

# Sports

See the Sports Section at nghanews.com

## Panthers demolish Fannin; playoffs on the line this Friday

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
sports@nghanews.com

**Blue Ridge** - Union County scored early and often while leaving their mark on the record books during a 63-39 victory at Fannin County that wasn't as close as the final score indicated.

Not only did the Panthers set the game record for points in a single team with 63, it is believed they also broke the record for points in a half with 49.

"Offensively, I can't say enough about what a great job all of those guys did," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "From receiver to center to quarterback to running back it was a really good night."

Meanwhile, the senior class becomes the winningest class in program history with 31 victories during their four-year career, that has at least one game remaining.

The win at Fannin moves Union County one step closer to clinching the No. 3 spot in Region 7-AAA as they host Lumpkin County on Friday for Senior Night. However, a loss on Friday could potentially knock the Panthers out of the playoffs for the first time in four years.

A few different playoff scenarios could play out depending on the outcome of the Lumpkin County at Union County game, this Friday. If the Panthers win, it's simple, Union is third, North Hall is fourth (via their win over Lumpkin), and Lumpkin misses the postseason.

A Union loss results in a three-way tie for third, and one would almost need a degree in calculus to decipher the tiebreaker.

Since all three teams finished with one win and one loss against the other two teams, the head-to-head matchups go out the window. That leaves what is essentially the margin of victory vs the other two teams as the determining factor.

Simply put, Lumpkin would need to defeat Union by six-or-more points to end the Panthers' season and move North Hall into third and Lumpkin to fourth.

If Union falls by five-or-fewer points, the Panthers claim the fourth seed and North Hall takes third.

As for the top half of the region, the only unbeaten squads in 7-AAA will square off in Dawsonville this Friday night when Greater Atlanta Christian and Dawson County settle the Region Championship on the field.

The Tigers are riding high following a 54-8 romp of arch-rival Lumpkin County that saw Dawson open the game with 40 unanswered points. Down in Norcross, the Spartans are coming off a bye week with two weeks to prepare for Dawson County.

As the No. 1 and No. 2 spots in Region 7-AAA are determined in Dawson County, the No. 3 and No. 4 seeds will be settled in Blairsville when the Panthers host Lumpkin County on Senior Night.

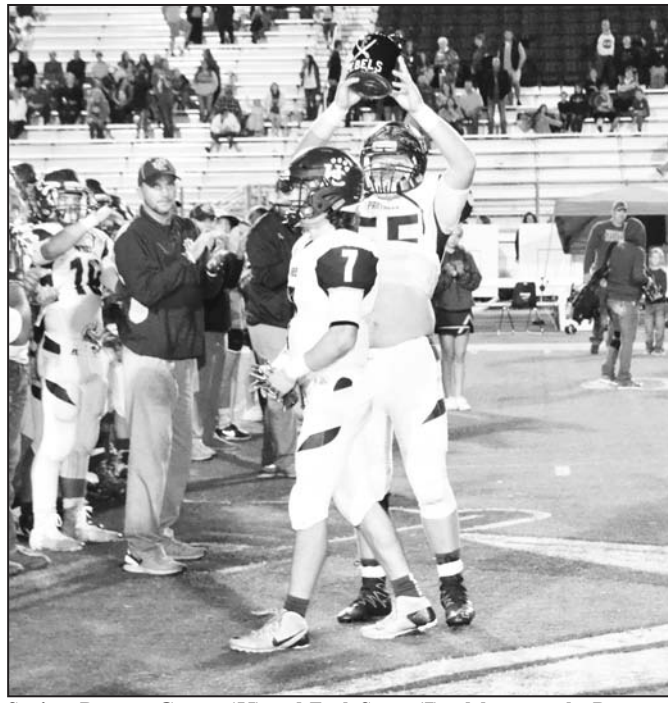
Union County put itself in the driver's seat for third place with its 63-39 rout over rival Fannin last week in Blue Ridge.

