

Sports

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Lady Panthers third in 8-AA Tourney; travel to Bremen for State

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For the fifth time in six years, the Union County Lady Panthers are headed to the Class AA State Playoffs.

Union County finished third at last week's Region 8-AA Tournament after suffering a 61-52 overtime loss at the hands of Rabun County on Friday but responded by sinking 10 treys in a convincing 58-32 victory over Jefferson.

The Lady Panthers will enter the State Tournament as the No. 3 seed from Region 8-AA and will travel to Bremen on Tuesday for the opening round.

With home court advantage in the State Tournament on the line Friday, Union County and Rabun went toe-to-toe for four quarters but in the extra frame, Rabun opened with an 11-4 run to take a 52-45 lead with 2:00 to play.

Junior Lauren Zollinger scored 7 of her team-high 21 points in the overtime session but it wasn't enough as the Lady Cats prevailed 61-52.

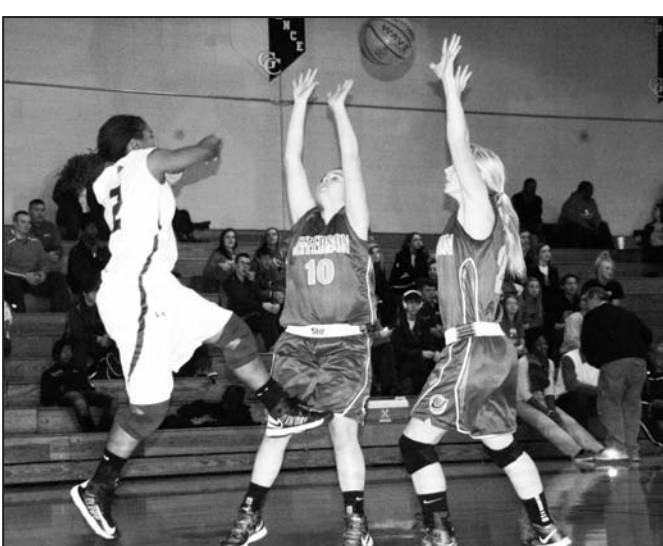
Union was without the services of Jeanelle Arnold for much of the second half as the senior battled foul trouble and picked up her fifth with 4:30 to play in a 39-39 game.

As the two teams were feeling each other out in the first quarter, Zollinger and Arnold each nailed a trey, en route to a 5-point quarter for both of the Union guards. Hannah Hughes added a bucket and the Lady Panthers trailed 14-12 after one quarter of action.

Rabun began to open up a little breathing room in the second, doubling-up the Lady Panthers during a 14-7 quarter to give Rabun a 28-19 lead at the break.

Zollinger, the reigning 8-AA Player of the Year connected from long distance, while Arnold and sophomore Brooke Maddox chipped in 2 points each.

The Lady Panthers' difficulty at the foul line played a huge role in Rabun taking a 9-point lead as Union shot 2-7 from the stripe during the



Jeanelle Arnold with the save. Photo/Todd Forrest



Lauren Zollinger drives for two. Photo/Todd Forrest



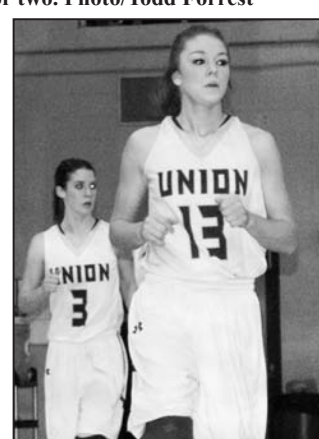
Carly Adams



Hannah Hughes



Madison Rich



Shawna Brown

frame. The third quarter saw Union clamp down defensively and hold the Lady Cats to 7 points and the Lady Panthers found themselves within 6 points at 35-29 entering the fourth quarter.

Arnold scored four, while Zollinger, Maddox, and Hughes scored 2 each in the third frame.

The fourth quarter began with a 10-4 Lady Panther run that tied things up at 39-39 before Arnold fouled out at the 4:30 mark.

"She has so much energy and she just tries to be everywhere and make things happen," Union County Head Coach David Tucker said.

