

Sports

See the Sports Section at ngenews.com

Panthers pull away from Lumpkin behind Mancuso's 7 TDs

Union County football program goes for win No. 250 at Andrews, NC on Friday

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@ngenews.com

Despite trailing 14-3, the Union County Panthers stepped it up on both sides of the ball and laid 20-unanswered points, and held a 23-14 advantage on visiting Lumpkin County.

A defensive score on the final play of the first half got the Indians back in the game, trailing by only two at the break, 23-21.

After both squads exchanged quick scores early in the third quarter, the Panthers responded with 21-straight to close out the game by a score of 51-28, and improve to 2-0 for the third time in four seasons.

In what was touted as a battle of quarterbacks, Lumpkin's Zach Matthews dominated the majority of the first quarter, but Union Head Coach Brian Allison, and his coaching staff made the necessary adjustments to slow Matthews for the remainder of the game.

And to make matters worse for the Indians, Union's Joseph Mancuso came to life.

After struggling with only one completion in his first 10 attempts, the senior quarterback accounted for all seven of his team's touchdowns, six passing, and one rushing, while accounting for 416 total yards - 302 passing and 114 on the ground.

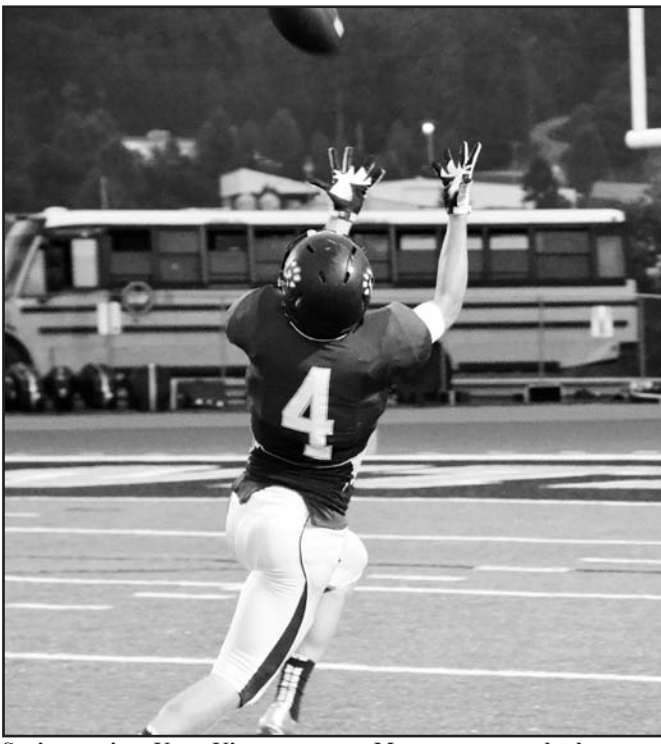
"I give all the credit to the offensive line," said Mancuso. "They played great and there isn't a better group of teammates anywhere."

Following three incomplections and a punt, Lumpkin County went 67 yards on 9 plays - capped off by a 9-yard touchdown run by Matthews to take a 7-0 lead.

Union took over on its own 34 and Mancuso carried for 11 yards then connected with sophomore Cole Wright for 15. Facing 3rd-and-16, Mancuso used his legs for 28 yards.

However, the drive would stall but senior Knox Kiernan made it a 7-3 game with a 35-yard goal from the right hash.

The ensuing Indians' drive was aided by a 44-yard run up-the-gut by Matthews on a fake punt. With a first down from the Union 26-yard line, a Lumpkin handoff to sophomore Cole White was good for 24-yards, then



Senior receiver Knox Kiernan snags a Mancuso pass and takes it to the house late in the first quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior defensive lineman Chandler Day (bottom) gets low to bring down Lumpkin QB Zach Matthews for a loss. Photo/Todd Forrest

two-plays later, a pitch sweep to senior Austin Pierce was good for six more points. Following the extra point, Union found itself in a 14-3 hole.

Down 11, the Panthers needed just two plays to score from their own 33-yard line.

