

Sports

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Rabun wins the coin toss; Lady Panthers get No. 2 spot

Union whips Social Circle but enters the 8-AA Tourney at No. 2 after losing the tiebreaking coin toss

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The regular season is in the books and the Lady Panthers are returning to the State Tournament for the fifth consecutive year and the seventh time in eight years. And losing the first place coin toss to Rabun won't make any difference if the teams should meet again this weekend in Greensboro.

As the postseason opens this week, the No. 2 seeded Lady Panthers (18-5) are on a mission, and know they're only one win away from hosting the first round of State for the first time since the 2008-2009 season.

After five straight trips to the State playoffs, just getting there isn't good enough anymore. And the Lady Panthers have no intentions of settling for home court in the first round. They are gunning for their ultimate goal of winning the 8-AA Region Championship.

In order to reach Saturday's Region Championship, the Lady Panthers need to take care of business on Friday when they meet the winner of the Oglethorpe County vs Social Circle game at Greene County.

As for Oglethorpe and Social Circle, Union was able to handle both squads, and got an up close look at Social Circle when the Lady Panthers hosted the Lady Redskins (7-11) last Friday.

**Lady Panthers 65
Social Circle 15**

The visitors never knew what hit them when they rolled into Blairsville for Senior Night.

The Lady Panthers put the game away well before halftime with a 20-2 run right out of the gates, that turned into a 35-6 game at the half.

Senior Lisa Nalaschi, who also grabbed 11 boards on the night, led the charge with 11 of her game-high 21 points in the first quarter.

Senior Brooke Maddox added 7 of her 12 points in the



Senior Kaitlyn Day with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



Senior Madison Larisey with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



Senior Brooke Maddox with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



Senior Lisa Nalaschi with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich

opening frame. The senior guard would lead the team with 7 steals and 5 assists, while hauling in 5 boards.

Junior Layne Colwell had 2 points to round out the first quarter scoring. She would finish the game with 6 rebounds and 4 steals.

Nalaschi and Maddox continued to lead the offense in the second quarter with Nalaschi getting 6 points and Maddox scoring 5 points.

Sophomore Holly Stroman nailed a trey in the second and senior Kaitlyn Day added a basket for a 35-6 advantage.

The Lady Panthers continued their onslaught in the

third quarter with Nalaschi and Day scoring five each. Both Layne Colwell and Stroman hit a trey in the period. Junior Kim Coyne had 2 points and freshman Bailey Daniel went 1-of-2 at the free throw line.

Leading 54-10 entering the fourth, Union Head Coach David Tucker turned to his bench and freshman Baylee Young knocked down a trey and two free throws for 5 points. Junior Anna Danek scored 4 points and Daniel added a basket.

SCORING: Nalaschi 21, Maddox 12, Day 7, Stroman 6, La. Colwell 5, Young 5, Danek 4, Daniel 3, Coyne 2 REBOUNDING: Nalaschi 11, La. Colwell

6, Maddox 5, Larisey 5, Day 3, Coyne 3, Stroman 2, Danek 2 ASSISTS: Maddox 5, Day 3, Colwell 2, Stroman 1, Nalaschi 1 STEALS: Maddox 7, La Colwell 4, Daniel 3, Stroman 1, Nalaschi 1 BLOCKS: Nalaschi 1

The 8-AA Region Tournament opens this week but Union won't see any action until Friday at 4 p.m. when they meet either Social Circle or Oglethorpe County (12-13). The Lady Panthers defeated Social Circle 60-26 in the first meeting and 65-15 at home last week.

Union knocked off Oglethorpe County 57-35 at home thanks to 13 treys. Maddox led all scorers with 24,

while Day finished with 18, and Layne Colwell with 9 points. During Union's 63-41 victory in Lexington, Maddox led the way again with 17 points. Layne Colwell added 13, and Day finished with 12.

A loss on Friday and the Lady Panthers will play for third place at 4 p.m. on Saturday. A win on Friday sends Union to the Region 8-AA Championship Game at 7:00 on Saturday.