With its senior leader on the bench, Union limited the Wildcats to just one basket from that point on. With the score all even at 41-41 with 24 seconds to play, Union's de-

fense kept Rabun off the board and forced overtime.

"You can't blame anyone," Tucker said. "They played their bottoms off and that's all you can ask for."

Zollinger scored 4 in the fourth while treys from Maddox and Carly Adams helped spark Union's late surge.

Zollinger's 21 points led the Lady Panthers, while Arnold finished with 13. Maddox had 7, Hughes finished with 6, Adams added two from the stripe in the extra period for a 5-point performance.

Union County's struggles at the foul line came back to haunt the Lady Panthers in the end - shooting 6-for-14 from the stripe.

On Saturday, Union met another team who had fallen in overtime the night before in the Lady Dragons of Jefferson.

The Lady Dragons suffered a 53-51 overtime defeat

at the hands of Greene County during the Semi-Finals and in order to avoid a No. 4 seed and a trip to Columbus to face the No. 1 team in Georgia, Kendrick, they had to go through a focused Lady Panther squad.

"They've been that way all season," Tucker said. "Playing after a loss doesn't bother them. It's hard to pinpoint a single reason why, but they've all played unbelievable"

Union had faced Jefferson twice during the regular season, defeating the Lady Dragons 53-42 in Jefferson before falling 45-43 in overtime, eight days prior.

Early it appeared as if the two teams were headed for another barn burner but Union found another gear late in the first quarter, closing on an 11-1 run for a 17-7 advantage after one.

Zollinger scored 9 points in the opening frame, Maddox

had 4, and Arnold added a free throw. However it was a buzzer-beater trey from junior Madison Rich that proved to Jefferson that Union meant business and was dead-set on making a statement.

Arnold got things going early in the second with a trey, making it a 20-7 game, Shawna Brown's two free throws and an Adams lay up put the Lady Panthers ahead 24-9.

An old fashioned 3-point play pulled Jefferson back within 12 but Arnold and Brown kept the Lady Dragons at bay.

Arnold finished the second frame with 8 points, Brown with 4, and Adams had 2 and Union led 31-18 at halftime.

Brown drilled a corner trey to open the third but Jefferson answered right back with a trey of their own to remain within 13.

That's when the rout

began.

Union put a stranglehold on the Lady Dragons, keeping them from scoring a field goal for more than 13 minutes as Union sprinted out to a 49-27 lead after three quarters.

Here's how it happened.

Brown hit a short jumper, Adams found pay dirt from beyond the arc on consecutive possessions, opening up a 45-24 Lady Panther runaway.

Three Jefferson free throws were negated by two at the stripe and a pull up jumper from Zollinger for Union's 22-point advantage.

Union took the air out of the ball in the fourth quarter when Coach Tucker began to stall with Arnold and Zollinger playing keep-away for over a minute of action. Zollinger would go baseline for a score and Union led 51-27 with 6:42 to play.

At the 4:39 mark Hughes hit a trey as Union County surgically dismantled the Jefferson defense. Following a Lady Dragon turnover, Zollinger hit a jumper for a 56-27 Lady Panther lead.

With his team up 29 points, Tucker went to his bench for the remainder of the contest.

Jefferson scored 5 unanswered points before Maddox drove into the paint and scored Union's final basket in the 58-32 victory.

Zollinger finished with 17 points and 6 assists. Arnold went for 12 points and 2 steals. Brown scored 9, while Adams had 8 points and 4 steals.

Maddox scored 6, Hughes had 3 points and 6 boards, Rich ended up with 3 points and sophomore Ariel Maurer blocked 3 shots.

The Lady Panthers now face a 22-6 Bremen squad that finished second in Region 5-AA. The contest will be a revenge game of sorts for Union as No. 3 Bremen came to No. 2 Union County and knocked the Lady Panther softball team out of the State Playoffs in October.

Union County will play at Bremen on Tuesday night at 5:30 p.m.

"The girls will compete, and in sports, that always gives you a chance to win," Coach Tucker added.