A sweep by sophomore running back Cole Dockrey went for 14 yards then Mancuso hit a wide-open Kiernan on a go-route for 53 yards and a score with 1:37 left in the first quarter.

The extra point went wide left but the Panthers' offense was only getting warmed up and there were plenty of points to be scored.

With 10:20 to play in the

second, senior Josh Daniel fielded an Indian punt and returned it for 36 yards to the Lumpkin 41-yard line.

After two carries by Mancuso for 24 and 17 yards, Union held it's first lead of the game at 16-14, and they would never trail again.

"At any point-in-time, Joe can run the football and he ran the fool out of it tonight," Coach Allison said. "He was all over the place running the football."

A penalty and a sack by sophomore R.J. Banton forced Lumpkin into a 4th-and-27, and an obvious punting situation.

"I knew it would take us a quarter to adjust to what they were



Senior QB Joseph Mancuso moves the chains on 3rd-and-16 with a 28-yard carry, setting up a Kiernan field goal. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Bryan English (42) celebrates a sack on Zach Matthews during the second half. Photo/Todd Forrest

doing on offense because we can't (simulate it in practice), but we made some adjustments and got better," Coach Allison said.

Taking over from their own 17-yard line with 3:12 until halftime, Mancuso went back to work.

On the first play he dropped a pass over an Indian defender, into the hands of Dockrey, who raced 38 yards down the near sideline. Then Dockrey carried for 16 more.

Union found pay dirt on it's third play with a 29-yard touchdown connection from Mancuso to Wright, giving the Panthers a 9-point cushion at 23-14 at the 2:44 mark of the half.

With limited time to work with, Lumpkin was forced out of its comfort zone and went to the air. The Indians picked up one first down but senior Tyler McCoy broke up a 4th down pass attempt to give Union the ball at its own 41 with 83 ticks left on the clock.

Facing a 4th-and-2, Mancuso took a quarterback keeper up the middle for 3 yards. But one play later, Mancuso found himself in the teeth of a Lumpkin blitz.

After avoiding four defenders, he found an open receiver, but as he began his throwing motion, an Indian defensive lineman grabbed the back of his jersey, forcing the throw to fall short and into the outstretched hands of White,



Senior receiver Sam Gilbert who went 56 yards down the far sideline for the score - trimming the lead to 23-21.

"Joe (Mancuso) will make that play 99-out-of-100 times so I don't have any second guesses on it at all," Coach Allison said. "I never have any doubts in putting the ball in his hands."

On the play, Dockrey suffered a broken arm while trying to make a touchdown saving tackle on interception return.

He would not return to the game and his status for the future remains uncertain as of this writing.

With Lumpkin set to receive the opening kick of the second half, momentum was clearly in the visitors locker room, but the Union defense came out and set the tone by forcing a three-and-out and getting the ball back into the hands of Mancuso and the red-hot Panther offense.

"I told them at halftime that if we get a stop, then score, we win the ball game. That was the bottom line," Coach Allison said. "We came out fired up and in good shape. We didn't have anyone cramping and I was a bit concerned about that. Our kids fought through that and we adjusted when Dockrey was hurt."

Following a punt, the Panthers set up shop at midfield and on the first play, Mancuso hit Sam Gilbert over the middle and the senior wideout cashed in the 50-yard reception, putting Union back on top by nine at 30-21.

Lumpkin responded with a 76-yard screen pass to Pierce, the Class AAA 100-meter State Champ, and just like that, the

See *Still Rolling*, Page 15A

Lady Panthers complete sweep of Rabun; tied for first in 8-AA

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@ngenews.com

The Union County Lady Panthers held on to a 9-7 victory at Class AAAAA's Habersham Central after taking an 8-0 lead going into the third inning.

On Thursday, they moved to 6-0 in Region play and 14-2 overall to remain tied for first in 8-AA with Washington-Wilkes following Union's completion of the regular season sweep over Rabun County, last Thursday in Blairsville.