Greene County will host the Region 8-AA Semi Finals on Friday and the Finals on Saturday.

The Union County Lady Panthers will return to State for the 17th time in team his-

tory. And despite reaching five straight State Tournaments, one trend they would like to reverse is their performance.

Union has not been out of the first round since the 2008-09 squad won the Region title and hosted the first and second round.

The Lady Panthers blew out Calhoun in the first round before falling to GAC at home in the second round.

One year prior, during the 2007-08 season, Union County lost at GAC in the opening round. That game ended a 7-year drought from the State Tournament after the Lady Panthers fell in the 2001 Class AA State Championship Game to, you guessed it, GAC.

During the 90's, the Lady Panthers reached State once - coming in 1994 when they were the champs of Region 8-A. That team knocked off GAC in the first round of State at The Pit to advance to the Elite 8.

They went twice in the 1980's (1985 and 1987) and reached the Elite 8 in 1985 - which was the first of five State appearances under Head Coach Jim Hughes.

The Lady Panthers advanced to State six times in the 1970's - reaching the Final Four in 1972 and 1974.

From 1970-73 Union was coached by Tommy Wilson before Mickey Birchfield took over in 1974



Coach Tucker and Kaitlyn Day embrace during the Senior Night ceremonies

Panthers hold off Social Circle; postseason opens Tuesday vs Oglethorpe

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The postseason begins this week, and for the Panthers, it's win or go home.

While the Lady Panthers are guaranteed another two weeks of basketball, the men haven't been as fortunate.

However, they are only one win away from extending the season and they will get that chance on Tuesday at 5:30 p.m.

Rabun County High School will be the site of Union's first round playoff game with the Oglethorpe County Patriots.

If the Panthers (15-10) take care of business on Tuesday, they'll advance to the final two rounds - both to be played at Greene County.

**Panthers 68
Social Circle 67**

Last Friday night, Union County ended its regular season with 15 wins for its third straight winning season. But getting that 15th win was no simple task.

Last month, Social Circle (8-13) pulled off one of the most shocking upsets of the season when they knocked off Union County, 49-48. In the

second meeting, in Blairsville, the Panthers barely escaped in another one-point game between the two squads.

At the half, Union held a slim advantage at 25-20, but during the second half they found themselves in the fight of their lives.

Social Circle's sophomore guard Deion Head scored 20 of his game-high 35 points in the second half. And he wasn't alone.

Junior forward Zae Jackson put up 12 of his 18 points in the second half. The duo combined for 19 of the Redskins' 21 third quarter points that tied the score up at 56-56 entering the fourth quarter.

The Panthers used a balanced scoring attack that allowed them to hang on to the win.

While Social Circle's two stars were trying to take over the game, Union quietly had four players finish with double-figures in scoring.

Seven different Panthers reached the scoring column during the fourth quarter alone. Senior Tyler Odom scored 12 of his team-high 17 points in the second half.

Junior Chase Shook scored 8 points in the second half en route to a 15-point performance. Senior guards Hunter Hughes and Kyle Hamby each finished with 10 points.

The Panthers enter this week's Region Tournament as the No. 3 seed and will face No. 6 Oglethorpe County (9-16) at 5:30 on Tuesday.

Union has beaten the Patriots twice this season, but both contests were too close for comfort.

In the first meeting, in Blairsville, the Panthers held on 65-58. Odom was the star of the game with 25 points and 5 rebounds. He hit 3-of-4 from beyond the arc and 4-of-5 at the line.

