

Sports

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Rivalry week: Panthers get a scare from Rebels; Towns can't keep pace

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After ending a nine-year home winless streak against Dawson last month, it appeared as if Fannin was about to end its nine-game skid to Union County until senior Ralston Drake's game-winning tip-in at the buzzer.

On Friday they visited Towns County who was coming off a 104-99 overtime loss to Dade County.

The Indians kept it close until late in the second quarter when Union began to pull away. Towns never threatened again after the mid-way point of the third quarter.

The Panthers were led by senior guard Hunter Hughes' 27 points. He has scored 20-plus in each of Union's four games and is averaging 24 points-a-game.



Ralston Drake with a first half layup vs Fannin Co. Photo/Todd Forrest



Chase Shook and Hunter Hughes on the defensive end. Photo/Todd Forrest

Panthers 61 Fannin County 59

The Panthers' two-point victory is by far the slimmest margin during the 10-game winning streak where Union has outscored the Rebels by an average of 15 points-per-game. And in the early going of last week's contest, it appeared that the Panthers were about to cruise to another easy win over Fannin County.

After leading for a large chunk of the fourth quarter, the Rebels went inside and tied the game at 59-59 with 18 ticks on the clock. Union turned to senior Hunter Hughes, who came in averaging 22 points-per-game, but when the Fannin-D smothered his dribble-drive, Panthers Head Coach Casey Jones called a timeout - stopping the clock with 3.8 seconds left.

With 24 points on the night, Hughes got the call again and quickly penetrated from the right wing where his heavily contested shot went long, but Drake was able to slip in unnoticed from the weak-side and get the tip just in time.

As the Panthers swarmed onto the court to celebrate Drake's heroics, Coach Jones let out a sigh of relief knowing that his team almost let one slip away.

"We got super-lazy on defense and thought we were going to stroll through the rest of the game," Jones said. "We were very fortunate to even have an opportunity to win the game at the buzzer."

Right out of the gates, Union opened up leads of 8-0 and 13-4 and the Rebels appeared to be overmatched. With just over 2:30 to play in the first quarter, senior Tyler Odom connected on his third straight trey to open up a 16-6 Panther advantage that would stretch to 20-6 at the end of the frame.

The two teams played each other dead even for much of the second quarter with Union holding

a 31-17 lead at the 2:00 mark of the half, but the Rebels narrowed the gap to 33-23 entering the break.

A trey from Hughes pushed the Panthers ahead 38-26 less than two minutes into the third but Fannin went on a 7-0 run to get within five points at 38-33.

A pair from the foul line and a steal-and-score by Hughes kept Union in front 42-36 with 2:00 left in the third.

The Rebels would leave the door wide open for the Panthers to distance themselves going into the fourth quarter, but unfortunately, they failed to take advantage.

At the 1:25 mark of the third, Fannin would turn the ball over, and seconds later, commit a foul, but an 0-for-2 trip to the foul line kept the Union lead at 42-36.

With 56 seconds left, the Rebels turned it over again and this time, junior Chase Shook, who blocked a career high 8 shots in the contest, scored on a putback - giving Union a 44-36 advantage. Once again, with just under 30 seconds left in the quarter, Fannin was unable to hold onto the ball but the Panthers were unable turn their miscue into points and entered the fourth quarter still on top at 44-36.

A Rebels 3-pointer and a Union turnover to open the fourth turned into an 8-0 Fannin run giving them their first lead at 45-44, a lead that stretched to 47-44 with 6:12 left in the game.

Senior Kyle Hamby slowed the bleeding by attacking the rim and drawing contact, resulting in a pair of free throws at the 5:54 mark.

The teams would exchange 1-for-2 trips to the line but a Panther turnover and a miss on the front-end of a one-and-one kept Fannin ahead at 48-47.

As the fourth quarter reached its halfway point, sophomore Lawson Baenninger snared a long rebound off a Rebel miss and went coast-to-coast for a quick deuce - putting Union back on top 49-48 with 3:52 remaining.

Fannin regained the lead 50-49 then got a stop on the defensive end. As the clock approached the 3-minute mark, the Rebels fired a trey that could have put Union in a four-point hole, but senior Jacob Rogers came out of nowhere to block the shot attempt and Hughes turned Rogers' hustle into points when he nailed a jumper to hand the lead back to the Panthers.

After exchanging baskets and one-point leads, Fannin connected from beyond the arc to open up a 53-51 lead.

As the 2-minute mark approached, Baenninger came through again with another coast-to-coast layup - this time the sophomore picked the Rebels' pocket and evened things back up at 53-53.

With 1:35 to play, Fannin was perfect during a trip to the foul line but Hughes quickly attacked and got to the basket, and 10 seconds later, the game was tied once again.