Triple overtime heartbreak for Panthers

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Greensboro - As the final buzzer sounded in Union County's 86-83, triple overtime loss to Washington-Wilkes, an emotional Zach Odom laid face first with his head in his hands, near the three-point line, not far from the spot where moments earlier, he nailed a buzzer-beater trey to force a third overtime.

As his teammates helped him to his feet, it became obvious that it would be the last time this senior class would suit up in a Panther uniform.

Odom, who wasn't even cleared to play until hours before the game because of a torn muscle in his left shoulder, was determined to suit up and lead his senior class to the State Tournament, despite what physical limitations stood in his way.

With playoff implications on the line, Union's four seniors didn't disappoint.

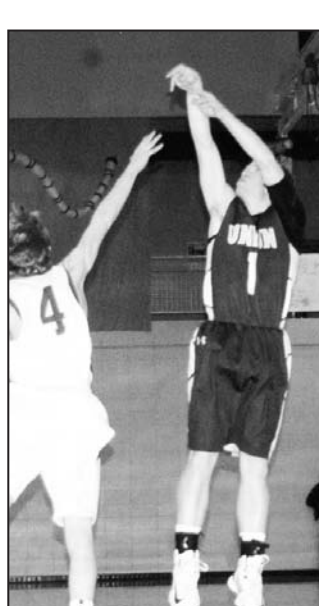
As expected, the Panthers were led by their 12th graders, with Rhett McCombs leading the charge with 33 points. Odom tossed in 19 points - 17 in the second half and overtime periods. James Rowe had 9 points with a critical 3-pointer in the fourth and a go-ahead lay up in the second overtime. C.J. Byers came up with 6 points during a fourth quarter rally, including two clutch free throws with 2:39 to play in the fourth quarter.

Early in the contest, Union found themselves chasing the Tiger shooters as Washington-Wilkes opened up a 30-18 lead at the midway point of the second quarter. But the Panthers refused to go away. Union answered with an 11-0 run to close the half with a 3-point play, followed by a steal and score from McCombs, a lay up by Rowe, another bucket from McCombs and two free throws by Hunter Hughes got Union within a point at the half.

Two early free throws gave the Tigers a 32-29 lead but a jumper by McCombs brought Union within a point. Following another Washington-Wilkes basket and free throw, McCombs



Rhett McCombs



Zach Odom

8-AA Region Tournament photos by Todd Forrest



The Union County Cheerleaders made the long trip to Greensboro three times last week to cheer on both Union County squads.

went 2-for-2 at the line before a trey by Hughes gave the Panthers their first lead of the game at 36-35 with 4:10 to play in the third.

Unfortunately, another McCombs jumper was all Union could muster in the final 4 minutes of the quarter and the Tigers closed on a 13-2 run for a 46-38 lead entering the fourth.

A trey by Rowe pulled Union to within 5 at 46-41 early in the fourth but back-to-back scores by Washington-Wilkes put the Panthers in 9-point hole with 6 minutes to play.

An Odom trey kept Union within striking distance but the Tigers continued to keep the pressure on by adding another deuce for a 52-44 lead with 5:30 left.

Byers scored down low, sophomore Tyler Odom added a free throw and a lay up, then Byers knocked down a 10-foot and two crucial free throws, bringing Union within two at 55-53 with 2:30 to go.

Four straight free throws from Zach Odom capped off a 13-3 run that gave Union a 57-55 lead with 1:48 to play.

Following a Tiger miss, Union had the ball and a two point lead, Byers was whistled for a debatable illegal screen, resulting in the Panther big man being sent to the bench at the 1:27 mark.

The offensive foul resulted in the Tigers tying things up at 57-57 just 19 seconds later.

After a jump ball awarded the ball to Union County, the

Panthers held for the final shot.

With less than 10 seconds to play, McCombs drove the lane and drew contact sending the senior to the line. With 7.6 seconds showing on the clock, McCombs sank both attempts and the Panthers were seconds away from a State Playoff berth.

The Tigers raced down the floor and connected in the paint as the buzzer sounded - sending the game into overtime.

A trey by McCombs and a jumper by Zach Odom gave Union a 64-63 lead but a 3-point play by the Tigers put Union behind by two.

