

Sports

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Big plays, red zone struggles bite Panthers at Rabun Co.

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TIGER - A 38-10 loss left Union County shaking their heads as they left Frank Snyder Stadium in Rabun County on Friday.

After blocking an early Panther field-goal attempt, Rabun rattled off 17 straight points before Union could put three on the board before halftime.

The Wildcats continued to pull away in the second half by scoring 21 unanswered points, taking a 38-3 lead with 6:15 to play.

The Panther offense reached the Rabun County 20-yard line six times but only had 10 points to show for it.

"We just got outcoached and outplayed," Union Head Coach Brian Allison said. "Some of our best players are beat up and we had some injuries during the course of the game that hurt us. But the bottom line is, we can't afford to give up big plays throughout the game or continue to turn the ball over."

It will now take a miracle for the Panthers to see the post season as they fall to 2-3 in Region 8-AA and 5-3 overall.

Rabun fumbled the football four times in the first half but the Panthers were unable to capitalize - only recovering one.

After stopping Rabun on three-and-out on the opening possession of the game, Jonathan Hughes, who was battling an illness, broke off a big run down to the Wildcat 18-yard line but a false start penalty on Union, followed by a short run and an incomplete pass brought on the field goal unit.

The reliable Eric Hougrand's 35-yard field goal was blocked and Rabun's offense took over.

The Wildcats used a 28-yard completion to reach mid-field, then a 26-yard strike on 3rd-and-10 to move inside the Panther 25-yard line.

Rabun's lone turnover



Jonathan Hughes carries the ball at Rabun. Photo/Todd Forrest



Josh Kim bringing down a Rabun receiver. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior T Bentley throwing on the run. Photo/Todd Forrest



Lalo Rivera fights for yardage after a reception. Photo/Todd Forrest

came a few plays later when Luther Jones recovered a Wildcat fumble on the Panthers' 15-yard line.

After Bentley was tackled for a loss, Hughes picked up eight on the ground before Bentley hit Lalo Rivera for a first down. Another first down rush by Clay Burnette had Union on the move but an interception ended the drive at the Wildcat 46-yard line.

Again Rabun would reach the Panther 15-yard line but two fumbles, both recovered by Rabun, led to a third down incompleteness to bring the Wildcat field goal unit on the field. Rabun connected from

32-yards out to take a 3-0 lead, early in the second quarter.

Union went three-and-out but benefited from a 71-yard punt by Hougrand that was downed at the 1-yard line by Bentley.

Union sophomore safety, Jonah Whitmer was out with a shoulder injury suffered at Greene County and the Panthers clearly missed one of its stars in the secondary.

Rabun used two rushes to reach the 14-yard line before another recovered fumble and an incomplete pass led to a third and long. The Wildcats then connected over the middle on an 87-yard touchdown score

to take a 10-0 lead with 7:28 to play before halftime.

"We blitzed them and they had us in man defense but we were in good position and just missed a tackle."

A personal foul would force the Panthers into another three-and-out, setting up the Wildcats at the 40-yard line.

One play into the series, a Rabun receiver took a screen pass 60 yards for another Wildcat touchdown.

Trailing 17-0, the Panthers were desperate for a score and Hughes carried the ball for an 8-yard gain that had 15 yards tacked on thanks to a personal foul on Rabun.

A first down rush by Bentley put Union into Wildcat territory. After the drive stalled out, the Panthers turned to a fake punt that was pulled off by Burnette to get the Panthers a first down at the Rabun 30-yard line.

A second down pass to Jared Croskey gave Union a first down at the 12-yard line.

The Panthers added a new wrinkle to its offense on this night as they turned to the "Wildcat" formation and Rivera took the direct snap down to the Rabun 2-yard line but it was called back following a holding against the Panthers.

Union had to settle for

3 at the end of the half when Hougrand connected from 36-yards to put the Panthers on the board.

The Wildcats picked off another Bentley pass on third down to set them up at the 28-yard line. The Panther defense held its ground and forced Rabun into a fourth down.

Expecting a field goal or an attempt to draw the Panthers offside, Rabun took advantage and threw a quick pass that went for 21-yards and another Wildcat touchdown.

"We needed to come out in the second half and score on them and we didn't," Coach Allison said. "Instead, they scored on us and it went down hill from there."

The next Panther drive began at the 20-yard line where Bentley, Burnette, and Josh Kim did most of the leg work - driving to the Wildcat 6-yard line. The Panthers were only able to manage one yard and turned the ball over on downs with 5 minutes to play in the third quarter.

Union forced a Rabun punt and took over at the Wildcat 39-yard line.

A first down run by freshman Nick Whittle was wiped off due to a personal foul against the Panthers. Facing a fourth-and-20, Union punted back to the Wildcats.

Rabun went 54 yards for a score on its opening drive of the fourth quarter - capped off by a 1-yard scoring run with 10:41 to play.

The Panthers drove inside the Rabun 10-yard line when a scary moment had all of Union County holding their collective breaths.

Sophomore linebacker, and leading tackler, Chase Barnett went down with what appeared to be a severe knee injury. With one of its key players being carried off the field, a shaken Panther team handed the ball back to Rabun on an end zone interception that was returned 47 yards.

"We had the ball inside

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Cross Country ready to swing into high gear

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The 8-AA Region Meet is Thursday at Oglethorpe County and Union County has had two weeks to prepare.

With Union's last meet taking place on Oct. 17, Head Coach Jackie Hughes and her squads have been preparing for the Region Tournament with gusto.

