

Sports

See the Sports Section at ngame.com

Panthers improve to 6-0 with wins over Fannin, Rabun Union to face its toughest test of the season Friday at North Hall

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@ngame.com

BLUE RIDGE - Union County opened Region 7-AAA action on Tuesday with a 55-49 road win over Fannin County behind 21 points, 11 rebounds, and 5 steals from sophomore Sawyer Drake.

Leading 16-11 after one and 32-24 at the break, the Panthers were unable to put the rival Rebels away despite opening up a 13-point lead in both the third and fourth quarters. With 7:00 to play, a driving layup by Pierson Allison gave Union a 47-34 advantage; a Drake lay-in made it 49-36 with 6:22 remaining then another Drake bucket gave the Panthers a 51-38 lead at the 5:51 mark.

After a Fannin trey cut the deficit to 10, Crawford Colwell hit 1-of-2 free throws with 4:45 left. He then made two from the line with 2:36 remaining to open up a 54-43 advantage.

The Rebels refused to go away, however, scoring back-to-back field goals to pull within seven at the 1:45 mark. Crawford Colwell went 1-for-2 at the stripe seven seconds later for Union's final points of the contest.

Fannin would go ice-cold from the floor over the final 90 seconds while also missing a pair from the line that could have trimmed the lead to five with 45 seconds left. Meanwhile, the Panthers missed the front-end of a 1-and-1 and turned it over three times in the final 90 seconds, leaving the door cracked for the Rebels.

In the first quarter, Union jumped out front 6-2 on a Drake 3-point play followed by a Patrick Baggett trey. A Drake steal-and-score made it 8-2 but Fannin scored five-unanswered to pull within a point. Crawford Colwell scored 6 of the next 8 Panther points, with RJ Banton adding



Sophomore Sawyer Drake soars for two of his game-high 21 points at Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

a layup, to spot Union County a 16-11 edge after one.

Fannin pulled within one at 18-17 but the next 4 points belonged to the Panthers. Leading 24-19, a Baggett trey made it 27-19 before the Rebels answered with a 5-0 spurt. Two free throws from Allison and another Baggett trey over the final 42 seconds gave Union a 32-24 lead at the intermission.

Early in the third, the Panthers pulled in front by 13 off a Drake deuce and a Baggett three but Fannin was able to limit the damage and enter the fourth down nine at 43-34.

Crawford Colwell opened the fourth with a deuce to increase the lead to 11 before going on to finish with 12 points and 5 boards. Baggett had 9 points, and Allison scored 8 points. Fannin was led by 11 from Chandler Kendall and 9 from Joe Satchell.

Meanwhile, Banton finished with 4 points and Candler Colwell had 1 point and 3 assists

for the Panthers.

Panthers 56, Rabun County 37 - The Panthers improved to 6-0 with a 56-37 home victory over Rabun County that saw Union pull away with a 23-4 third quarter onslaught.

Still without the services of several key players due to football, the depleted Wildcats put up a valiant first half effort before the Panthers blew things open in the third period. Trailing 5-0 and 13-8 in the first, the Panthers didn't see their first lead of the game until a Crawford Colwell dribble-drive made it 20-19 with 1:43 left in the second.

Union County took a 22-21 lead into the break behind 15 first half points from Crawford Colwell - 9 coming in the second quarter on three field goals and three free throws.

The second half, however, belonged to Drake, who poured in 13 of his 18 points over the final 16 minutes as the Panthers took control with an 11-0 run to close the third. A Drake tip-in

and an Allison steal-and-score gave Union a quick 26-21 advantage coming out of the break. After a Rabun bucket, the Panthers scored the next 5 points for a 31-23 lead at the 5:00 mark.

A Baggett trey made it a nine-point game and sparked the 11-0 run that included a bucket from Crawford Colwell, three Drake free throws, and consecutive 3-pointers from Allison and Baggett.

Leading 45-25 after three, Candler Colwell went inside for two then Crawford Colwell connected on a pair from the stripe. Drake scored on a layup then Crawford Colwell converted a 3-point play to give Union a 54-31 lead with 4:41 left. Drake would hit two more free throws at the 1:51 mark to cap off the Panther scoring and stretch the lead back to 20 at 56-36.

Crawford Colwell scored a game-high 22 points to go with nine boards. Drake turned in his second straight double-double performance with 18 points



Crawford Colwell goes up for two of his 22 vs Rabun. Photo/Todd Forrest

and 13 rebounds while stuffing the stat sheet with team highs in assists (3), steals (4), and blocks (2).

Baggett and Allison finished with 7 points each while Candler Colwell added 2 points, 8 boards, and 3 steals. Chase Reed led Rabun County with 14 points.

The Panthers dominated the glass, outrebounding the Wildcats 47-31 overall and 23-12 on the offensive boards.

Looking ahead - The Panthers are off Tuesday but resume region play when they visit North Hall on Friday. The Trojans are currently 3-2 but suffered a pair of cancellations over the weekend.

Their lone region contest was an 83-42 loss at second-ranked GAC. North Hall was set to visit cross-county rival East Hall on Friday until winter weather forced a change of plans.

The Trojans opened the season with convincing wins

over Franklin County and Coahulla Creek before falling 59-48 at White County. They answered with a 30-point rout of Commerce but were thumped by GAC three days later.

North Hall's Saturday meeting with North Oconee was also canceled but the Trojans return to action Tuesday when they host Fannin County in another 7-AAA matchup.

North Hall returns one starter off last year's senior-laden 14-12 squad that was upset by Lumpkin County in the region playoffs, denying the Trojans their third consecutive state tournament appearance.

North Hall is led by a trio of senior guards: Taylor Hanson, Noah Holman, and Cole Brooks. Last year the Trojans dominated Union 70-47 in Blairsville then completed the sweep with a 56-44 victory in Clermont.

The girls game is scheduled to tip-off at 7 p.m. Friday with the guys to follow.



2017 EAST WEST CLASSIC

United Community Bank | FRONTLINE CAPITAL MORTGAGE

FCA

<p>Team Georgia</p> <p>Pickens Gilmer Fannin Union Towns</p>	<p>Team North Carolina</p> <p>Robbinsville Murphy Hayesville Andrews Swain Rosman Cherokee</p>
---	---

SATURDAY
DECEMBER 16, 2017
1:00 pm
Fannin County Stadium

\$5 AT GATE
www.515FCA.org