The Panthers stormed out to a 49-9 halftime advantage over an emotionally-charged Rebels' squad that was hosting Senior Night.

Quarterback Cole Wright and running back Bo Lynch continued to put up huge numbers, combining for all nine Union touchdowns and 583 total yards. Lynch, who ran for three scores, also took his place among the elite running backs in the history of the program with 15 rushing touchdowns on the season, and 26 for his career—one short of tying Gabe Mantovani and Matthew West for the most touchdowns by a Panther running back since 1990. (For more details, see chart at bottom right corner of page).

However, in the early-going, the Union offense caught a break in the form of a roughing-the-kicker penalty that led to their first score of the game. Later the defense used three consecutive, second quarter interceptions to put Panther County away before halftime.

Following a clipping penalty on the Panthers' first play of the game, Cole Wright and company were unable to overcome a 1st-and-25, resulting in a punting situation. Things appeared to turn



Seniors Dawson Groves (55) and Zach Stone (7) celebrate as the Panthers retain the King of the Mountain Jug. Photo/Todd Forrest

from bad-to-worse when the snap sailed high and off the outstretched fingertips of junior punter R.J. Banton, who was able to scoop up the loose football but the kick went off the side of his foot and out-of-bounds, just shy of the Union 30-yard line.

Luckily two Rebel defenders plowed into Banton after the kick, resulting in a 15-yard personal foul and an automatic first down.

With new-life breathed into the offense, Lynch took a 2nd-and-2 handoff down the visitors' sideline, shedding a tackler at the 15, then dragging another defensive back across the goal line for a 54-yard touchdown run.

"We made some mistakes early on with the bad snap and the penalty, and had the mistakes continued, we would have been in for a long night," Coach Allison said. "We were able to settle in, get things going, and I thought we played pretty good."

Fannin County would answer with a 10-play, 72-yard scoring drive that was capped off by a 19-yard touchdown pass from senior Brad Davis to fellow senior Cooper Earls, who was returning from a knee injury that cost him three games. The two-point conversion pass attempt fell incomplete and the Panthers held a 7-6 advantage with 5:01 left in the first quarter.

It would be all Union County for the remainder of the half.

Taking over at their own 33, Wright found Logan Dyer over the middle for 19 yards before Wright moved the chains again with a 14-yard bootleg, two plays later. Facing a 4th-and-2, later in the series, Wright kept the drive alive with a 15-yard keeper that set up a 4-yard scoring run from Lynch—his second of the game.

Union scored again after the defense forced a three-and-out and the offense set up shop at the Rebels' 34-yard line following a punt and a personal foul against Fannin.

A loss on first down and a second down incompletion forced the Panthers into 3rd-and-12 but Wright hit Lynch on a wheel-route, down the sideline for a pickup of 34. Three plays later from inside the five, Wright found a seam up-the-middle and gave his team a 21-6 lead.

In last week's North Georgia News, Coach Allison discussed the role that turnovers would have on the outcome, and while holding a 15-point lead, the Union defense quickly turned this rivalry game into a blowout with three straight takeaways.

"I feel like defensively we played pretty good in the first half, as good as we've played in a long time, and against a really good offense," Coach Allison said.

The first came on the ensuing possession with the Rebels driving into Panther territory, attempting to make it a one-score game, junior Cole Dockrey jumped in-front a Fannin receiver inside the 30-yard line and returned the interception back to the Rebels' 41-yard line.

Unfortunately, the Panthers were hit with a holding penalty, followed by a delay of game, pushing them back onto their own side of midfield. With a 1st-and-27, Wright connected with Kanon Hemphill on a middle-screen that the sophomore receiver turned into



Lynch (5) and Dockrey (15) were selected as the Offensive and Defensive Players of the Game. Photo/Todd Forrest

a 14-yard gain.

On the very next play, Wright took a quarterback draw up the middle for a 44-yard scoring run to stretch the lead to 28-6.

