

Sports

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Basketball season is underway at Union County High School

Lady Panthers dismantle Rabun Gap following scrimmage victory over Hayesville, NC

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@ngame.com

Tied at 9-9 early in the second quarter, Union County used an 18-2 run to take a 27-11 halftime lead over Rabun Gap before eventually cruising to a 50-21 victory.

The Lady Panthers got off to a slow start in the 2018-19 season opener, trailing for much of the first quarter before a Kait McCarter trey opened up a 9-6 Union advantage after one.

"I think we were just a little nervous in the first quarter," Lady Panther head coach Corey Garrett said after the game. "We got what we wanted and saw what we expected to see but we just didn't execute. We were throwing the ball away, missing easy baskets and weren't trusting in ourselves."

Making her high school debut, Lady Panther freshman Ava Hunter scored 12 of her game-high 16 points in the first half while connecting on all four free throw attempts and 6-of-12 from the floor.

Providing a spark off the bench, freshman Riley Allison knocked down a three then added a steal-and-score to help Union County pull away during a one-sided second period.

"We finally started rolling," Garrett said. "We were able to get a few looks inside then the outside shots started to fall, and once that happened, the floodgates opened."

"We were able to get (Rabun Gap) out of zone and we love it when teams play us man-to-man and things just steam rolled from there."

Allison finished with 3 steals and 2 boards to go with her 5-point debut.

As the second half got underway, McCarter continued to showcase the newest addition to her offensive arsenal, the 3-point shot. McCarter ended the third period with 7 points,



Freshman Ava Hunter battles for an offensive rebound during the first half of Union County's win over Rabun Gap. Hunter led all scorers with 16 points -- 12 coming in the first half. Photo/Todd Forrest

coming off a trey, a deuce and a free throw. She would finish the night with 11 points and 8 boards on 4-of-4 shooting and 2-for-2 from downtown.

Afterwards, Coach Garrett talked about how tough it is to guard McCarter, who was all-region last year as a post player, when she's hitting jumpers from long distance.

"She was worked her tail off in the gym," he said. "She's been shooting a lot and I told her, if you can stretch your game out, you're going to be a machine."

Fellow junior Brooke Dockrey converted an and-one while Hunter knocked down a pair of free throws as the Lady Panthers extended their margin to 38-18 after three.

Junior Andelin Hill nailed a pair of threes in the fourth and Hunter added a bucket to wrap up the scoring for the Union starters.

Hill turned in a 9-point performance on 3-of-7 from beyond the arc. She also grabbed 5 boards to go with 3 assists, 3 steals and a blocked shot.

Sophomore Kyla Locklear, who got on the board in the first half, recorded her second basket of the night in the final frame. She would also pull down three boards.

Freshman Rebekah Chambers added another late bucket for the Lady Panthers, who outscored Rabun Gap 12-3 over the final eight minutes. Senior Adeline Dockrey chipped in three boards; senior Brianna Hemphill recorded an assist and a steal while freshman Ansley Collins grabbed two rebounds.

Junior point guard Brooke Dockrey finished with 3 points and 6 assists to just one turnover. As a team, Union County finished with 13 assists to just 10 turnovers, but that ratio will be tested on Tuesday when

the Lady Panthers host Towns County.

"They're going to do exactly what we expect," Garrett said. "They're going to press us full court and try to turn us over as much as possible. That was our Achilles' heel last year. If we didn't turn it over, we won. If we turned the ball over, we usually struggled. If we can take care of the basketball (against Towns County) then I think we'll be fine."

Lady Panthers 52, Hayesville, NC 34 (Scrimmage) - Union County hosted Hayesville, NC for a preseason scrimmage contest on Mon. Nov. 12 and coach Garrett liked what he saw from his younger, less experienced players.

"With the four returning starters, you know what you're going to get," he said. "But (against Hayesville) we played four freshmen and one sophomore a pretty good amount."

"Overall, I thought they played good. They still looked like freshmen but they did a lot of good things."

The Lady Panthers were led by the returning junior duo of Hill and McCarter, who scored 12 and 10, respectively.

The other returning starters, junior Brooke Dockrey and senior Adeline Dockrey chipped in 6 and 2 points, respectively.

Hunter, the freshman, got the start and turned in a 7-point outing. Locklear added 6 points and Allison scored five.

Hemphill and junior Adelia Pyle finished with 2 points apiece.

Union County was never threatened after jumping out to a 12-4 first quarter advantage. The Lady Jackets were able to string together a few runs to remain within striking distance but found themselves down 15 at the break, 28-13. Hayesville outscored

Union 13-11 in the third to make it a 39-26 game entering the fourth but were unable to mount a serious comeback bid as the Lady Panthers pulled away 52-34.

"I thought we looked pretty decent, but at times things just didn't seem to flow the way we wanted it to," Garrett said. "I think that comes from having four or five girls that haven't played being out there with four returners."

