

Sports

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Panthers pull away from Lumpkin 35-13, take third in 7-AAA

Wright scores 5 TD's as Union finishes regular season 8-2; postseason begins Saturday at 6th ranked Cedar Grove

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It may have been Senior Night, but it was junior quarterback Cole Wright who picked on the Lumpkin County defense with his arm and his legs - combining for five touchdowns to lead the Panthers into the State playoffs for the fourth straight season with a 35-13 victory over Lumpkin.

Wright finished the game with 135 yards on the ground - giving him 1,323 for the year, which is believed to be a school record for rushing yards by a quarterback.

The previous high was thought to be held by Joseph Mancuso, who ran for 1,311 yards last season.

The Union defense was also stellar, allowing the Indians into the redzone just three times, where they surrendered only one touchdown per half.

That proved to be more than enough for Wright, who overcame an early turnover that led to a score with three touchdowns of his own to give Union a 21-7 advantage at the break.

After an 18-play touchdown drive by Lumpkin trimmed the lead to 21-13 in the third, Wright responded with touchdown runs of 54 and 28 yards to put the visitors away.

The Panthers were without starting running back Bo Lynch (did not play, coaches' decision) and lost linebacker RJ Banton to injury early in the game. Without Lynch, the offense sputtered during the first quarter but the defense was able to snuff out a fake field goal attempt to keep the contest a scoreless tie after a quarter.

Early on the second, Wright fumbled deep in Union territory and one play later, Lumpkin fullback Zach Matthews broke a 27-yard run to put the Panthers in a 7-0 hole.

On the ensuing drive, a pass to Kanon Hemphill was put on the turf and recovered by the Indians. However, a brief discussion by the officials ruled that Hemphill never gained possession and the play was ruled incomplete and not a fumble.

With new life breathed into the offense, Wright went back to Hemphill, who made a tough catch with a defender draped all over him. The result of the play was a 13-yard gain, moving the chains on third down.

"That call was huge because we were in some trouble," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "But I don't think (Hemphill) ever had possession, so I think it was a good call."

On the very next play, Wright found a seam and exploded down the far sideline for a 45-yard touchdown run. Up until that run, Lumpkin's defense was playing lights out, forcing two Union punts and limiting Wright to just 20 yards rushing on five carries.

"(Lumpkin) was actually in a different defense than what we expected from them and it threw us off a little bit," Coach Allison said when asked what Lumpkin did to try and make Wright uncomfortable. "We made adjustments, kept fighting, kept battling, and finally we were able to find a few things that worked."

With the score knotted at 7-7, the Panthers defense forced a punt and with the offense taking over at the 32, Wright immediately went back to Hemphill.

On first down he hit the sophomore receiver for 10 yards. Then with a 2nd-and-inches, Wright went deep down the sideline and Hemphill hauled in the pass for a



Cole Wright rolls out and looks downfield for Kanon Hemphill, who has been his favorite target over the last two games. Photo/Todd Forrest

pickup of 42.

From the 16-yard line, Wright went to junior Erik Strayer on a quick screen that he took to the house for a 14-7 Union County lead.

A quick three-and-out by the Panthers defense brought up another punting situation for the Indians, but this time, senior Micah Gilbert was able to get a hand on the kick and the ball bounced out-of-bounds inside the Lumpkin 10-yard line.

Two plays later, Wright cashed in from the four to make it a 21-7 game with 3:01 to play in the first half.

"For the first time this year, we struggled on offense early, but we still scored 21 in the first half," Coach Allison said. "It was one of those games where things just weren't clicking the way we needed them to. But we played as well as we've played all year on defense and that blocked punt really helped us."

The Indians received the second half kick and used an 18-play, 79-yard drive that burned nearly eight minutes off the clock and cut the lead to 21-13. Lumpkin took advantage of a fake punt early in the drive that resulted in a 25-yard run into Panther territory.

Eventually, Matthews found the endzone from seven yards out to make it a one-possession game. However, junior Cole Dockrey blocked the extra-point attempt to keep the lead at eight points.

"The fake punt was a really great call on their part and it was very well executed and caught us off-guard," Allison said.

The ensuing Union County drive began with a 25-yard completion and a 43-yard carry by sophomore running back Chad Buzzard that gave the Panthers a first down at the 16.

The drive would stall when Dockrey ran for four on 3rd-and-7, but instead of kicking a chip-shot field goal, Wright attempted to gain the three yards with his legs but he would be forced out-of-bounds, short of the chains and the Indians took over at their own 8-yard line.

