

Basketball opens with scrimmage, regular season begins Tuesday

By Todd Forrest
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Union County basketball returned to the hardwood last Tuesday, Nov. 12 with a scrimmage contest vs Rabun Gap-Nachoochee.

The girls would overpower the Lady Eagles, taking a double-digit lead in the second quarter before pulling away by 20.

The shorthanded guys team fought hard but eventually ran out of gas in the fourth quarter, falling 86-67.

Lady Panthers 61, Rabun Gap 41 - The Crystal Beach era at Union County High School got underway last week with a 61-41 scrimmage victory over a solid Rabun Gap squad that was fresh off its own one-sided preseason victory — a 70-36 rout of Towns County.

“As a coach you think you’ve done everything you can to prepare them and get them ready, but to be honest, I wasn’t sure (what to expect in the scrimmage),” Coach Beach said. “I was a little worried about nerves but they came out and fought hard and that’s what we practice everyday and what I expect.”

Sophomore Ava Hunter scored 24 of her game-high 28 points in the first three quarters as the Lady Eagles had no answer for the reigning Class AA Freshman of the Year.

The high-point of the evening for Rabun Gap came in the opening two minutes as they built an early 4-0 advantage before Hunter and senior Andelin Hill combined to score 10 of the Lady Panthers’ 13 first quarter points.

Leading 13-9 after one, senior Kait McCarter opened the second with a pair of free throws before freshman Ellie Cook made it a 17-9 game moments later with a steal-and-score.

Consecutive buckets by Hunter quickly stretched the margin to double-digits at 21-10 while McCarter and sophomore Riley Allison kept the margin at 10-plus beyond the midway point of the second frame.

“Our younger girls really stepped up,” Coach Beach said. “Of course you have (Hunter), who doesn’t play like a sophomore. Then you had Riley Allison and Ellie Cook who came in cool, calm and collected. We’ve got some other fireballs too that will go out there and hustle. There’s a lot of promise, it’s just about them gaining experience.”

A Rabun Gap try trimmed the Union lead to seven at 25-18 but Hunter scored her team’s next six points to stretch the lead to 31-19. McCarter split a pair at the line to close out the half with the Lady Panthers in control at 32-21.

The first six Union County points of the third belonged to Hunter to help her team build its largest lead of the game, up to that point, at 38-23. Hill made it 41-25 with a triple from the wing but the Lady Eagles answered with a 6-0 spurt to pull within 10.

The Lady Panthers re-



Union County sophomore Landon Cox scored a game-high 30 points in the scrimmage vs Rabun Gap. Photo/Todd Forrest

sponded with six-unanswered of their own as Hill knocked down another three and split a pair from the line to go with a Hunter bucket in the post.

Leading 47-33 after three, Hunter and McCarter pushed the Union County lead out to 16 and sophomore Rebekah Chambers made 54-37 with a 1-for-2 trip to the charity stripe. Later, senior Brooke Dockrey and Chambers helped open up a 57-39 advantage with 90 seconds remaining, then junior Kyla Locklear dropped in a pair of baskets in the final 36 seconds to give the Lady Panthers a 61-41 victory.

Hill finished with 11 points and McCarter added nine. Locklear scored four, Chambers and Cook had three apiece, Allison had two points and Dockrey added one.

When asked about establishing a rotation, Coach Beach referred to her substitution method as the “floating five.”

“I think anyone that watched us (in the scrimmage) saw that we constantly sub in and out. If they are running and playing the way we preach everyday in practice then they should be tired, so we’re going to try and keep fresh legs in at all times.”

According to Coach Beach, the transition has been



An animated Coach Beach during the scrimmage. Photo/Todd Forrest

a smooth one after arriving in Blairsville last summer. Previously, Beach served as an assistant coach for the three-time defending State Champion Buford Lady Wolves.

“Everything and everyone has been great,” she said. “I couldn’t be more happy. Everyone has bought in, the seniors are leading by example and setting the tone and Coach (Mandy) Hunter has been a tremendous help.”

Coach Beach also brings with her a full court pressure defense, something the Lady Panthers haven’t employed very often in recent years.

“(In the scrimmage) I wanted our girls to see what it takes to play that (style of defense),” she said. “We weren’t perfect, and I didn’t expect us to be, but it gives us a good starting point to build on.”

Union County will visit Towns County on Tuesday, however, Friday’s contest with Fannin County has been postponed until January to allow fans and players to attend the football playoff game.

“Right now, I just want our girls to use every single day and every single opportunity to get better,” Coach Beach said. “Whether it’s working on an offensive play, our defensive stance or ball handling, we just need to continue getting better. Point blank.

“I’ve talked about our seniors and I’ll probably talk about them a lot this year. I believe that to be successful, it will take those ladies to make it happen. We’re trying to push some ownership upon them and they are doing a great job.

