

Sports

See the Sports Section at nghanews.com

Panthers roll 49-8 behind four touchdowns from Daniel

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Rabbittown - The Union County Panthers won their 16th straight season opener, 49-8 at East Hall, thanks to 221 total yards and four touchdowns from junior running back Jonah Daniel.

The Union offense piled up 321 yards with 321 yards coming on the ground -- the most rushing yards by a Panther team since its 63-38 victory at Fannin County in 2016.

Daniel accounted for 180 rushing yards and three scores on Friday night. He also caught two passes for 41 yards and a touchdown.

"It feels great," Daniel said after the win. "[Our offense] has a wide variety of weapons and plays that we can run to make things happen.

"The O-line did a really good job blocking for me and I was able to break away a few times, but there's still some things I need to work on before next week."

His coach concurred. "I thought we did a great job running the ball, but the good news is, we can get so much better."

Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "The offensive linemen played well, but we also missed some blocks and Jonah was just making [tacklers] miss.

"We didn't do a great job up front, but you have to do something right to get 320-plus (rushing) yards. I think it also helps when you have a passing game like ours, it forces them to pay so much attention to our outside receivers. But once again, we have a chance to be so much better if we can eliminate some of our mistakes."

After falling short in all four visits to Rabbittown since 1959, the Panthers sent an early message that this time would be different, jumping out to a 21-0 advantage after one quarter. Union County would add a second-quarter score for a 28-0



Union County junior running back Jonah Daniel takes a screen pass 39 yards for his third touchdown of the first quarter. Earlier, Daniel scored on runs of 36 yards and 1-yard to help the Panthers build a commanding early lead at East Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

halftime lead before putting things away for good with a pair of touchdowns in the third.

Despite the one-sided advantage on the scoreboard, East Hall's passing attack found plenty of success in its home opener. Sophomore quarterback Clete Cooper put up 352 yards while connecting on 33-of-38 attempts. Overall, they recorded 20 first downs and were an efficient 5-for-10 on third and fourth down conversions while running 69 plays against the Panther defense.

"I think we played the run pretty well but most of their yards came when the quarterback got outside of the pocket and was scrambling around," Coach Allison said after the game. "We're just going to have to do a better job of putting pressure on the quarterback."

However, four costly turnovers and a touchdown-negating penalty kept the Vikings off the board through three quarters, despite driving into

Union County territory on eight of its nine possessions.

East Hall reached the Union County red zone on three separate occasions but came away empty-handed each time. The Vikings would finally score their first points of the season on a 39-yard touchdown strike -- with the game already out of reach at 42-0 -- early in the fourth quarter.

After reviewing game film over the weekend, Coach Allison had more to offer on the performance of his defense.

"After last season, we made a commitment to stop the run and I felt like we did a pretty good job of that," Coach Allison said on Sunday afternoon. "We held East Hall to about 25 or 30 rushing yards, and hopefully we'll continue to do that, but when we do, we're going to open up some passing opportunities. Really, all of their passes were short throws and if we come up and make the tackle, I would have been good with it,

but we missed some tackles and the kid also made some really good throws.

"That's the chance you take to stop the run game, but if we just do a little better job tackling on the outside, then I will feel a whole lot better

"We gave up a lot of yards, but in the long run, they only had 8 points and that's the stat we're looking at."

Unfortunately for East Hall, the game got away from them almost immediately and they were unable to recover. Things might have looked very different had two critical plays not swung the early momentum in favor of the Panthers.

On the opening kickoff, junior Mason McCombs dropped a pooch kick between a pair of Vikings at the 25-yard line, and like a well-struck sand wedge, the resulting backspin allowed the ball to bounce directly into the arms of junior Noah Underwood, awarding the game's first possession to Union

County at the East Hall 26.

Four plays later, the Panthers were on top for good at 7-0.

The scoring drive consisted of completions to Rich for 11 yards and Drake for eight more. Meanwhile, the first and last play of the series both went to Daniel, who picked up eight yards before punching it in from a yard out.

On the ensuing Vikings' drive, Cooper would move the offense inside the Union County 5-yard line, highlighted by a 28-yard completion on 3rd-and-10. Faced with 3rd-and-2 from the four, East Hall found pay dirt on a quarterback keeper, only to have the potential game-tying score wiped away on a holding penalty.

Looking at 3rd-and-11 from the 13, the Union County defense took advantage of the second chance and forced a third-down incompletion, then limited the Vikings to just five yards on fourth down.

Union's lead was never in jeopardy again.

Beginning with a shovel pass to Drake for 18 yards, followed by a 17-yard scramble by Pierson Allison two plays later, the Panthers needed just six plays to drive 92 yards on their second offensive series, opening up a 14-0 lead on a 36-yard run by Daniel.

East Hall's next drive would stall after crossing the 50-yard line and a shanked punt gave the ball back to Union at its own 34. From there, they needed eight plays to extend the margin to 21-0 on a throwback screen to Daniel, who went untouched into the end zone from 39 yards out on 3rd-and-8.

The touchdown pass was the Panthers' second third-down conversion of the drive, the first coming on a 12-yard completion to Kyle Morlock on 3rd-and-5. Morlock would lead all Union pass catchers with 101 yards on four receptions.

The Vikings' first possession of the second quarter showed promise when an 11-play drive marched them into the Panther red zone, but once again, they shot themselves in the foot. This time, a first-down fumble on the quarterback-running back exchange was recovered by junior safety Kaston Hemphill with 8:08 left before halftime.