On the Rebels' ensuing possession, Drake came through with the first of his two game-saving plays - this time, it was on the defensive end.

With just over a minute remaining, Drake swiped a Fannin pass, which resulted in Hughes drawing a foul while attacking the basket. Union's point guard stepped to the line and calmly sank both attempts.

Once more, Fannin knotted things up with a basket as the clock ticked under 50 seconds, and moments later, the Panthers dodged a bullet.

As Union was looking for its potential game-winning shot, they lost possession but Hughes was able to run down the loose ball and draw a foul in the process. Still dead-even at 57-55, Hughes delivered two clutch free throws, breaking the tie with 29 seconds to go and setting the stage for the Drake's tip. Until his game-winner, he was an unimpressive 1-for-5 shooting and 0-for-2 at the free throw line.

Meanwhile, the Panthers

finished with a respectable 21-of-45 (45 percent) from the floor, including a 6-16 (38-percent) outing from long distance. However, four of Union's six treys came in the first quarter as they built a 14-point lead.

As the Panthers went cold and the treys dwindled, the comfortable double-digit advantage evaporated until Fannin took the lead early in the fourth. A 20-point first quarter was followed by 13 points in the second and 11 in the third. Union's offense was finally revived around the 6-minute mark and poured out 17 points in the game's final 5:56.

"There isn't one team on our schedule that we can afford to not give 100 percent on the defensive end," Jones said. "We can score points but our defensive effort has to get better."

Union stats (vs Fannin)

POINTS: Hughes 25, Odom 17, Hamby 7, Drake 4, Baenninger 4, Arnick 2, Shook 2 REBOUNDS: Drake 8, Odom 7, Shook 6 ASSISTS: Baenninger 2 STEALS: Hughes 2, Rogers 2 BLOCKS: Shook 8, Rogers 2

Panthers 69 Towns County 38

Hawasssee - Hughes led the way with a career-high 27 points as Union extended its win streak over the rival Indians to 34 games with a 69-38 road victory over a much-improved Towns County squad.

"Banks only beat them by five, Lumpkin got them by 10, and they scored 99 at Dade," Jones said. "I try not to scoreboard watch, but knowing what they had coming back this year worried me."

"They have Boone (Moss) inside, Major (Moss), and Dallas Manus back and they play hard, they can score points, they're a physical team inside and rebound very well."

Towns kept the game close until late in the second quarter when Hughes put up 12 points during a 14-3 Union run, making it a 34-19

foul line and hit 1-of-2 for a 34-19 score at the break.

Hughes' 19 first half points equaled Towns County's team total for the first two quarters.

"Hunter is playing lights out right now," Jones said. "But anytime we smell blood in the water, we try to turn it on."

The Panthers opened the third with a corner-trey by Odom off a feed from Hughes. However, the Indians, led by senior post Boone Moss, scored the next 6 points to get within 12 at 37-25 at the 6:12 mark of the third.

Hamby ended the Indians' run with a drive and an up-and-under lay in. Almost one minute later, junior Lance Rich forced a turnover that led to an easy basket for Odom.

The Indians trimmed the Union lead to 41-28 at the 4:22 mark but Odom rejected a Towns layup. With 3:20 left in the third, Odom hit 1-of-2 at the line, and 18 seconds later, Hamby fed Hughes for an easy layup following another Indians turnover.

A 1-for-2 trip to the line got Towns within 12 but a quick bucket by Baenninger off a perfectly executed inbounds pass gave Union a 46-29 lead.

With 80 seconds left in the third, the Indians narrowed the Panthers' lead to 46-33 but Hughes went the length of the court for another layup. A Towns free throw made it a 48-34 game but a pull up jumper from Hughes and a last-second putback by Baenninger gave Union a 52-34 lead after three quarters.

A layup at the 7:41 mark and two free throws at 7:34 were the only Towns County points in the final frame.

A trey from Hamby, a baseline drive and score by Odom, and two baskets by Shook opened up a 61-38 lead. At the 4-minute mark, Hamby hit a pull-up jumper, then Rich drove to the basket and scored.

Hughes hit two from the line and freshman Crawford Colwell went 2-for-2 at the charity stripe for Union's final points of the game.

Union will host Lakeview on Tuesday at 6 p.m. then travel to Dawsonville on Friday for a 7 p.m. tip. On Saturday, for the second year in-a-row, Union will host a game at The Pit. This year's opponent is a talented Hayesville, NC squad who returns most of its 10-man rotation off a team that reached the second round of state last season. Tip-off is at 6 p.m.

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Lady Panthers respond to Fannin loss with 13 treys in blowout win at Towns

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Despite suffering their first home loss to Fannin County since 2010 on Tuesday, the Lady Panthers regrouped and recorded their fifth straight win over Towns County on Friday.

