

Rabun claims Region title; Panthers to host South Atlanta on Friday

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Rabun County quarterback Gunner Stockton accounted for all seven Wildcat touchdowns while the Union offense was hamstrung by four turnovers in a 49-7 loss to No. 4 Rabun County (10-0) on Senior Night.

“At the end of the day, our guys played their butts off,” Union coach Brian Allison said. “We may not have played well, but we played our hearts out. And like I told the guys, I would much rather be in our huddle than theirs, and that will never change.”

With the loss, the Panthers (9-1) will host third-seeded South Atlanta (7-3) in the opening round of the Class AA State Tournament on Friday. Union County will enter the postseason as the No. 2 seed for the second straight year following the loss to Rabun.

The Wildcats jumped out to a 21-0 lead in the early stages of the second quarter, but after struggling to find an answer during the first 12 minutes, the Panther defense tightened up and kept the margin at 21-0 into the fourth.

The defense would eventually run out of gas as Rabun County tacked on 28 points over the final 10-plus minutes to run away with the 49-7 victory.

“The defense played pretty well after the first few drives,” Coach Allison said. “We managed to hold (Rabun) at 21 despite the offense going through a rough stretch of turnovers.”

After allowing a 10-play, 70-yard drive on the game’s opening series, the Union defense was forced to defend a short field when the offense went three-and-out and Rabun took over near midfield. From there, Stockton and the offense needed just eight plays to drive 55 yards for the 14-0 lead.

On the second Panther possession of the game, a screen pass to Jonah Daniel burned a Wildcat blitz for 20 yards but two plays later, the shotgun snap sailed wide of Pierson Allison and Rabun pounced on the loose football at the Union 29.

The Wildcats would eventually find the end zone after converting a 4th-and-3 when Stockton kept it himself for an 8-yard score on 3rd-and-goal, less than a minute into the second quarter.

“Our starting tackle got hurt so we had to move our center to tackle and that had us a little out of sync,” Coach Allison said. “Even Drake (Groves) went in with a quad injury and we weren’t sure if he was going to play. We



Friday night’s game ball arrived via skydiver. Photo/Todd Forrest

had some offensive adversity but still, if we get a couple of breaks to go our way here and there, it could have been a much closer ball game.”

Trailing 21-0 on the ensuing possession, Sawyer Drake was unable to come down with a deep-ball over the middle but the incomplete pass was ruled a fumble and Rabun scooped up the football and returned it to the Panthers’ 35-yard line.

The Union defense stood strong, forcing a three-and-out and allowing the offense to take over at the seven following a Wildcats’ punt. From there, a 3rd-and-6 draw play to Daniel went for nine and a first down. With a 3rd-and-8 from the 22, Allison went deep down the sideline for Mason McCombs but the Rabun defender came down with the jump ball at midfield.

Despite giving up consecutive plays of 17 and 19 yards after a penalty moved the Wildcats into a 3rd-and-23, the defense did its job again and forced Rabun into a 45-yard field goal attempt that sailed wide right.

Taking over at the 20 with 4:44 left in the half, Pierson Allison had Union County on the move with a 12-yard completion to Drake and a 22-yard hookup with Josh Orr. After scrambling for a first down, the Panther QB found Orr again for 13 yards to the Wildcats’ 19. The drive would stall after short runs by Daniel and Pierson Allison brought up 4th-and-5 from the 14. With under a minute on the clock, Union County would elect to go for six points instead of three and the fourth-down throw to Orr fell incomplete.

“We had a chance to cut it to 21-7 so we went for it and that was my call,” Coach Allison said. “We came out to win

the game, not just score points and I felt a field goal didn’t help us at that point.”

With 50 seconds left before the break, Rabun County moved the ball out to midfield but an interception by Drake kept the Wildcats off the board one more time and the Panthers entered the half down 21-0.

Union County started the third quarter on offense and moved into Rabun territory after Pierson Allison kept the drive alive with a 4th-and-8 throw to a diving Cayden Rich. Following a 12-yard quarterback keeper, the drive would stall when they were unable to convert a 4th-and-9 at the Wildcats’ 40-yard line.

Once again, the defense kept Union County in the game by forcing a punt and handing the ball back to the offense near the midway point of the third.

Starting from their own eight, a second down throw to Rich went for 15 yards to give the offense some breathing room. A holding penalty would push Union back but Daniel tore off a 20-yard run and McCombs moved the sticks with a 7-yard reception. A 15-yard throw to Orr had Union County on the move but a nine-yard loss on first down derailed the drive, resulting in a 4th-and-18 punt.

Pierson Allison’s kick was downed inside the 1-yard line with 2:28 left in the third. But from the shadow of its own end zone, the Wildcats used a back-breaking 99-yard scoring drive that opened up a 28-0 advantage with 10:42 to play.