"We thought about kicking it but I knew if we went for it, and didn't get it, we would have been backed up," Allison said. "I truly thought we would get (the first down). We had a good play called, got the ball into Cole's hands, we just didn't get it."

"In hindsight, maybe we should have kicked the field goal but we don't like kicking it from that (left) hashmark and if we miss it, (Lumpkin) gets the ball on the 20."

The decision to go for it on fourth down didn't come back to haunt the Panthers as the defense forced another punt on the first play of the fourth quarter.

Setting up shop just short of midfield, Wright tore off a 54-yard scoring run on the first play of the series to open up a 28-13 lead with 11:36 to play.

The ensuing Lumpkin drive would stall at their own 38 when the Indians drove into an incompleteness on 4th-and-7.

Facing a 3rd-and-7, Buzzard kept the Union drive alive with a 7-yard run. Then two plays later, Wright capped off his five-score game with a 28-yard run to put Lumpkin County away by a score of 35-13.

Injury report (as of Sunday Nov. 6): According to Allison, Banton is listed as doubtful for Saturday's game at Cedar Grove.

Although he isn't injured, Lynch is expected to return this week for Union's playoff game at Cedar Grove.

Other 7-AAA scores / news: GAC dominated Dawson County 42-7 to claim the No. 1 seed from 7-AAA.

East Hall rallied past Fannin County by a score of 71-58 where the outcome resembled a basketball score.

Fannin County allowed an average of 60 points-per-game over its last five games and 66-per-game over the final three games.

Looking ahead: For the first time in nearly two decades, Union County will play a Saturday game when they visit Cedar Grove for a 5 p.m. kickoff on Saturday.

The game will be played at Buck Godfrey Stadium in Decatur. (For more detailed directions, see the "Directions" segment that follows)

The host team, the Cedar Grove Saints enter the playoffs as the No. 2 seed from Region 7-AAA with an 8-2 record.

They are led by a handful of players that will be playing on Saturdays for Power 5 conferences when next season opens.

The leader of that group is quarterback Jelani Woods (#17), an Oklahoma State commitment who is built like a college fullback at 6-6, 240 pounds. He will be protected by a pair of Georgia commits on the offensive line, Justin Shaffer (#77) and Netori Johnson (#72).

Senior running back Grant Walker (#6) is the workhorse of the Saints' spread offense and rushed for 211 yards on 28 carries at Lovett.

Junior wide receiver Israel Spivey (#20) is a threat to score anytime he touches the ball, anywhere on the field. He caught a touchdown pass and returned a punt for a score last Friday.

"They are a quick score team, they are fast, big, and the most athletic team we have seen all season," Allison said. "Union and Cedar Grove



Panther linebacker Cole Dockrey (15) gets up-close-and-personal with Lumpkin County's Zach Matthews during the first half of Union's 35-13 victory. Photo/Todd Forrest

don't share a common opponent but the Saints did defeat Lovett 28-21 with a late touchdown.

Lovett fell 31-6 to Greater Atlanta Christian during the opening week of the season while Stanford commit and No. 1 ranked quarterback in Georgia, Davis Mills was out with an injury for GAC.

The Panthers fell to the Spartans, with Mills, by 23 points (35-12). So based solely on the score margins, Union and Lovett are almost dead even on paper, making the Panthers less than a one touchdown underdog vs Cedar Grove.

"I think GAC is better than (Cedar Grove) but it would be a great matchup," Allison said. "Overall they are bigger than GAC but I don't think they are any faster than GAC."

On the flip side, the Saints have some stats that point heavily in their favor. Defensively, Cedar Grove is among the leaders in the state in scoring defense at 11 points-per-game.

They have shutout five opponents on the season with four of them coming over the last five games.

Over the last four games, they outscored the opposition by an average of 54-2. In fact, during a three-game stretch in October, the Saints' average margin of victory was 56 points.

Should the contest come down to a kick, the Panthers have the clear advantage as the Saints have struggled with extra points and field goals all season long.

Their two losses came to Westminster (42-21), the defending Class AAA State champ and current Region 5-AAA champion.

The other defeat was by one point at the hands of the No. 3 seed from 5-AAAAA, Southwest DeKalb, 21-20. Cedar Grove had a chance to win the game but a 27-yard field goal fell way short of the goalposts.

The Saints have also been known to rack up the penalties and have looked undisciplined at times. In a game earlier this season, they were flagged 23 times for 210 yards.

In another game, earlier in the season, senior defensive back Tre' Shaw (#1) was ejected for throwing a punch at an opposing player.

When interviewed by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution last month, Cedar Grove Head Coach Jimmy Smith was asked what his favorite quote is, and he replied, "hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard."