Fannin responded by driving all the way down to the Union 13, but the Panthers' defense stiffened a forced three incompletions to hold them to a 30-yard field goal.

With it's advantage trimmed to 28-9, Lynch went back to work and picked up 34 yards on the first play of the ensuing drive. A third down pass to Hemphill was good for 20 and a fresh set of downs at the 22. From there Lynch took the read-option give from Wright and raced across the goal line for his third touchdown of the night.

Once again the Rebels offense was on the move until Dockrey made a diving interception at the 15-yard line to keep Fannin off the board and in a 35-9 hole. The pick was brought on by the pressure of defensive lineman of Daniel Hernandez who was in the face of Davis, forcing the Rebels' QB to heave a pass into the middle of the field.

With just over three minutes left in the half and needing 85 yards for a score, Union wasn't about to settle for just one more touchdown.

A scramble by Wright moved the chains before a roughing-the-passer flag gave the Panthers another first down. An 11-yard hookup from Wright to Austin Pattee moved Union into Fannin territory, then Wright connected with Hemphill on a 10-yard dig-route that Hemphill turned into a 45-yard touchdown when he outran the Rebels secondary to the endzone.

With 1:14 to play in the half, the Panthers were also running away on the scoreboard at 42-9.

On the second play of Fannin's ensuing possession, senior linebacker Luke Winkler snagged a bullet pass from Davis that handed the ball back to the offense with 49 seconds to work with and 32 yards from pay dirt.

Wright went to Erik Strayer on a pair of screen passes to the boundary, allowing the junior receiver to get out-of-bounds and stop the clock following gains of nine and five yards, respectively.

Wright then used his legs for a gain of 12, setting up the Panthers with a 1st-and-goal from the six. Lynch took a sweep around the left end but was forced out just shy of the pylon. With a second down from the one, Wright rolled right and hit Pattee in the endzone, who had to climb the ladder to reel in the high pass with his fingertips, reminiscent of "The Catch" by the 49ers' Dwight Clark in the 1982 NFC Championship Game.

"Those three turnovers and the roughing the punt were really the difference in the game. That was the turning point," Coach Allison said. "But I think the penalty made a huge difference."

The grab by Pattee and the point after by Brian Smith put the game out of reach before the teams even entered the locker rooms at halftime. With 15 seconds left in the second, Union was in complete control at 49-9.

"All week long we talked about jumping on them early,



"You the man, Cole." Tyler McConnell (59), Blaine Brown (78), and Kanon Hemphill (4) congratulate Cole Wright (8) following a touchdown by the Union QB. Photo/Todd Forrest

and yards-per-carry (2.9) at Dawson County. Matthews was limited to 58 yards and no scores — his second lowest total of the year.

As for Matthews' replacement at quarterback, first-year starter Chandler Woodham averages 66 YPG on the ground but isn't much of a threat to throw the ball. The junior signal caller has only completed 15-of-49 passes on the year.

Matthews' backfield partner is junior Cole White (not to be confused with Union's QB), who is churning out 84 YPG on the ground along with nine scores.

"They do a great job coaching those kids (at Lumpkin), they play very hard, and they're extremely disciplined," Coach Allison said.

Defensively, senior Connor Heriot and junior Josh Chastain are the sack leaders with four each, while senior Micah Adams has picked off two passes.

Junior kicker Wesley Wells is also a difference maker with a 48-yard field goal to his name this season. Overall, Wells has connected on 7-of-9 field goal attempts, 19-of-21 extra points, and 21-of-46 kickoffs have reached the endzone for a touchdown.

Last week, Lumpkin yielded 249 rushing yards to Dawson County. In their last four region contests, the Indians have surrendered 233 YPG on the ground. Over the last two weeks combined, they have given up more than 1,000 yards of total offense.

On the other side, the Panthers are rushing at a clip of 283 YPG over their last two games and sit atop the region in total offense at 424 YPG.