**Lady Panthers 9
Rabun County 1**

The Lady Panthers scored five times in the first, added three in the fourth, and one in the sixth - bringing the mercy rule into play and ending the game early.

However, Rabun took a short-lived advantage with an unearned run in the top of the first. Junior Laken Chambers came back to catch the leadoff hitter looking at strike three after falling behind 3-0. The Lady Cats then reached on a throwing error, doubled, and put another runner aboard thanks to a dropped pop fly. Chambers got out of trouble with a strikeout and a grounder to third.

When it was Union's turn at the plate, senior Karley Nix reached on a one-out infield single, Chambers ripped a base hit to left, sophomore Jillian Lawn smacked an opposite field, RBI single.

Senior Maddie Garrett brought in another run when she reached on an error, freshman Aladriel Arnold singled to left-center, bringing home two runs. With two outs, freshman Courtney Moose made it 5-0 with an RBI single to right-center.

In Rabun's half of the second, Chambers went unscathed despite allowing two walks, then survived a two-out double in the third, and a two-out hit batter in the fourth.

During the bottom half of the fourth, Moose reached on an error to open the inning, sopho-



Left to right: senior Karley Nix, sophomore Braden Poteete, Senior Maddie Garrett, and junior Lydia Arrowood. Photos/Todd Forrest

more Braden Poteete singled, and junior Kendra Tanner singled to load the bases with no outs.

Nix reached on a fielders choice with the first out being made at home, but Chambers scored Poteete with a ground out. Lawn doubled home Tanner and Nix and Garrett doubled to cap off Union's three-run inning.

The Lady Cats used back-to-back two-out singles to move a runner into scoring position in the fifth but a pop-out back to Chambers ended the inning. In the sixth, a two-out throwing error didn't come back to bite the Lady Panthers and they took an 8-1 advantage into the sixth.

Nix lined a double past the third baseman, advanced to third on a Chambers ground out, scored on a wild pitch and the game was called.

Nix finished 2-for-4 with 3 runs while Lawn knocked in three during a 2-for-3 performance. Chambers was 2-for-3 with an RBI and recorded her 10th win from the circle, working 6 innings with one unearned run. She fanned four, walked two, and gave up four hits.

Arnold went 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs and run, Garrett doubled, scored, and drove in one.

**Lady Panthers 9
Habersham Central 7**

After taking an 8-0 ad-



vantage into the third inning, the Lady Panthers managed to hang on to a two-run victory, despite four errors, and surrendering 5 runs in the final two innings.

The Lady Raiders came to the plate in the bottom of the seventh inning trailing 9-5 but a leadoff single and a one-out hit-by-pitch put the home team in business, and it didn't stop there. Union County left the door wide open with consecutive infield errors, making it a 9-7 game with two runners in scoring position and the winning run at the plate.

With the game teetering in the balance, Union County Head Coach turned to Chambers, who nailed down the save by ringing up the first batter with a called strike three on a 3-2 pitch. The third out came on a ground out to Tanner at shortstop.

Lawn opened the game in the circle before giving way to Madeline Tanner in the sixth.

At the plate, Chambers finished 2-for-4, scored three times, and drove in a pair with her fourth homer of the year - a two-run shot to left in the second inning.

Lawn recorded her third win of the season, allowing 4 earned runs, 9 hits, and no walks in 5 1/3 innings of work. Garrett continued to swing a hot bat - driving in three runs.

The Lady Panthers posted



four runs in the first inning with an RBI single from Lawn. Garrett made it 2-0 by bringing in a run with a single, Arnold brought in another run with a ground out, and Arrowood singled to left to drive in Union's fourth and final run of the inning.

After Kendra Tanner walked and scored with one out in the second, Nix reached on an infield single and scored on Chambers' two run blast. Later, Garrett lined a base hit to left that scored Garrison - Lawn's courtesy runner.

A pair of two out singles and a triple resulted in two runs for the Lady Raiders in the bottom half of the third.

Still trailing 8-2 in the bottom of the fifth, Habersham put up three runs in the inning and Coach Stewart turned to Tanner who got her squad out of the jam without any further damage.