"Practice went well considering it was fall break," Coach Hughes said last week. "We practiced Monday through Thursday from 10 to 11:30 a.m., and they worked very hard. We cut our mileage just a little, but increased the intensity to build our speed."

The Panthers and Lady Panthers can expect some stiff

competition at the Region Meet. Both Jefferson teams are currently ranked along with Oglethorpe's boys squad. But for the most part, this new-look Region 8-AA remains a bit of a mystery.

"The girls have faced Rabun and Jefferson so far this season. Jefferson edged out our girls by 9 points at the Buford meet, so we will be trying to catch them on Thursday," Coach Hughes said. "With the new region alignments this year, I am not as familiar with some of the other teams we will be competing against. I know we will have to be ready to run our best in order to qualify for the state meet."

Union County has seen a few of the squads but with Oglethorpe getting to race on their home course, Coach

Hughes believes the Patriots will be one of the teams to beat.

"We have raced against a few teams in our region this year including Jefferson, Rabun, and Riverside Academy," Coach Hughes said. "Just looking at times from other races, the boys race looks like it is going to be a real battle for the Top Four spots. It looks like all the teams are pretty even, with Riverside and Oglethorpe, maybe having a slight advantage."

One thing Union will have going for them is some familiarity with the course. Last year's Region Meet was also held at Oglethorpe so most of Coach Hughes' runners know

what to expect.

"The region meet was at Oglethorpe last year, so some of our team has run there before," Coach Hughes said. "It is a two-loop course that has a fairly long hill that the runners will have to deal with twice. Otherwise the course is fairly flat. The course can definitely have an impact on a meet. We have been working on a course at Meeke that combines the hills with a lot of flat and downhill running to prepare for Oglethorpe. The team has worked very hard this season and has stayed focused on our goal of qualifying for the state meet. I know they will give it their all on Thursday."

Joe Collins

Tips from the Range

I'm getting a lot of questions about why it is so hard to hit the ball straight, so I thought I would cover some of the things you should look for if you are having trouble hitting greens or par threes or finding the fairway off the tee. Unfortunately, there is never the one fix that will work for everybody when accuracy is the problem, but there are some things that are very common among every golfer who struggles with accuracy.

The first thing a golfer should consider when working on hitting the ball straighter is alignment. Good golfers will first make sure that their alignment is good when trouble starts sneaking into their game. Have a friend or even a playing partner stand behind you and see if you are "pointed" to the correct area on the course or practice facility. If you aren't aimed correctly your sub-conscious will know it and force your swing to compensate for the poor alignment. The fix some of you need could be this simple.

If alignment is not your issue then we next need to focus on the club path. If the club path is incorrect it will cause the ball to start off either left or right of where you are aimed. The path of the club must start off straight away from the intended target and then continue on an uninterrupted path all the way to the end of the backswing. From there it must travel slightly inside the takeaway path to impact and beyond. The follow-through path should mimic the takeaway path.

Never lean into the ball on the downswing because if you do you will cause the downswing path to travel on the outside of the takeaway path ("over-the-top") and that is bad. That path can cause all sorts of weird looking shots so stay away from bad balance on the downswing. Now let's look at the shoulder turn because it will be the actual problem many of you will struggle with.

The shoulder turn is crucial to making a good golf swing, but the problem with a lot of us is, we can't turn enough to get the shoulders in the correct position. We try to compensate by using the arms more and that

is where the problem lies. The arms have to stay "connected" to the body and must stay in front of the chest on the downswing. The distance the arms travel in a proper back swing is determined by how far the shoulders can turn. When the shoulder turn is complete, let the momentum the arms have built up set the top position. Focus on keeping the top of the spine, or your head, behind the ball as you make the downswing.

Don't force the arms to travel farther than the shoulders can turn them in the back swing before you start down. This may shorten your swing a little but you will probably pick up some yardage because you will be hitting the ball more solid. The last thing to look at when facing accuracy issues is the weight transfer. The proper weight transfer is very important to the club path and must occur at the right time in the swing. To early and you will push the shot and to late will make you pull the shot, so make sure your weight transfer is correct from back to front on the downswing. Your weight must be on the front foot at impact with your shoulders slightly open. The weight transfer starts with the hips and finishes through shoulders so make sure you push off the back foot and hold your back to the target to start the downswing. Always remember to keep your head behind the ball at impact.

Accuracy is difficult because to hit the ball correctly you must not really feel your hands. Shots need to be controlled by the big muscles and not the smaller muscles like is in your hands and wrist. This feels awkward when trying to hit a designated target but it is the proper way to swing. The back hand and arm can provide a lot of power but must be used at the correct time in the downswing. If you release the back wrist too soon it makes it really difficult to hit a straight shot with any club, so swing the club with the big muscles and stay in balance to improve your accuracy.

Hope this helps! Remember to send yours questions to jcollins.tcherald@windstream.net and hopefully a little insight can help make your game more enjoyable. Don't forget that practice makes golf better so get out there and work on your game.

Good luck and I will see you on the course!



Union County Cross Country Photos by Todd Forrest

AJC High School Cross Country Rankings

Class AA - GIRLS

1. Westminster
2. Wesleyan
3. Lovett
4. Jefferson
5. Bleckley County
6. Greater Atlanta Christian
7. Bremen
8. Union County
9. Thomasville
10. Pelham

AJC High School Cross Country Rankings

Class AA - BOYS

1. Westminster
2. Wesleyan
3. Bleckley County
4. Lovett
5. Murray County
6. Jefferson
7. Benedictine
8. Greater Atlanta Christian
9. Oglethorpe County
10. Pepperell