Starting from its own 20, Union County leaned heavily on its ground game, using both Daniel and backup Sloan Sutton, as well as the wheels of Pierson Allison, to extend its lead with a 12-play, 80-yard drive. The Panthers ran the ball eight times during the series with Daniel picking up 22 yards on three carries. Sutton rushed three times for 20 yards and Pierson Allison called his own number twice for 17 yards, including a read-option keeper from three yards out that opened up a 28-0 advantage.

Allison finished the game with 45 yards on four carries while completing 17-of-26

See Panthers Roll, Page 3C

Volleyball: Union wins two of four; enters September with 5-9 record

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

The Panthers (5-9) suffered a tough home loss to Pickens on Tuesday but responded by taking two of three at East Hall's Thursday quad-match.

After falling 2-0 (25-19, 25-13) to an 11-6 East Hall squad in the opening match, Union County strung together back-to-back victories over Johnson and Eastside.

In the victory over Class 4A Eastside, the Panthers rallied from a 14-3 deficit to take the first set 27-25. The Eagles controlled the second set wire-to-wire in a 25-10 win, but Union scored a three-point, third-set victory to take the best-of-three match.

Earlier, the Panthers needed three sets to knock off Class 5A Johnson after falling 25-20 in the opening frame.

The final two sets, however, were all Union County, 25-11 and 15-6.

"Those two wins were awesome," Union coach Megan Swanson said. "It was a huge for our program. For the first time in two years they looked like a complete team. They worked together, they showed enthusiasm and



Union County celebrates a point during a recent home match. After winning just three matches in its first two years, Union already has five victories in the first month of the 2019 season. Photos by Todd Forrest

passion, and it really showed when we came back from down 14-3.

"They never gave up and even the girls on the bench were up yelling, screaming and showing support the entire time."

On Tuesday, Aug. 27,

the Panthers fell 3-0 to Pickens following a 2-0 victory by the Union County junior varsity.

In the varsity contest, the first set was a see-saw affair with the Panthers holding leads of 2-1, 3-2, 4-3, 8-7, 9-8 and 12-11. Union County's final lead of the set came at 13-

12 when the Dragons answered with six-unanswered to grab an 18-13 advantage.

The Panthers battled back to within 21-17 but would get no closer in a 25-18 loss.

The second set saw Pickens grab a 5-4 lead and remain in front most of the

way. Trailing by margins of 11-7, 13-8 and 19-13, Union appeared dead in the water before storming back to within a point at 22-21.

Down 23-21, the next three points belonged to the Panthers as they took their first lead since 3-2. Unable

to clinch the set at 24-23, Union County had four more opportunities to secure the game-point (must win by two points) at 25-24, 26-25, 27-26 and 29-28 before the final three points went to the Dragons in a 31-29 loss.

The third set was all Pickens, 25-13 as the Panthers had a difficult time recovering from the heartbreaking defeat in set two.

Union never led in the third frame but kept pace until the Dragons pulled away with 14 of the final 17 points. "Pickens was a lot better than I thought they would be, but we also made them look a lot better with the way we played," Swanson said.

The Panthers visit Lumpkin for a Tuesday tri-match at 5 p.m. before hosting Hayesville, North Carolina at 6 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 9.

Lumpkin County will visit Union County the following day for a 6 p.m. match on Sept. 10. Region/Area play doesn't open until Sept. 24 so the Panthers have a few more weeks to of preparation.

"I'm super proud of our girls and the way they played (at East Hall)," Coach Swanson added. "I think it's given us a fresh start on our season and something that we can build on."



Union County Volleyball Schedule 2019

Date	Opponent	Time	Location
8/8	Dawson Co. / Gilmer Co.	JVV - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
8/13	Fannin Co. / Murray Co.	5:00 & 6:00	Away - Fannin
8/15	Andrews, NC	V 5:00	Home
8/19	Hiwassee Dam, NC	JV 5:00 / V 6:00	Home
8/20	Fannin Co. / Fannin Co.	5:00 / 6:00	Away - Gilmer
8/22	Gilmer Co. / Stephens Co.	V - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
8/27	Pickens Co.	JV 6:00 / V 7:00	Home
8/29	East Hall/ Johnson/ Eastside	V - 5:00, 6:00 & 7:00	Away - East Hall
9/3	Lumpkin / Prince Avenue Academy	5:00 & 6:00	Away - Lumpkin
9/9	Hayesville, NC	JVV 5:00 & 6:00	Home
9/10	Lumpkin Co.	JVV - 5:00 & 6:00	Home
9/12	White Co. / East Hall	JVV 6:00 & 7:00	Away - White Co
9/16	Hiwassee Dam, NC	JV 5:00 / Varsity 6:00	Away - HD
9/17	Dawson Co. / Alcovy / Athens Christian	V - 5:00, 6:00 & 7:00	Away - Dawson Co
9/19	Tellico Plains	JV 5:00 / V 6:00	Away - Tellico
9/24	Oglethorpe/Washington Wilkes*	V - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
9/26	Rabun/Putnam* - Tri-match	V - 6:00 & 7:00	Away - Rabun
9/30	Hayesville, NC	JV 5:00 / Varsity 6:00	Away - Hayesville
10/1	Lake Oconee Academy*	V - 5:00	Home
10/8	Region Tournament***		
10/10	Region Tournament***		TBA