In what was a tale of two teams, Union County lit up the Lady Indians with a 13-of-27 performance from long distance in a 63-22 victory.

But during the 51-47 loss to Fannin, the Lady Panthers struggled - shooting 8-for-31 from downtown and 13-for-62 overall. The free throw line wasn't very kind either as Union went 15-for-32 from the charity stripe.

Lady Panthers 47 Fannin County 51

Union County struggled to find any offense during a fourth quarter that saw four starters foul out and Fannin overcome a 41-37 deficit with a 14-6 final frame.

All tied up at 42-42 with 5:12 to play, senior point guard, and leading scorer Brooke Maddox was whistled for her fifth foul - taking 13 points and 3 steals with her to the bench.

The Lady Rebels knocked down 1-for-2 at the stripe but senior Lisa Nalaschi knotted things back up with a 1-for-2 trip to the line.

With 4:59 left, Fannin took a 45-43 lead on a putback, but junior Layne Colwell gave Union it's final lead of the game with a trey at the 4:14 mark.

With her team trailing 47-46, Colwell picked up her fifth foul for going over-the-back on an offensive rebound with 2:35 to play.

Nineteen seconds later, Nalaschi was sent to the bench with her fifth foul at the 2:16 mark. The Lady Rebels hit 1-for-2 at the line for a 48-46 advantage.

Union would come up empty on its next trip to the line but got the ball back on a Fannin turnover. Then with 1:29 left, the Lady Pan-



Sophomore Holly Stroman goes up strong for two in the first half vs Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest.

the second and the teams went to the break tied 27-27.

The Lady Panthers overcame a 34-30 deficit in the third for a 41-37 lead entering the fourth.

"We got beat by two good teams, Fannin and Dawson, but the effort was there and we've just got to keep playing," Union Head Coach David Tucker said.

Lady Panthers 63 Towns County 22

Union County opened with a 20-6 outburst that saw two treys each from Day and Colwell to go with 6 points from Maddox.

Day, who finished with 20

points, connected on three more treys in the second, Maddox hit twice from downtown and added a layup off a steal. Colwell knocked down a trey and Coyne scored twice on a pair of layups.

Entering the break, Union led 44-9, thanks to a 10-for-20 shooting performance from long distance in the first half.

In the first half alone, Maddox recorded 4 assists and 8 steals, Colwell had 7 steals, while Day and Nalaschi added three steals each as Union picked the Lady Indians 23 times in the first two quarters.

"We came out and shot the ball well and just built on that," Coach Tucker said. "But this is just a fun team to be around."

The third quarter saw Day nail her sixth three, making it 47-9. That was followed by an assist from Maddox on a Nalaschi jumper.

Towns hit a free throw at the 6:08 mark of the third but Maddox's third trey of the contest made it 52-10 with 4:35 left in the quarter.

On the next whistle - which came at the 4:16 mark - Coach Tucker sat his starters.

Madison Lariscy and Anna Danek scored buckets for Union and the third quarter closed with the Lady Panthers on top at 56-15.

In the fourth, Logan Colwell, Bailey Daniel, and Lariscy scored during the 6-minute quarter that was shortened due to Union's 41-point lead.

Union hosts Lakeview on Tuesday at 6 p.m. before traveling to Dawson for a rematch at 7 p.m. On Saturday, Union hosts Hayesville, NC at The Pit.

Hayesville was a Final Four team in last season's State Tournament and also knocked off Dawson for a Battle of the States Championship. Tip off is at 6 p.m.

Union stats (vs Towns)
POINTS: Day 20, Maddox 17, La. Colwell 9, Coyne 4, Lariscy 4, Nalaschi 2, Danek 2, Lo. Colwell 2, Daniel 2 REBOUNDS: Nalaschi 6, La. Colwell 4 ASSISTS: Maddox 6, Stroman 3 STEALS: Maddox 9, Colwell 7, Nalaschi 4, Coyne 3 BLOCKS: Nalaschi 4, Busse 3

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Kaitlyn Day battles for the loose ball vs Fannin. Photo/Todd Forrest

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GAME TIMES AND LOCATION

RUBBER FLOOR GYM 310 Wellborn St	OLD REC GYM 400 School Circle
Saturday Dec 13	Saturday Dec 13 Thursday Dec 18
10:00 The Squad vs Panthers	10:00 Fierce vs Red Storm
11:00 Bobcats vs Fannin	11:00 Sparks vs Lady Panthers
12:00 Lady Panthers vs Fannin	12:00 Grizz vs Ducks
1:00 Fast Breakers vs Bobcats	1:00 Board Crashers vs Heat
Monday Dec 15	Tuesday Dec 16
7:00 Panthers vs Bobcats	5:30 Fierce vs Lady Panthers
	6:30 Heat vs Grizz
	7:30 Ducks vs Board Crashers