

Sports

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Panthers rushing attack pummels Wilkes with 344 yards

Union improves to 9-1 and secures No. 2 seed in 8-AA; will host Bowdon in first round of State on Friday

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Washington - Senior quarterback Joseph Mancuso needed only two pass completions on Friday night to take down Washington Wilkes on the road.

Both completions went for touchdowns of 43 and 56 yards, but it was the ground game that allowed the Panthers to pull away during the second half for a 43-21 victory.

The win clinches the No. 2 seed in 8-AA and allows Union County to host the first round of the Class AA State Tournament for the second straight year.

The Panthers picked up their ninth win of the season thanks to 344 team rushing yards. Mancuso went for 170 yards and two scores on 19 carries. He also passed the 1,000-yard mark on the ground for 2015.

Junior Bo Lynch rushed 16 times for 144 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

The home team would get on the board first but the Panthers responded by outscoring the Tigers 22-7 for the remainder of the first half.

Union opened the third with a touchdown and Wilkes answered with 8-points when quarterback DeAndre Harris punched it in from 6-yards out, then kept it himself once again on the two-point conversion.

From that point on it would be all Union County as they put the finishing touches on a 9-1 regular season by owning the fourth quarter by a score of 14-0.

The Tigers' two-point conversion cut the Panthers' lead to 29-21 with 1:26 left in the third quarter, but it was all Union the rest of the way.

Starting from their own 37-yard line, Mancuso rushed for 23 yards on first down before Lynch finished off the drive single-handedly.

From the Tigers' 40-yard line, Lynch carried for 14 yards, 10 yards, and 6 yards before Wilkes jumped offsides and gave Union a 1st-and-goal from the 5-yard line.

On first down, Lynch picked up 4 yards, then on second down, he slipped a tackle in the backfield, then plowed his way into the endzone for his first score of the night with 11:30 to play.

Leading 36-21, senior Sam Gilbert, who is known for his receiving skills, entered the game as a defensive back and picked off an overthrown Wilkes pass at the 25-yard line after the Tigers drove into Panther territory.

From there, it would only take Union four plays to put the game away.

On first down, Lynch continued to wear down the Wilkes defense with a 14-yard gain.

On the very next play the offensive line cleared a path for Lynch and the junior running back gashed his way through the Tigers defense for a 51-yard gain.

Once again, he would finish off the drive himself.

The 51-yard pickup gave the Panthers a 1st-and-goal at the



Senior quarterback Joseph Mancuso surpassed 1,000 yards rushing last week to go along with 2,700 passing yards on the year. He needs approximately 225 total yards on Friday to reach 10,000 total yards for his career. Photo/Todd Forrest



RJ Banton (11), Chris Drost (54), and Chandler Day (67) swarm the Eagles quarterback. The Panthers' defensive front abused the Riverside offensive line for 48 minutes. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior defensive back Eddie Kemp (30) recovered a fumble during the second half of the win at Washington Wilkes. Photo/Todd Forrest

10-yard line and Lynch needed two carries of 6 and 4 yards to cash in with 7:37 to play.

Trailing 43-21, Wilkes drove back into Union territory but the ball-hawking secondary came up with another interception to seal the deal.

From the Panthers' 39-yard line, Harris' deep ball was underthrown and senior Josh Daniel snared the pass at the 8-yard line and returned it to the 40-yard line where Union ran out the clock.

Mancuso finished the game completing 2-of-7 passes for 100 yards and two scores.

If there were any doubts regarding the health of Mancuso's knee, he put them to bed in the first quarter.

With his team down 6-0, Union's senior quarterback orchestrated an 11-play drive that saw him carry the ball seven times for 55 yards, including a 10-yard scoring run and the two-point conversion.

With his team on top 8-6, Mancuso hit Gilbert on a screen pass that went for 44 yards and a touchdown.

The Tigers trimmed the Panthers lead to 15-13 with 4:20 left in the first half but Union needed only two plays to reach the endzone.

Mancuso carried for 7 yards on first down then dumped off a short pass to Knox Kiernan, who came out of the backfield and raced 56 yards down the home sideline to make it a 22-13 game at the half.

An Eddie Kemp fumble recovery resulted in a 9-play, 52-yard drive that was capped off by a 26-yard touchdown run by Mancuso in the third.

During the drive, Mancuso had carries of 15 and 9 yards but a holding penalty forced the Union into a 3rd-and-16 where the Tigers jumped offsides - making it 3rd-and-11 from the 26-yard line. That's where Mancuso, sprung by a Coleson Daniel block, took the



The Panthers' young defensive front led by juniors Chandler Day (67) and Nic Rodriguez (3). Joining them are sophomores Matthew Beise (53) and RJ Banton (11). Union's front-seven continue to improve on a weekly basis. Photo/Todd Forrest



Panthers Head Coach Brian Allison has been a part of four of Union football's five nine-win seasons. As a coach in 2001, 2014, and 2015, then as a player in 1983. Union also won nine in 1974. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior running back Bo Lynch rushed for 144 yards and two scores during Union's win at Washington Wilkes. Photo/Todd Forrest

read option keeper up the middle, then cut left and found blocks downfield by Gilbert and fellow receiver Slade Thompson that allowed him to find the endzone for his second rushing score of the game.

