

Sports

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Panthers rally around injured teammate; pull away at Lumpkin 28-7

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Dahlonega - Despite scoring on its first possession, Union County was holding on to a 7-0 lead early in the third quarter when junior receiver Sam Gilbert took a vicious hit to the head that sent his helmet flying and left him lying at midfield.

While paramedics tended to their fallen teammate for nearly 20 minutes, the Panthers rallied around Gilbert and vowed to finish strong.

Lumpkin was penalized for a helmet-to-helmet personal foul which was followed by a dead ball unsportsmanlike conduct flag for celebrating the illegal hit.

The Lumpkin defender responsible for the hit was ejected for targeting.

Earlier this year, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) outlawed "targeting" as a defensive player.

Effective with the 2014 season, the new rule reads as follows: "Targeting is an act of taking aim and initiating contact to an opponent above the shoulders with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulders.

"A defenseless player is a player who, because of his physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury."

When play resumed, the Panthers took out their frustrations with their play, and in two plays it was the Union County offense's turn to celebrate when Joseph Mancuso and Robert Prunier hooked up for a 45-yard touchdown pass - giving the Panthers a 13-0 advantage.

"At first I was down on myself (following Gilbert's injury), but I knew that I needed to get back up, go out there and win this game for him," Mancuso said. "We are a family and we do everything together. It was all for 'Gibby.'"

After being treated, Gilbert's injury was ruled a concussion. Union was already playing shorthanded after junior running back/linebacker Nick Whittle left the game early with a leg injury. As of this writing, Whittle's diagnosis remains uncertain.

"We've had to overcome adversity all week long," Union Head Coach Brian Allison said. "We lost Clay Wallis (wide re-



Junior Sam Gilbert with a touchdown grab to give Union a 7-0 lead on the first play of the second quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

ceiver) early in the week, (Jacob) Rogers (WR) was hurt early in the week, Whittle got hurt in the first quarter, so when Gilbert got hurt, I think it motivated our kids even more. We have responded really well to adversity all week."

When Lumpkin took possession trailing 13-0, the Indians' offense was penalized for holding, bringing back a long touchdown run and eventually forcing the Indians to punt.

When the Panthers took over on their own 20, they were unable to gain any positive yardage, and after the punt was shanked, Lumpkin set up shop with prime field position at the Union County 31-yard line.

A 9-yard carry set up a 22-yard touchdown run that brought the Indians within six at 13-7 with 4:52 remaining in the third.

Starting at their own 20, Mancuso hit Jacob Rogers for nine yards, then picked up two yards and the first on a quarterback keeper. A block-in-the-back brought up a second-and-20 but Mancuso found Rogers for 13 yards and Prunier for nine to move the sticks. Unfortunately the Panthers' drive would stall and a faked punt attempt was unsuccessful.

Lumpkin's offense took over on their own 38-yard line

and a handoff went for 10 yards on the first play. On the second play, Union's defense forced a fumble and handed the ball back to Mancuso and the offense at the Indians' 44-yard line.

Sophomore Nic Rodriguez and Mancuso carried for four yards each but a third down incompleteness brought up a 4th and 2. From just inside midfield, Mancuso connected with Rogers for 16 yards and a fresh set of downs.

On first down, Mancuso dodged a bullet when a Lumpkin defender dropped a would-be interception that hit him in the numbers. After nearly throwing his first pick of the year, Mancuso found Prunier for 10 yards and a first down. At the Indians' 22-yard line, Mancuso dumped off a short pass to Chase Barnett and the senior running back / linebacker plowed his way to pay dirt for the final play of the third quarter. Union would elect to go for two following Barnett's score and the call paid off. Prunier snagged a bullet from Mancuso at the goal line and in traffic - stretching the Panthers' lead to 21-7 to open the fourth quarter.

