. 17. However, the Lady Panthers will host consecutive home games vs. North Hall on Dec. 21, followed by Lumpkin County on Jan. 2. Needing 100 points, and based on her current scoring average of 19.3 per game, Hunter is on pace to reach 1,000 in one of those two home contests. If she hasn't accomplished the feat by Jan. 2, the region opener at Rabun County becomes the probable locale on Jan. 5.

Lady Panthers 54, Towns County 44 - Hunter scored 14 of her game-high 20 points in the first half, helping Union build an eight-point advantage at the break.

Picking up the slack in the second half was junior center Rebekah Chambers and sophomore guard Ellie Cook, who combined for 17 points, helping the Lady Panthers lead 36-28 after three, and by as many as 12 in the fourth.

Hunter started the game with a pair of baskets and freshman Lara Turner followed with a trey for leads of 4-0 and 7-2. After two free throws and a Hunter free



Junior Ava Hunter tallied 41 points in two games over the weekend, giving her 900 career points. She is currently on pace to reach 1K at home when Union hosts back-to-back contests vs. North Hall (Dec. 21) and Lumpkin County (Jan. 2). Photo/Todd Forrest

goal, sophomore Corinne Hill closed the first-quarter with a 1-for-2 stop at the charity stripe.

Ahead 12-9 after one, Union outscored the Lady Indians 12-7 in the second as four different Lady Panthers were involved in the scoring.

Although, Towns County opened the quarter by scoring five of the first seven points for a 14-14 tie, but Union closed with a 10-2 run to build an eight-point advantage.

Hunter led the way with 6 points on three buckets and Turner hit two free throws. Chambers and Cook each added a deuce in the second.

The Lady Indians remained within striking distance for much of the third, trimming the margin to 39-34 and 42-37 but they wouldn't get any closer.

The same four players provided all of Union's 12 points in the third with Chambers connecting on a pair of baskets and Cook sinking a triple. Turner added 3 points on a field goal plus a free throw, and Hunter provided 2

points on one bucket.

Still nursing an eight-point advantage after three, the Lady Panthers turned in their highest-scoring period of the night with 18 in the fourth to keep Towns County at bay.

Union built its largest lead of the night at 49-37 with under 2:20 to go but a 7-1 spurt by Towns made it a two-possession game at 50-44.

A Lady Panthers' turnover with a minute left opened the door for the home team but a defensive stop and four unanswered points put the Lady Indians away.

Union County hit 10-of-15 at the line over the final 8 minutes, with Cook going 4-for-4 and sophomore Kaylee Helton hitting 2-of-2. Chambers led her team with six in the quarter on two baskets and 2-for-5 shooting from the foul line. Hunter split each of her two visits to the free-throw line to bookend her lone fourth-quarter field goal.

Hill added a deuce to round out Union County's scoring in the final frame.

Chambers finished with



Rebekah Chambers shows off her shooting range with a jumper from the corner. The junior post is third on the team in scoring at 6 points per game following her 12-point performance at Towns County last Saturday. Photo/Todd Forrest

a career-high 12 points and Cook added nine. Turner's 8 points also marked a career-best during her young three-game varsity career. Hill chipped in three and Helton finished with two.

The Lady Indians were led by 17 from senior Vanessa Floyd, who led all fourth-quarter scorers with 9 points. Senior Kennedy Henson scored eight of her 13 points in the third; fellow seniors Jayce Young and Abby Mauldin had five and four, respectively.

Lady Panthers 44, Stephens County 64 - After suffering a 65-55 homecourt loss to Rabun County four days earlier, the sixth-ranked Indians bounced back with a 42-32 victory at Habersham Central on Friday and a 20-point Saturday win over Union County.

For the second-straight night, Hunter scored 14 in the first half to keep the Lady Panthers within 30-25 at the break. Unfortunately, Stephens County opened up an 11-point advantage with a 16-10 third period before closing out the

visitors with an 18-9 fourth.

With a roster that features seven seniors, the Lady Indians saw eight different players crack the scoring column while pulling away in the final frame.

As for Union County, Hunter and Cook provided all of their squad's 11 first-quarter points, with Hunter scoring five of her seven at the foul line.

The two teams would battle to a 14-14 tie in the second quarter as Hunter poured in seven more on 3-for-3 shooting at the line. Cook knocked down her second 3 of the night, and Chambers added a pair of baskets to keep the contest tight entering the third.

Hunter's scoring eventually tailed off, and the Lady Panthers scored just 19 points after the intermission. Turner, Hill and freshman Katie Byers got in the third-quarter scoring with 2 points each. Hunter finished the period with a pair of field goals as Union found itself behind 46-35.

Junior Ansley Collins

and freshman Kyra McKechnie hit a pair of free throws in the final frame; Turner added a deuce and Hunter made 1-of-2 at the line to finish with three.

Hunter ended her 21-point night 9-for-11 at the foul line. Cook had seven, Chambers and Turner added four apiece.

Byers, Collins, Hill and McKechnie each chipped in 2 points for Union County.

The Lady Panthers will host Tallulah Falls (5-2) on Tuesday at 6 p.m. Tallulah is coming off a 48-44 win at Towns County and are led by a trio of wings combining for more than 30 points a game. Katy Corbett, a 5-10 senior, is good for 11.7 points and five boards a night while connecting on 19-of-53 from downtown. Sophomore Veronaye Charlton averages 11.2 points and a team-high three assists a game. Charlton also hits 78% of her free throws, making 25-for-32 on the year. Rounding out the Indians' top-three scorers is sophomore Denika Lightbourne, who averages 9.4 points and 5.4 rebounds a game.

White County will visit Blairsville on Thursday, marking the first time since 2012 the Warriors have played at Union County. White is currently 1-6 with its lone victory a 34-point rout of Lakeview. Among their six losses is a 61-51 season-opening defeat to Region 8-AA's Banks County. White County also fell twice to the previously mentioned Habersham Central - the first a 43-41 home loss followed by a 52-42 road loss three days later.

The week wraps up with a visit to 3-2 Fannin County on Saturday. The Rebels opened the year ranked, then claimed a 65-56 win at Pickens, who defeated Union by 12 in a scrimmage.

However, Fannin dropped from the rankings after a 70-45 loss to Gilmer and an unimpressive 55-46 victory at winless Copper Basin, TN.

Tip-off is scheduled for 4 p.m. Saturday at Fannin County and 5 p.m. Thursday vs White County.

In other scheduling news, last week's canceled Gilmer game will not be rescheduled.



Sophomore Corinne Hill pulls down a rebound during a recent Union County contest. The Lady Panthers point guard scored three at Towns and two at Stephens County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Ellie Cook drains a 3-pointer from the corner during a recent Union County game. Cook scored 7 of her 9 points during the second half at Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest



In a varsity career that spans three games, freshman Lara Turner scored a career-high 8 points at Towns. With 16 points through three outings, the 9th-grader is fourth on the team in scoring. Photo/Todd Forrest