“I’m so proud of the girls for believing in us as coaches and I’m thankful for the warm welcome that I’ve received here.”

Panthers 67, Rabun Gap 86 - Playing without the services of five key players, including First Team All-Region selections Pierson Allison and Sawyer Drake, new head coach Corey Garrett was able to get a look at the players that will be



Sophomore Ava Hunter goes to work down low for two of her game-high 28 points in the Lady Panthers’ scrimmage victory over Rabun Gap. Photo/Todd Forrest

called upon to provide additional depth to a Union County squad expected to contend for a Region 8-AA title.

In the meantime, sophomore guard Landon Cox made a statement in his first varsity appearance, pouring in a game-high 30 points. However, it wouldn’t be enough as Rabun Gap pulled away for an 86-67 victory.

“Yes, we were short-handed but the thing I was looking for is: will we be able to carry over to games what we’ve been doing in practice.

“We don’t do a lot of fluff at practice. Everything we do is for a reason and hopefully it carries over. And for the most part, it did.”

With only one player with starting experience (Sawyer Brey) and one that saw varsity action last season (Bryson Lariscy) the youthful Panthers held their own well into the fourth quarter despite never leading again following a brief 2-0 advantage.

“Of the 8 or 10 guys we played, only one has meaningful varsity experience,” Coach Garrett said. “So I think we saw some good things for sure. The effort was there. The attitude was there and the toughness was there at times.

“Overall, I think (the scrimmage) was definitely a positive. If we can just keep getting better every single day, then when we get the football players back and in shape, I believe we can do some really good things.

Trailing 20-14 in the latter stages of the opening period, Union County stormed back to within two as a coast-to-coast layup by Cox made it a 20-18 game.

Down 23-20 after one and 28-22 moments later, baskets by Lariscy, Brey and Cox tied things up at 28-28. Cox would again even the score at 30-30 with 4:45 left in the half before the Eagles answered with a 10-0 run. Union would weather the storm over the final

2:17 and enter the break still down 10 at 43-33.

The Panthers outscored Rabun Gap, 8-2 to begin the third, pulling within four at 45-41, but the Eagles rebounded with five-unanswered to extend their margin to 50-41.

Trailing 57-47 at the 2:30 mark of the third, Union County refused to go away, using a 6-0 spurt to make it a 57-53 game but Rabun Gap closed the quarter by stretching the difference back to eight at 63-55.

The Eagles would start pulling away in the fourth when a trey opened up their first lead of more than 11 at 68-55. Down 13 at the six-minute mark, the Panthers were all out of runs as Rabun Gap went up by 14 at the five-minute mark and by 16 at four minutes.

Before fouling out, Cox would eclipse the 30-point mark with 2:12 remaining as a dribble-drive pulled Union within 15 at 78-63. The Eagles would take a 21-point lead at 86-65 but the Panthers would score the game’s final basket for an 86-67 score.

Lake Hughes and Landon Kight scored nine points each, Daniel Snow had seven while Brey and Lariscy added six apiece.

On Tuesday, the short-handed Panthers will visit Towns County, who also fell by double digits to Rabun Gap. Friday’s contest at Fannin County has been postponed until January.

“The football team is having a great season and we wish them the best of luck, but we’re excited about getting those guys back.

“The younger guys have really bought in and the older guys are doing a great job so we’re seeing some special things at practice.”

Coach Garrett is taking over for Casey Jones, who made four playoff appearances in six seasons on the Union County bench. In 2016, Jones became the first boys coach to win a playoff game since

2001.

When it comes to adjusting to a new coach, Garrett isn’t concerned since he coached several of the upperclassmen in middle school. He feels the biggest contrast will be in the personality of the two coaches.

Garrett believes he might be a little more outgoing and intense than Jones’ calm, laid back coaching style.

“Coach Jones did a great job and I still talk to him all the time about basketball and life,” Garrett said. “He taught me a lot but I think I might be a little more intense and energetic than he was. I’m not throwing off on Coach Jones, it’s just that we have different personalities.”

As far as adjusting his practices or personality after switching from girls to guys, Coach Garrett says he tries to be the same coach regardless.

“I’d like to say that nothing is different but I find it difficult at times,” he said. “The girls were really young last season while the guys are very senior-heavy. But hopefully, since I coached them in middle school, they will know how I like to do things and will pick things up right away and be ready to rock ‘n’ roll as soon as they return from football.”



Coach Garrett shouts instructions vs Rabun Gap. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union Co. swimmers qualify for State meet

Gainesville - On Nov. 13, Union County attended a meet at Riverside Military Academy where the Panthers qualified for State in four events.

Overall, the high school finished in fifth place and the middle school team came in second.

The results are as follows:

200-Yard Medley Relay: (HS) Brian Williams, Hunter White, Alden Wilkes and Steven Williams - 1st place (State qualifier); Hannah Sheffield, Rachel Reid, Courtney Foster and Hana Gregory - 3rd place.