"After Gibby got hurt we were pumped up and ready to go, but then we dropped down a little



Junior Joseph Mancuso with a 13-yard carry in the first quarter. He led Union in rushing and passing yards. Photo/Todd Forrest

bit," Barnett said. "That's the way it is throughout the game. You're going to get pumped up and then you're going to drop, but you've just gotta keep going."

Lumpkin County's power running attack isn't suited to rally from multiple-touchdown deficits in the fourth quarter and the Indians went three-and-out and punted. With 9:48 to play, Union took over on their own 31-yard line.

Seconds later, the Panthers were up 27-7 thanks to a 69-yard deep ball from Mancuso to an in-stride Rogers. Knox Kiernan's kick made it 28-7.

Senior Brett Dietz blew up a third-and-19 Lumpkin County pass attempt with a sack - resulting in a 4th-and-25.

The Panthers went three-and-out and punted. On the ensuing drive, the Indians drove into the Union redzone but another fumble recovery by the Panthers kept Lumpkin from reaching double-digits and preserved the 28-7 victory.

On the Indians' first possession of the game they held the ball for almost 9 minutes before a fumble deep in Union territory brought the Panthers' offense onto the field. Mancuso hit Rogers and Prunier often and carried himself

for nine yards and 13 yards before finding Gilbert in the endzone from 14 yards out.

Mancuso threw for more than 300 yards for the sixth time in his high school career, totaling 309 yards and four touchdowns through the air. He completed 21-of-28 pass attempts with no interceptions despite facing the most aggressive pass rush that he's seen thus far in 2014.

"Lumpkin is a physical football team and their defensive line was a little more physical than I thought they would be," Coach Allison said. "At times we didn't do a great job of pass protection but when it was all said and done, I think our offensive line played maybe a 'B' football game. (Lumpkin) is a (Class) AAAA football team that just dropped down to AAA. Last year they beat Stephens County in the last game of the season."

After Whittle went down early, Mancuso wound up leading the team in rushing with 37 yards on nine carries.

Rogers had six grabs for 110 yards and a score, Prunier had five catches for 82 yards and a score, and Gilbert caught six passes for 81 yards and a touchdown - all in the first half.

Barnett added two recep-

tions for 27 yards and a touchdown to go with 16 tackles, six assists, two forced fumbles, and a fumble recovery.

Sophomore linebacker Chris Robinson lined nine tackles and five assists.

The Panthers played four quarters of turnover-free football while Lumpkin coughed up the football four times, and Union recovered it three times.

"The turnover margin was a big factor," Coach Allison said. "Of their four fumbles, we forced two of them. Defensively I thought we played much better than we did against Towns. We did some really good things"

The Panthers will enter Friday's home opener vs Andrews, NC with a 2-0 record - marking the second time in three years that Union has opened the season at 2-0.

The visiting Wildcats will bring an 0-3 record to Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium, fresh off a 28-8 loss to Rabun-Gap.

Rabun Gap defeated Towns County 20-13 in a scrimmage contest last month.

Andrews' other losses came vs Smoky Mountain, NC (30-7) and at Tellico Plains, TN (22-21). However, Coach Allison knows that a win at Union County would make the Wildcats forget all about their early season struggles.

"They are a well-coached football team and their kids play very hard," Coach Allison said. "They'll come over here just like they did two years ago and play hard for four quarters. We've got to come out ready to play and keep taking this season one game at a time."

Last season, the Panthers held a 13-6 lead early in the fourth quarter before the offense exploded for 21 unanswered points in a 34-12 victory.

Two years ago in Blairsville, Union and Andrews were tied at 14-14 midway through the third quarter when the Panthers put up 26 unanswered in a 40-14 victory.

Union County is 12-1-1 all-time vs Andrews, NC and currently own a four game win streak over the Wildcats dating back to 1982. Andrews' lone victory came in 1981 by a 21-6 score. In 1969 the two teams finished in a 6-6 tie.

Kickoff will be at 7:30 p.m. this Friday at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. A monument to the '57 football team will be unveiled Friday.