Union made it 9-5 in the top of the seventh when Chambers led off with a single and Garrett brought her in with a one-out double.

Tanner finished 1-for-3 with a run and a walk, Nix was 1-of-2 with 2 runs, Lawn went 1-for-3 with an RBI, and Arrowood drove in a run during a 1-for-4 day at the plate.

Up next for the Lady Panthers is a trip to the two-time defending Region Champions Social Circle, who Union hasn't



defeated since 2012. The Lady Redskins are currently 9-6 overall and third in Region 8-AA with a 4-1 record. Their lone region loss came at the hands of the upstart Washington Wilkes Lady Tigers by a score of 7-2.

Over the weekend, Union will be participating in the Cherokee Tournament at Twin Creeks Park in Woodstock.

Action begins on Friday when the Lady Panthers JV takes on Pope at 5 p.m. On Saturday, the JV team takes the field at 8 a.m. when they take on Campbell.

The varsity will open play on Saturday morning at 10 a.m. when they face off with Pope. At 2:30 p.m. they will play Milton. The JV will meet Douglas County at 4:30 and the varsity will wrap up play for the weekend with Gilmer County at 6:30 p.m.

Season Stat Leaders

Batting Average: Chambers .477, Nix .390, K. Tanner .388, Lawn .381, Poteete .371
Runs: Nix 18, Poteete 16, K. Tanner 15, Sutton 13, Garrison 11

RBIs: Lawn 18, Chambers 17, Arnold 13, K. Tanner 12, Garrett 10

Doubles: Lawn & Chambers 5, Garrett & Arnold 3

Triples: K. Tanner 6

Homers: Chambers 4, Garrett 1
Walks: Garrett 7, Chambers 6, Arnold 5
Stolen Bases: Sutton 9, Poteete 8, Arrowood 7
(Pitching) Wins: Chambers 10, Lawn 3
(Pitching) Strikeouts: Chambers 61, Lawn 11
ERA: Chambers 1.25, Lawn 3.09
Innings: Chambers 72.2, Lawn 11.1, M. Tanner 6.0

**Box Score
Union @ Habersham**

BATTER	AB	R	H	RBI	BB
K. Tanner	3	1	1	0	1
K. Nix	2	2	1	0	1
-S. Ludlum	2	0	0	0	0
L. Chambers	4	3	2	2	0
J. Lawn	3	0	1	1	0
-E. Garrison	0	2	0	0	0
-M. Tanner	1	0	0	0	0
M. Garrett	3	0	2	3	1
-M. Sutton	0	1	0	0	0
A. Arnold	4	0	0	1	0
L. Arrowood	4	0	1	1	0
M. Lockaby	3	0	0	0	0
B. Poteete	2	0	0	0	0
-A. Owenby	1	0	0	0	0

2B: Maddie Garrett
HR: Laken Chambers
SB: Kendra Tanner, Lydia Arrowood, Ellie Garrison 3, Maddie Sutton 2

PITCHING	IP	H	R	ER	K	BB
J. Lawn	5.1	9	5	4	1	0
M. Tanner	1.0	1	2	1	0	0
L. Chambers	0.2	0	0	0	1	0

W: Jillian Lawn
SV: Laken Chambers

**Box Score
Rabun @ Union**

BATTER	AB	R	H	RBI	BB
K. Tanner	4	1	1	0	0
K. Nix	4	3	2	0	0
L. Chambers	4	0	2	1	0
-E. Garrison	0	1	0	0	0
J. Lawn	3	1	2	3	0
M. Garrett	3	0	1	0	0
-M. Sutton	0	1	0	0	0
A. Arnold	3	1	1	2	0
L. Arrowood	3	0	0	0	0
C. Moose	3	0	1	1	0
B. Poteete	3	1	1	0	0

2B: Maddie Garrett, Aladriel Arnold

PITCHING	IP	H	R	ER	K	BB
L. Chambers	6.0	4	1	0	5	2

W: Laken Chambers