That quote is appropriate for Union County, who can chalk much of their success up to their superior work ethic. And not just their work ethic on the field, in the weight room, film sessions, or summer workouts, but off

the field, as well. These student athletes excel in the classroom, at church, in the community, and whatever they set their minds to.

"We're going to have to control the ball, avoid turnovers, and knock the ball loose from them," Allison said. "We'll need to be solid on special teams. Had we been a little more solid on special teams at GAC, that game could have been a bit closer."

"It's just going to come down to how we matchup with their speed, that will be the biggest key."

Directions: This Saturday's game will be held at the 8,500-seat Buck Godfrey Stadium (formerly Panthersville Stadium) in Decatur.

The street address is 2817 Clifton Springs Rd, Decatur, GA 30034. From I-285, take exit 48 for GA-115 / Flat Shoals Rd.

Turn left onto Panthersville Rd. Then, after 3/4 mile, turn right onto Clifton Springs Rd. The stadium will be on the left after 1/2 mile.

Team stats: Union County: 330 yards of total offense. RUSHING: 27 carries, 208 yards, 7.7 YPC, 5 TD. PASSING: 8-for-16, 122 yards, 1 TD.

Third down efficiency: 3-for-9, 33-percent.

Lumpkin County: 265 yards of total offense. RUSHING: 60 carries, 248 yards, 4.1 YPC, 2 TD. PASSING: 3-for-15, 17 yards.

Third down efficiency: 4-for-16, 25-percent.

Individual stats: (OFFENSE) Wright: 8-for-16, 122 yards, 1 TD. 13 carries, 135 yards, 4 TD.

Buzzard: 7 carries, 52 yards. Dockrey: 6 carries, 14 yards. Stone: 1 carry, 7 yards.

Hemphill: 3 receptions, 65 yards. Strayer: 2 receptions, 40 yards, 1 TD. Dyer: 2 receptions, 10 yards. Pattee: 1 reception, 7 yards.

(DEFENSE) Gilbert: blocked punt. Dockrey: blocked PAT.

(KICKING) Smith 5-for-5 extra points, 3-of-6 kickoffs went for touchdowns.

Scoring summary: 2ND QUARTER

LC: 1 play, 27 yards in 13 seconds. Matthews 27-yard TD run. (0-7)

UC: 7 plays, 68 yards in 1:54. Wright 42-yard TD run. (7-7)

UC: 4 plays, 68 yards in 59 seconds. Strayer 16-yard TD pass from Wright. (14-7)

UC: 2 plays, 9 yards in 33 seconds. Wright 4-yard TD run. (21-7)

3RD QUARTER

LC: 18 plays, 79 yards in 7:37. Matthews 7-yard TD run. PAT blocked. (21-13)

4TH QUARTER

UC: 1 play, 54 yards in

14 seconds. Wright 54-yard TD run. (28-13)

UC: 6 plays, 38 yards in 1:43. Wright 28-yard TD run. (35-13)

Game notes: With the win over Lumpkin, the Panthers' seniors set the record for the most wins over a three-year span with 26, surpassing the 1985-86 senior class that won 25 games from 1983-85.

They also became the first team to average 8 wins-a-season over four years with 32 total victories.

The seniors finish their career with a program-best 12 straight regular season home wins.

Their 35 points vs Lumpkin gives the 2016 squad the second highest scoring regular season - trailing only the 2014 team. However, 2013-16 is the highest scoring 4-year span in the program's history.

Lynch remains two rushing touchdowns away from scoring the most TDs by a Union running back in 26-plus years.

He also needs just 15 kick return yards to become the first player since Zach Helton in 2001 to accumulate 600 rushing yards, 200 receiving yards, and 100 return yards in a season.

Wright needs one rushing touchdown to become the first Panther quarterback in the last 26-plus years to score 20 times on the ground.

He is six total touchdowns away from equaling Joseph Mancuso's record of 39 total scores during the 2015 season. Also, Wright needs just 24 total yards to join Mancuso and Kolt Owenby as the only Panthers since 1990 to top 3,000 total yards in a season.

Buzzard's 52 rushing yards for the game and 43-yard run in the third quarter vs Lumpkin are both career highs for the sophomore.

Pattee needs 15 receiving yards to give Union six different receivers with 100-plus yards for the year - something the 2014 squad (3,106 passing yards that year) didn't accomplish.

Strayer is 13 yards short of 300 receiving yards and Dyer is 46 yards away from 300. If they both reach 300, that would give Union four receivers (Hemphill and Dobbins) with 300 yards and match the 2014 team.