"I've watched them throughout the course of the year and it seems like they get better-and-better every week so I expect quite the challenge for our offense," Coach Allison said. "We need to execute, don't turn the ball over, and just do the things that we know how to do."

**\*Injury report:** According to Coach Allison, linebackers Bryan English (hip) and RJ Banton (neck) are both questionable for Friday.

**\*Team stats:** Union County: 609 yards of total offense. RUSHING: 30 carries, 369 yards, 6 TD. PASSING: 16-for-20, 240 yards, 3 TD.

First downs: 21. Third down efficiency: 5-for-8 (63%). Fourth Down Efficiency: 2-for-2 (100%). Penalties: 6-for-53 yards.

Fannin County: 559 yards

of total offense. RUSHING: 47 carries, 221 yards, 2 TD. PASSING: 24-for-40, 338 yards, 3 TD, 3 interceptions.

First downs: 30. Third down efficiency: 8-for-16 (50%). Fourth down efficiency: 5-for-7 (71%). Turnovers: 3. Penalties: 4-for-36 yards.

**\*Individual stats:** (Offense) UNION COUNTY: Cole Wright: 16-for-20, 240 yards, 3 TD. 11 carries, 172 yards, 3 TD. Bo Lynch: 13 carries, 171 yards, 3 TD. 2 receptions, 49 yards.

Kanon Hemphill: 5 receptions, 106 yards, 2 TD. Austin Pattee: 2 receptions, 12 yards, 1 TD. Logan Dyer: 4 receptions, 54 yards. Erik Strayer: 3 receptions, 20 yards.

Cole Dockrey: 4 carries, 21 yards. Chad Buzzard: 2 carries, 5 yards. Pierson Allison: 1 carry, 0 yards.

(Defense) Cole Dockrey: 2 interceptions. Luke Winkler: 1 interception. Chandler Day: 1 sack.

(Kicking) Brian Smith: 8-for-8 extra points, 1 Touchback

FANNIN COUNTY: Brad Davis: 24-for-40, 338 yards, 3 TD, 3 INT, 1 rush TD.

Cooper Earls: 3 receiving TD, 1 rush TD.

**\*Scoring Summary:**  
1ST QUARTER  
UC — 7 plays, 65 yards in 1:48. Lynch 55-yard TD run. (7-0)

FC — 10 plays, 72 yards in 2:43. Earls 19-yard TD pass from Davis. (7-6)

UC — 8 plays, 77 yards in 2:18. Lynch 4-yard TD run. (14-6)

UC — 6 plays, 34 yards in 1:47. Wright 2-yard TD run. (21-6)

2ND QUARTER  
UC — 3 plays, 30 yards in 57 seconds. Wright 44-yard TD run. (28-6)

FC — 12 plays, 66 yards in 4:15. 30-yard field goal. (28-9)

UC — 5 plays, 80 yards in 1:01. Lynch 22-yard TD run. (35-9)

UC — 7 plays, 85 yards in 1:47. Hemphill 45-yard TD pass from Wright. (42-9)

UC — 5 plays, 32 yards in 35 seconds. Pattee 1-yard TD pass from Wright. (49-9)

3RD QUARTER  
UC — 7 plays, 97 yards in 2:29. Hemphill 20-yard TD pass from Wright. (56-9)

FC — 7 plays, 79 yards in 2:09. Earls 25-yard TD run.

See One more win, Page 3B



Bo Lynch breaks free for a 55-yard touchdown run for the first score of the night for either team. Photo/Todd Forrest

### UCHS CAREER RUSHING TDs (SINCE 1990)

Kolt Owenby (07-10)	33
Gabe Mantovani (97-00)	27
Matthew West (00-03)	27
Bo Lynch (Active)	26
Joseph Mancuso (12-15)	22
Andrew Williams (00-02)	20*

Bold — Indicates running backs

\* - scored at both quarterback and running back



Day and Rodriguez put the clamps on Brad Davis. Photo/Todd Forrest