(MS) Anniston Howse, Lily Helton, Grace Cook and Brooklyn Brown - 2nd place.

200-Yard Individual Medley: (HS) Brian Williams - 1st place (State qualifier).

100-Yard Individual Medley: (MS) Eli Gwynn - 2nd place; Lily Helton - 1st place; Anniston Howse - 2nd place.

50-Yard Freestyle: (HS) Hunter White - 5th place; Alden Wilkes - 9th place; Hannah Sheffield - 4th place.

(MS) Liam Smith - 2nd place; Grayden Cobb - 3rd place; Will Doyle - 4th place; Grace Cook - 1st place; Arianna Prostan - 6th place; Reese Jones - 9th place.

100-Yard Butterfly: (HS) Alden Wilkes - 3rd place

50-Yard Butterfly: (MS) Grace Cook - 2nd place; Brooklyn Brown - 3rd place.

100-Yard Freestyle: (MS) Liam Smith - 1st place; Lily Helton - 1st place

200-Yard Freestyle Relay: (HS) Steven Williams, Hunter White, Alden Wilkes and Brian Williams - 1st place (State Qualifier); Courtney Foster, Hana Gregory, Rachel Reid and Hannah Sheffield - 5th place.

(MS) Reese Jones, Lydia McNabb and Cheyenne Doche - 2nd place.

100-Yard Backstroke: (HS) Steven Williams - 2nd place; Hannah Sheffield - 3rd place; Courtney Foster - 5th place.

50-Yard Backstroke: (MS) Grayden Cobb - 1st place; Will Doyle - 2nd place; Elijah Gwynn - 5th place; Cooper Allen - 8th place; Anniston Howse - 3rd place; Olivia Loyd - 4th place; Arianna Prostan - 5th place; Lillian Collins - 6th place; Brooklyn Brown - 8th place; Reese Jones - 9th place.

100-Yard Breaststroke: (HS) Brian Williams - 1st place (State qualifier); Hunter White - 2nd place (State qualifier); Hannah Sheffield - 4th place.

50-Yard Breaststroke: (HS) Liam Smith - 2nd place; Michael Leird - 10th place; Rachel Reid - 4th place.

GHSAA Realignment brings changes to Region 8-AA

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Thomaston - Union County High School’s future athletic schedules will feature a few more familiar faces and a little less traveling following last week’s Georgia High School Association Reclassification Committee meeting.

Gone are three-hour trips to Monticello, Putnam County and Social Circle and in their place will be next-door neighbor Fannin County and a former region-foe in Gainesville’s Riverside Military Academy.

Meanwhile, Banks County, Elbert County, Oglethorpe County and Rabun County are also staying put in Region 8-AA to round out the seven-team region.

In girls’ sports, however, Region 8-AA will only consist of six teams since Riverside is a boys-only academy.

Despite eliminating three of the longest trips (Monticello, Putnam and Social Circle) off the schedule, and replacing them with Fannin County and Riverside, Region 8-AA will still traverse a large swath of North Georgia.

came from Jasper Jewell, who serves as the Atlanta Public Schools’ Athletic Director and President of the Georgia Athletic Director’s Association.

Barring any last-minute appeals, these changes will

be finalized on Tuesday, Nov. 19 and will take effect at the beginning of the 2020-21 school year and will remain for a two-year cycle until the GHSAA meets again in the fall of 2021.



Winter Fitness Family Programs Union County Recreation Department Winter 2019-20 Session Ages: 50 and over

Winter is quickly approaching! Union County Recreation Department will be offering many awesome fitness class options for the winter session. Here is a list of the following fitness classes we will offer:

- Regular Aerobics (T/Th) @ 8:30-9:30 AM
- Advanced Strength-Core class (M/W/F) @ 9:45-10:30 AM
- Indoor Walking (M/W/F) @ 9:00-9:45 AM
- AM Beginner Strength and Core class (T/Th) @ 10:45-11:30 AM
- AM Step-Aerobics class (M/W/F) @ 10:45-11:30 AM
- PM Beginner Strength-Core class (T/Th) @ 5:30-6:30 PM
- Chair Fitness-Aerobics class (T/Th) @ 1:15-2:00 PM
- **New Power Hooping class (T/Th) @ 9:45-10:30 AM
- Beginner Yoga (M/W/F) @ 11:45 AM-12:45 PM
- Zumba-Latin Combo Class (M/F) @ 7:50-8:50 AM (Age 18 and over)
- PM Dance Jams class (M/W) @ 6:30-7:30 PM (Age 18 and over)

*Winter Session 2019-20 Registration begins on November 4, 2019 and ends November 25, 2019 (or until classes fill to capacity) at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.) Registration and class payments must be done in person. If you have any questions, you can call (706) 439-6074 and ask for Jennifer.