Lady Panthers pound East Hall, Rabun; split at Veterans Tourney

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After clobbering Rabun 7-1 in a Region contest and East Hall 9-1 in a non-region affair, the Lady Panthers went 2-2 over the weekend at the Veterans Tournament in Oconee County.

Union County (17-2, 6-0) will host the defending Region 8-AA Champions Social Circle (10-6, 5-1) in a critical Region doubleheader this Tuesday at 4 and 6 p.m. Social Circle defeated Union County four times in four meetings last season - all played at Social Circle.

On Saturday, Union will host Fannin County at 11 a.m. and Gilmer County at 3 p.m.

UC 6, Oconee Co. 3

Junior Maddie Garrett continued to swing the hot bat and it was her two-run homer in the first inning that staked Union to an early lead over the third ranked team in Class AAA.

Senior Kelsey Nix singled and scored in the second inning to keep the Lady Panthers on top 3-1 entering the third. In the bottom half of the third, sophomore Laken Chambers tripled to lead off the inning and freshman Braden Poteete, the courtesy runner, scored on a passed ball for a 4-1 Union advantage.

Oconee got two runs back in the fourth but sophomore Kendra Tanner singled and scored in the fifth and Crystal Busbee singled and scored on a passed ball in the sixth inning, giving Union a 6-3 lead.

Chambers (12-0) went seven innings for Union, striking out four, allowing four hits and three unearned runs.

UC 0, Brookwood 10

Union's 16-game win streak to open the season came to an end to Brookwood, the fourth ranked team in Class AAAAAA.

The game was called in the fifth inning due to Brookwood's 10-run lead.

The Lady Panthers were unable to muster a hit and managed just two walks. In 2 2/3 innings, Chambers (12-1) allowed



The Union County Lady Panthers infield and pitcher Laken Chambers after a conference with Coach Stewart. Photo/Todd Forrest

seven earned runs and freshman Jillian Lawn allowed one unearned run in 1 1/3 innings.

UC 0, ELCA 12

Seniors Courtney Busbee and Crystal Busbee each recorded a hit and Chambers (12-2) was knocked out of the game after five earned runs in 1/3 of an inning.

Lawn lasted 1 2/3 innings while allowing four earned runs. Freshman Logan Seabolt entered in the third and worked two innings, allowing one hit and two unearned runs.

Second ranked Eagles Landing Christian (Class A) scored six in the first and four in the second.

UC 8, North Oconee 1

Union County wrapped up the Veterans' Tournament in Oconee County by taking down North Oconee, an old Regional rival by an 8-1 score.

Chambers (13-2) struck out five, surrendered four hits, and one earned run in six innings of work. She also went 2-for-4 at the plate with a double.

Kelsey Nix was 2-for-3 at the plate with two RBIs, Courtney Busbee was 1-for-3 with an RBI double, Crystal Busbee finished with two hits and an RBI. King

was 2-for-3 with a run, sophomore Lydia Arrowood went 3-for-3, Tanner was 1-for-3, Garrett scored twice, and Poteete scored once.

UC 7, Rabun Co. 1

A four run fifth was enough to give Union a 7-0 lead and put Rabun County away for good in a decisive Region 8-AA contest.

Union benefited from two RBIs each from Chambers, Courtney Busbee, and Tanner. Chambers added a double while Courtney Busbee and Tanner both tripled. Junior Karley Nix finished with a 3-for-4 day at the plate and scored twice.

In her 11th win of the year, Chambers struck out nine, yielded three hits, two walks, and one unearned run to keep Union unbeaten in Region play.

UC 9, East Hall 1

The Lady Panthers posted five runs in the second inning which was plenty as Chambers fired a two-hitter and Union defeated East Hall for the 13th time in 14 meetings between former Region adversaries.

Garrett finished with a 2-for-3 day at the plate, scoring two runs and driving in one. The junior went deep for the second time this year to lead off the sec-



Junior Maddie Garrett has homered three times in the last three weeks to tie for the team lead in dingers. Photo/Todd Forrest

ond and jump start the the Lady Panthers' big inning that put the visitors away early. Tanner also had an impressive performance at the plate going 3-for-3 with two RBIs, two runs, a double, and a triple.