A driving lay up and an offensive board and put back from Odom put Union ahead 68-67. A Tiger free throw tied it up, but another put back, this time from Thomas Danek, put Union up 70-68. Danek then came up with a steal at the other end, resulting in two free throws from McCombs. A Zach Odom free throw with 21 seconds to play gave Union a 73-68 lead.

The Tigers nailed a quick trey at the 15-second mark, then a Panther turnover gave the ball back to Washington-Wilkes with 14 seconds to play. The Tigers again went inside and after the first attempt went long, an offensive rebound and lay up sent the game into a second overtime.

Rowe gave the Panthers a quick lead but the Tigers scored four straight for a 77-75 lead. A Tyler Odom steal set up McCombs for a 3-point play to put the Panthers ahead 78-77 with 45 seconds left.

Washington-Wilkes scored four quick points and with 16 seconds to play, Union found themselves behind by three.

Zach Odom brought the ball up the court, went to his right and hit a pull up trey as time expired - forcing a third overtime.

The Tigers opened with 5 points until Danek hit 2-for-2 at the line for Union's only two points. The Panthers were unable to force a fourth overtime as baskets were hard to come by late.

Hughes had 5, Danek ended up with 4, Tyler Odom finished with 3, and Dylan Coyne scored 4.

Joe Collins

Tips from the Range

I have been talking about the movements in the swing for the last several months. I would like to focus on one of the central things that I have brought to your attention but have not explained in detail. It is the basic idea that all the function of the golf swing pivots on. Let's look at the turn.

There are many parts that are involved in making the correct turn away from the ball and then back through impact, but to maintain all the proper elements of the whole swing, one must center the swing in front of the body. This means that the chest is the central area of consideration. Keeping the chest turning into the backswing and back through the downswing will enable you to maintain the spine position throughout the swing.

I don't have enough space in these short lessons to explain, nor would I even attempt to explain, the techniques I use to teach the proper turn but believe me when I tell you, it is rare when you see someone other than a really good competitive player turn correctly. This in large part is due to ignorance of the proper fundamental on the part of the player and the inability of most instructors to teach it. The largest percentage of players, and I mean most players, rarely complete their turn. A full turn is very important in making solid contact at impact. It can look like a full turn but still be disconnected. Here in lies the problem for the player and the instructor.

There is a gauge that will tell you if you are making a full turn and that is the position of the front shoulder when the club is at the top of the backswing arc. It should be squarely behind the ball with your back to the target.

Now here is the hard part. You must turn the chest and arms together to obtain the proper timing and arm placement on the downswing. It is imperative that your chest and arms realign at the 45 degree mark on the downswing. This is one of the things I don't have room to explain here in Tips but a proper instructor can answer any questions you might

have about realignment on the downswing.

So, the big question is how do you make a correct turn away from the ball? This is the easy part. Keep the club in front of your chest as long as you can on the backswing and then again on the downswing while keeping the spine in its original position that you established at address. This is what many know as connection and it is the basic unit of the actual full turn. Remember, it is very important to keep the head behind the ball and your center of gravity over the ankles until after impact or else the spine will move and the lower body will stop its rotation.

The easiest way to stay connected is to focus on the triangle your arms create at address. The triangle is in front of the chest and is created by the attachment of the arms to the shoulders and then extends down the arms to the grip of the club. To find the triangle, take an address position and look down and you will see said triangle. Keep this triangle in front of yourself until the arms are forced to separate and continue on their path to the top of the backswing. The rub here is that many of us will move our arms then the chest and think that we are turning correctly. But if the turn is correct, the arms will stay in front of your chest at the start and well into the backswing.

I hope I haven't confused many of you but the turn is so important because it promotes proper power through the big muscles and not the small ones. The turn is the key to staying connected and correctly realigning again on the downswing. This is a very involved fundamental and should be looked at as merely trying to keep the club in front of the chest throughout the swing.

The connection and realignment process, and the explanation thereof, is a sure fire way of determining if the person you are using for lessons or instruction is an informed teacher or just someone who claims to know what they're doing. Every successful competitive golfer makes sure the turn is connected and that realignment occurs at the proper time in the downswing. It is also the one bullet that will help every swing if it is done and taught correctly.

Good luck and I will see you on the course!