On the defensive side of the ball, Garrett saw room for improvement as Hayesville was able to keep pace with Union on occasion, preventing the Lady Panthers from turning the contest into a runaway.

"We definitely need to work on (defending) ball screens," he said. "One thing we talk about a lot is not giving up the base line and we gave it up four times in the first half."

"Those are easy fixes but we're still going to hit the defensive side pretty hard (in the upcoming practices)."

This season, Coach Garrett is blessed with one of the tallest Lady Panther teams in recent history, but he's hoping he can surround that size with enough shooters to keep opposing defenses honest.

"That's something that's definitely in the back of our minds," he said. "We have girls that can shoot but it might take them a little while to find their flow. We have a lot of size this year but we're going to have to find a way to make teams come outside and guard us."

Tip-off for Tuesday's Towns County game is scheduled for 7 p.m. following two JV games at 4 and 5:30 p.m.

The Lady Indians are coming off a 46-33 victory over Hiwassee Dam, NC. Sophomore Vanessa Floyd led Towns County with 11 points while senior Taylor Cornett added 10 and sophomore Kennedy Henson scored 8.

Rabun Gap hangs on 39-38 as several key Panthers transition from gridiron

Hayesville, NC fends off Union County, 60-55 in preseason scrimmage

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@ngame.com

Union County rallied from an 11-point, third quarter deficit to tie things up at 38-38 but Rabun Gap hit 1-of-2 at the line with 4.7 seconds remaining to escape with the one-point victory.

On Monday, Nov. 12, the Panthers hosted Hayesville, NC in a scrimmage contest where they erased a 9-point margin to even things up at 52-52 before eventually falling 60-55.

With football season ending on Nov. 9, Union County Head Coach Casey Jones welcomed five new players onto his team the day of the scrimmage.

Without a single basketball practice, junior Sawyer Drake came off the bench to lead the Panthers with 12 points. Meanwhile, senior Coleson Daniel had 4 points and junior Pierson Allison added two -- both in a reserve role after stepping off the gridiron, as well.

On Thursday, Drake and Allison moved into the starting lineup as Union County hosted a Rabun Gap team that featured a pair of near-7-footers in the post and a couple more key contributors in the 6-foot-7 range. A State playoff team in



Sawyer Drake drives to the basket following a screen set by senior Coleson Daniel (42). Photo/Todd Forrest

North Carolina's private school division, the Eagles opened their 2018-19 season with a win over the Panthers, followed by a Friday night victory over the defending North Carolina State Runner-up Winston Salem Christian.

"We fell behind by 11 and we could've laid down, but we didn't and I was proud of them for that," Coach Jones said. "We battled back and had a shot to win it at the end. Overall, it was

a good game for us.

"I like playing good competition early on because it's only going to make us better. I'm proud of my guys, they played hard and we got better."

In the early going, the Panthers led 7-3 then 8-5 after one before Rabun Gap used a 12-4 second quarter outburst to take a 17-12 advantage at the break.

A Jared Nelson trey pulled Union County to within a bucket

at 17-15 early in the third before an 11-2 Eagle run opened up their largest lead of the night at 28-17 with just over 5 minutes left in the third.

The Panthers would quickly respond with an 8-0 run to pull within three at the 2-minute mark of the third.

Hemphill contributed a pair of buckets during the run while Sawyer Brey and Allison added one basket each.

Trailing 30-25 after three,



Senior Britt Waller with the game-tying basket. Photo/Todd Forrest

Allison knocked down his only three of the game before Drake hit 1-of-2 at the charity stripe, cutting the Rabun Gap lead to 30-29 at the 6:56 mark.

As was the case all night, the Eagles answered with a spurt of their own, stretching its advantage to 38-31 with just under 4 minutes to play.

Brey split a pair at the line then a Colton Day put-back made it a 38-34 game with 2:58 remaining.

During the final minute, a 14-footer by Drake brought Union to within two. Moments later, with the clock ticking under 20 seconds, Drake drove into the paint and fed Britt Waller, who banked in a shot from the right block, tying the score at 38-38.

After Allison's full court pressure defense nearly forced a 10-second violation, the Eagles attacked the basket, drawing a two-shot foul with 4.7 seconds left.

Rabun Gap would miss the first and hit the second, forcing Union County to race across half court, where they called timeout with 1.8 seconds remaining.

The Eagles were whistled for a hold on the inbounds pass, but with a foul to give, the Panthers had to inbound the ball again, this time with seven-tenths of a second left.

With barely a half-second to work with, Union was unable to get off a decent shot and its desperation heave from mid-court sailed wide.

"They took Pierson (Allison) away all night so we had a hard time getting going offensively," Coach Jones said after the game. "When you have 6-10 in the middle with the athleticism they have on the perimeter

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