Up next is the 5-5 Bowdon Red Devils, the No. 3 seed from Region 5-AA.

However, Coach Allison says not to let that record fool you, they are much better than advertised. In fact, he feels Bowdon's offense is in some ways, better than Rabun County.

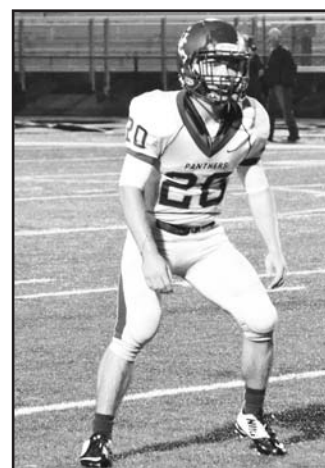
"They have probably the best offensive line and running backs that we've seen all year, including Rabun," Allison said.

"I think their offensive line, as a whole is better than Rabun's and I think their two running backs are also better (than Rabun). They're faster and more physical. They're going to run the football. It's what they do."

According to Coach Allison, we haven't faced a team this year that even runs a comparable offense to Bowdon and you have to go back to last year's State playoff game with Model to find a team that's similar to Bowdon, style-wise.

As for Union's offense, Coach Allison is confident that they can move the ball on Bowdon's defense.

"I think we can keep doing



Senior Josh Daniel



Senior Andrew Brown

what we've been doing and be successful at it. We have to make sure we can control the football and throw it when we want, and not be forced to do either one."

Kickoff on Friday is scheduled for 7:30 p.m.

Union Cross Country records a pair of Top 10 finishes at State

By Todd Forrest
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Carrollton - Both Union County squads returned to the Class AA State Cross Country Championships in Carrollton over the weekend as the two-time Region 8-AA Champions met a mangled and muddy course that only got worse as the day wore on.

The Union County guys were up first as they were forced to follow the Class AAAA girls race that saw two-time State Champion Jenna Gearing of White County slip and break her leg as she cruised down the final hill with a commanding lead, less than 100 meters from her third State title.

"The conditions on the state course were the worst that we have ever had there," Union Coach Jackie Hughes said. "Usually the weather and course conditions are very good. The conditions made for very slippery footing, and overall the times were about a minute off from last year. We knew in advance that the weather was going to be a factor, and I believe we went into the race with a good attitude about it."

The guys got underway at 1:25 p.m. and sophomore Lance



Union's guys at the starting line in Carrollton. Photo/Todd Forrest

Underwood found his way into the Top 10 in the early stages of the race.

He would work his way into seventh place but that's as close as he would get as the 8-AA Individual Champ finished with a time of 18 minutes, and 30 seconds to lead the Panthers to a sixth place finish in the team standings.

Underwood crossed the finish line three seconds ahead of eighth place and nine seconds out of a Top five finish and 40 seconds

back of the State Champion.

"Individually, Lance moved up 13 places this year, from 20th to seventh," Coach Hughes said. "He really wants a State Championship, and he has a great work ethic, so I truly believe he will have a legitimate shot at it over the next two years."

In 45th place was Timothy Murphy with a time of 20:52, Gehrig Patterson was 50th at 20:56, and 52nd was Adam Bachman at 20:58.

Union County's team fin-



The Lady Panthers at the starting line in Carrollton. Photo/Todd Forrest

ish of sixth was 46 points behind fifth place and 45 points ahead of seventh.

"Last year the boys were 90 points away from fifth place, this year they were only 46 points away," Coach Hughes said. They are definitely moving in the right direction. Our top five finishers were juniors, sophomores and a freshman, so they should be there contending for the championship again next year."

Other times for Union were 58th place Colby Ives at 21:10,

64th place Jacob Kelley at 21:22, and 94th place Cristian Garcia at 22:16.

During the Lady Panthers' race, Emma Garrison was unable to maneuver her way out of the middle of the field and finished 32nd at 24:06.

Sage Royston placed 46th with a time of 24:56 and Emmi Schakat was 54th at 25:25.

As a team, the Lady Panthers put together a Top 10 finish, just one point behind 9th place Bremen and 94 points better than

11th place Rabun County.

"I was really quite happy with the outcome of the girls' race," Coach Hughes said. "I think the conditions may have affected them a little more than they did the boys, since only a couple of the girls were wearing racing spikes. We also were dealing with some injury and sickness issues that hit the week before the meet. Any time you can walk out of Carrollton with a Top 10 finish, I feel you have done very well."

Rounding out the race for Union County were Stephanie Busse, who was 73rd, checking in at 26:19, 79th place Emmaline Stuart finished in 26:59, 88th place Erika Clause finished with a time of 27:35, and 92nd place Anna Danek finished with a time of 27:46.

"We had 15 senior runners on the teams this year," Coach Hughes said. "That is the largest group of seniors I've ever had. It has been an excellent season with many great accomplishments."

"However, It couldn't have come together so well without the help and support of the parents, the faculty and administration, and the community. We sincerely thank everyone for all they did to make this such a great season."