Chambers worked five innings, striking out two and walking three Lady Vikings. Chambers gave way to Lawn and the freshman pitched a scoreless sixth with one strikeout. But her outing was cut short when the Lady Panthers ended the game in their half of the inning, via the mercy rule.

On an evening that Union County Head Coach Jessica Stewart was honored for her 200th win, and with a key Region contest at Rabun County on deck, the Lady Panthers put the distractions aside and took care of business. Union pounded out 13 hits - six going for extra bases. King lined an RBI double in the second following Garrett's long ball, Tanner tripled in the third to bring in a run, and smacked an RBI double in the fifth. Crystal Busbee and Kelsey Nix each doubled.

Karley Nix went 2-for-4 with an RBI, Kelsey Nix was 1-for-2 with two runs and an RBI. King went 1-for-3 with three RBIs, and Arrowood finished 2-for-3 with a pair of runs and a stolen base.

UC 20, Greene Co. 0

Union County blasted the Lady Tigers with a football score in the first game of a Region 8-AA doubleheader in Greensboro.

Lawn recorded her third win of the season in three innings of work due to the 'mercy rule.' She struck out 6 batters and allowed two hits without a walk.

Garrett went 2-for-2 with 4 RBIs. Chambers was 2-for-3 with a double, a triple, four runs and three RBIs, and Kelsey Nix drove in three runs and doubled during a 2-for-2 performance.

Crystal Busbee, King, Seabolt and Poteete all doubled. Anna Owenby scored following an RBI single, Courtney Busbee and Macci Everett had RBI singles, Tanner was 2-for-2 with two RBIs. Channa Carroll recorded an RBI. Arrowood and Karley Nix each scored twice.

Greene County didn't help its cause with six errors.

UC 16, Greene Co. 0

Coach Stewart picked up win number 200 in a three-inning, 16-0 romp at Greene County.

Seabolt recorded the first win of her high school career as she struck out six, walked one, and allowed one hit. At the plate she was 3-for-3 with three runs, a

triple, and an RBI.

King went 2-for-3 with two doubles and four RBIs, Poteete was 2-for-3 with a double, three RBIs, and two runs, Owenby finished 1-for-3 with two runs and an RBI.

Courtney Busbee and Lawn each drove in a run. Tanner was 1-for-2 with a run and Carroll scored twice.

UC 5, Dawson Co. 1

The Lady Panthers and Lady Tigers softball programs share a rich history and a deep respect, so it was only fitting that Dawson County (9-2) was the last major hurdle that Coach Stewart had to clear on her way to 200 wins.

After handing Dawson its first loss of 2014, Coach Stewart improved to 14-6 all-time with the Lady Tigers, an impressive record against a team that's won 62 percent of its games over the last seven years.

Until the top of the fifth, the only offense the Lady Panthers could summon was a two-out, infield single from Arrowood in the third inning. However, in that fifth inning, Union crossed home plate five times, all with two outs and without an extra base-hit.

Kelsey Nix singled and King reached on an error, setting the stage for Arrowood once again.

And the sophomore delivered once again. This time a single to left scored Poteete, who ran for Kelsey Nix. Crystal Busbee went to the opposite field to score King and a bunt single by Karley Nix scored Arrowood. A stolen base by Karley Nix put two in scoring position for Chambers, Union's RBI leader, and she lined a 1-1 pitch into center - scoring Crystal Busbee and Karley Nix. When the dust settled, the Lady Panthers held a 5-0 lead going into the bottom half of the fifth.

Kelsey Nix was 2-for-3 at the plate, Chambers went 1-for-3 with two RBIs, and Arrowood finished 2-for-3 with an RBI and a run. Karley Nix and Crystal Busbee each went 1-for-4 with an RBI.

Chambers struck out eight, walked two, and allowed five hits in seven innings.