With 35 extra points and four field goals, Smith is just three points away from 50.

Including safeties, field goals and extra points, 15 different Panthers have put points on the board for Union County this season. Twelve different Panthers have scored a touchdown in 2016. The 2014 team saw 14 different players score at least one point with 13 players getting a touchdown.

UCHS/UCMS Swim Team Results

On November 5, 2016, your UCHS/UCMS Mens & Womens Swim teams participated in the "Hawaiian Luau" at the Habersham County Recreation Center. Your Panther Swimmers worked hard and brought home some excellent results! If you see one of them, please tell them congratulations!

Union County Swim Team Results from the Hawaiian Luau, 5 November 2016, Habersham County Recreation Center:

High School Men:

200 Yard Medley Relay – 2nd [Out Of 8] - Aidan Francis / Jeremy Herum / Gavin Thompson / Brian Williams;

200 Individual Medley – Brian Williams (3rd Out Of 6);

50 Yard Freestyle – Gavin Thompson (6th) [Out Of 33] - Aidan Francis (7th) - Steven Williams (9th) - Ean Harkins (11th) - Tyler Harkins (13th);

100 Yard Freestyle – Aidan Francis (2nd) [Out Of 20] - Steven Williams (5th) - Jeremy Herum (6th) - Gavin Thompson (8th);

3rd (Out Of 12) Aidan Francis / Jeremy Herum / Gavin Thompson / Brian Williams;

100 Yard Backstroke – Brian Williams (3rd) [Out Of 19] - Tyler Harkins (10th);

100 Yard Breaststroke – Jeremy Herum (5th) [Out Of 14] - Ean Harkins (12th)

High School Women:

200 Yard Medley Relay – 4th (Out Of 11) - Savannah Damon / Leannah Gambrell / Grace Weldon / Kaiya Wilkes;

200 Individual Medley – Grace Weldon (1st Out Of 11);

50 Yard Freestyle – McKenzie Hooper (17th) [Out Of 38] - Kindie Kolb (20th) - Savannah Damon (22nd) - Katie Yaboni (25th);

100 Yard Freestyle – Kaiya Wilkes (4th) [Out Of 30] - Leannah Gambrell (6th) - Kindie Kolb (22nd);

100 Yard Butterfly – Kaiya Wilkes (3rd Out Of 6);

100 Yard Backstroke – Grace Weldon (2nd) [Out Of 23] - Savannah Damon (14th);

100 Yard Breaststroke – Leannah Gambrell (9th) [Out Of 23] - McKenzie Hooper (15th)

Middle School Boys:

200 Yard Medley Relay – 3rd [Out Of 13] - Wilson Walker / Hunter White / Luke Gambrell / Alden Wilkes;

100 Yard Individual Medley – Alden Wilkes (3rd Out Of 14);

50 Yard Freestyle – Alden Wilkes (2nd) [Out Of 38] - Cale Winkler (8th) - Michael Leird (9th) - Wilson Walker (19th) - Riley Howse (21st) - Preston Perren (29th);

100 Yard Freestyle – Luke Gambrell (1st) [Out Of 28] - Michael Leird (9th) - Cale Winkler (10th) - Riley Howse (16th);

50 Yard Butterfly – Luke Gambrell (2nd Out Of 13) - Hunter White (4th);

100 Yard Breaststroke – Hunter White (4th) [Out Of 24] - Wilson Walker (16th)

Middle School Girls:

100 Yard Individual Medley – Danielle Grader (4th) - 50 Yard Freestyle – Libby Hendrick (14th) [Out Of 41] - Autumn Skinner (20th) - Hannah Patterson (21st) - Makenna Miles (26th);

100 Yard Freestyle – Courtney Foster (6th Out Of 22);

50 Yard Butterfly – Courtney Foster (3rd Out Of 11);

100 Yard Backstroke – Autumn Skinner (14th) [Out Of 33] - Hannah Patterson (19th);

100 Yard Breaststroke – Danielle Grader (5th) [Out Of 26] - Libby Hendrick (6th)

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TURKEY TROT

5K & PRAYER WALK
Saturday, November 19, 2016 – Meeks Park

Time: 8:00 a.m. Registration Opens – Pre-Register at Active.com
 9:00 a.m. Run & Prayer Walk begins

Place: 490 Meeks Park Road, Blairsville, GA 30512

Cost: \$25 pre-registration (Active.com) – T-shirt included
 \$30 Race Day – T-shirt available while supplies last

Awards: Top overall male & female runners. Top three runners in each age group: 10-under, 11-14, 15-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-over

All Proceeds to benefit Deputy Mitchell Henderson