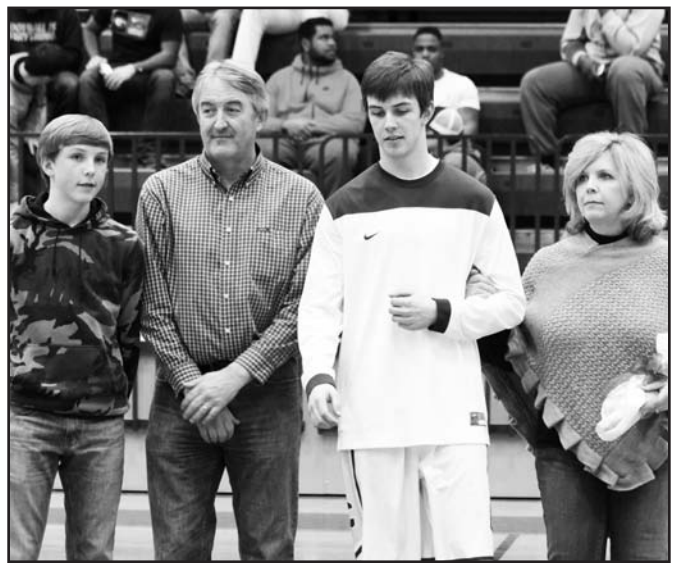
Hughes finished with 13 points and 6 assists while Shook had 10 points and 9 rebounds.

In the second contest, Hughes led the charge with 24 points, Odom had 15, and Shook added 14.

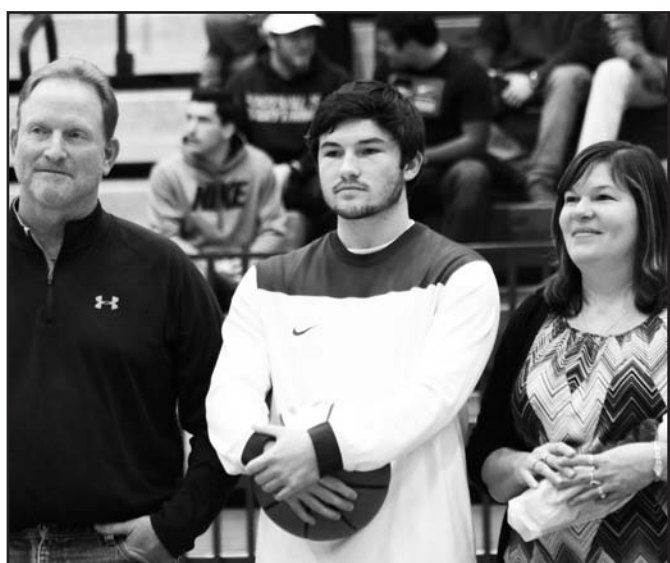
The Panthers led for most of the contest until the Patriots tied it up late in the third quarter.

Union eventually pulled away, 66-57 but the game was much closer than the final score would indicate.

A win on Tuesday would get the Panthers into the State Tournament for the second consecutive season, and that's something that hasn't happened since Union went to State four straight times, between 2000 and 2003.



Senior Ralston Drake with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



Senior Lake Arnick with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



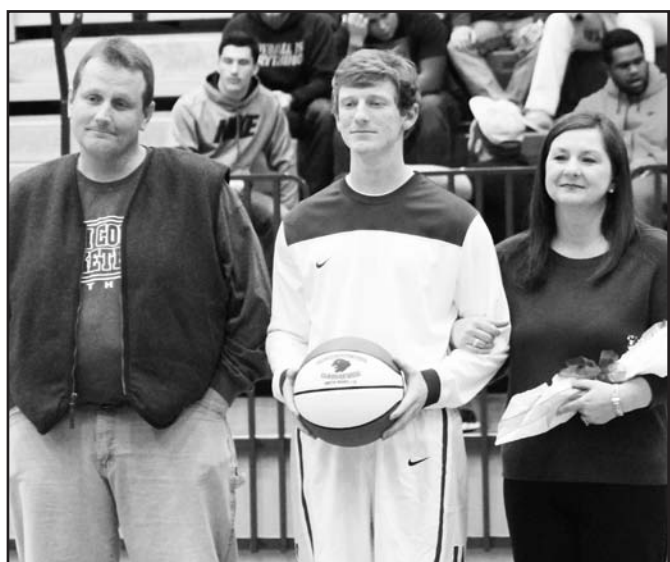
Senior Kyle Hamby with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



Senior Tyler Odom with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



Senior Jacob Rogers with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich



Senior Hunter Hughes with family. Photo/Sabrina Rich