The Panthers had a chance to kill the drive early but a first-down completion on 3rd-and-6 from the five sparked the Rabun offense, who eventually punched it



Senior safety John Mancuso (9) lowers the boom on Rabun County senior wide receiver and recent University of Georgia commit Braxton Hicks (4). Mancuso finished with a career-high 13 tackles. Photo/Todd Forrest

in on 1st-and-goal from the one.

“I thought for three-and-a-half quarters or intensity level was high,” Coach Allison said. “Last year we were super-jacked up to start and the game was over by halftime. This year, we were able to maintain our emotions much better and that allowed us to remain competitive for three-and-a-half quarters.”

A Union County interception led to a Wildcats touchdown at the 6:52 mark. Then another miscue on the shotgun snap set up a Rabun County score that made it 42-0.

The Panthers finally got on the board with a 15-yard touchdown pass to McCombs with 2:22 remaining.

The Wildcats weren’t finished, however, as Stockton perfectly orchestrated a two-minute drive to record his seventh touchdown with 55 seconds to play.

“They are big, fast and physical and their quarterback is a very good player,” Coach Allison said. “My hat’s off to them on how well and how hard their guys played.”

Daniel would finish with 121 yards on 17 carries and Pierson Allison rushed nine times for 46 yards. Through the air, the senior QB would connect on 14-of-31 for 206 yards, one score and two picks.

Drake caught four passes for 68 yards, Orr had three grabs for 54 yards, Rich had three catches for 31 yards.

McCombs had two receptions for 29 yards and a score. Daniel caught two

passes for 24 yards.

John Mancuso finished with one tackle for loss. Sloan Sutton had seven stops, Drake added six, Kaston Hemphill had five and JJ Littles four.

Clayton Lester and Zion Ross had three tackles each; Hunter Young, Noah Underwood and Pierson Allison had two apiece while Rich added a TFL.

Up next: On Friday, Union County will host a 7-3 South Atlanta squad that presents a matchup nightmare with its size.

Despite the size advantage and athleticism up-and-down the roster, Coach Allison feels his team can compete with the Hornets, if it can put the loss to Rabun in the rearview mirror.

“I imagine it might take until Monday or Tuesday to get over the loss but these guys are pretty resilient,” Coach Allison said. “That’s one thing I’ve never had to worry about so I expect them to show up ready to work on Monday. But the thing of it is, there are 15 guys (seniors), that if they don’t show up ready to play, that will be it for them.”

The key to victory Friday night is stopping explosive running back Pete Boyd (No. 12). South Atlanta likes to move the senior all over the field, spreading him out wide or putting him behind center in the Wildcat formation.

“They’ll pose a problem with their athleticism and their size,” Coach Allison said. “They have one guy, No. 12, that they like to put in the Wildcat, and he is very

dangerous if he gets into the open field.”

Others to watch are quarterbacks Jontez Adams (No. 16, freshman) and John Lawton (No. 2, sophomore), along with fullback/linebacker Quintavious Frazier (No. 14, junior). With only 24 passing yards in their most recent win, the Hornets aren’t known for lighting it up through the air, but like Union’s last three home playoff opponents, they will try to pound you into submission with a powerful offensive line and a stable of talented backs.

“I think we’ll be able to move the ball, and defensively, I know we just gave up 49 but I feel like we still have a chance,” Coach Allison said. “We had some guys that played 130 snaps vs Rabun but they stayed focused and stayed in it so we’re going to have to continue that.”

Injury report - Coach Allison expects Kyle Morlock to return at full availability on Friday night. The senior wideout played one snap vs Rabun. Meanwhile, junior right tackle Nathan Brooks’ status was unknown as of Monday morning’s deadline. An MRI was scheduled for later in the day to determine the extent of his knee injury.

According to Coach Allison, Groves will return to center vs South Atlanta with defensive lineman Nathaniel Ledford possibly replacing Brooks - if he’s unavailable.

“We’re going to try to not change our center again,” he said. “But at that point in time (vs Rabun), it’s what we had to do.”

Union County swimming opens 2019-20 season at Habersham

Clarksville - On Nov. 2, Union County began its new year in Clarksville with multiple Top-10 finishes and a third place overall finish by UCMS. The Top-10 finishers were as follows:

200-Yard Medley Relay: (HS) Steven Williams, Hunter White, Alden Wilkes and Michael Leird - 2nd place.

(MS) Nicholas Nushtayev, Eli Gwynn, Liam Smith and Will Doyle - 5th place; Lillian Collins, Olivia Loyd, Reece Jones and Brooklyn Brown - 8th place.

200-Yard Individual Medley: (HS) Courtney Foster - 9th place.

100-Yard Individual Medley: (MS) Liam Smith - 4th place; Lily Helton - 5th place.

50-Yard Freestyle: (HS) Hunter White - 3rd place; Steven Williams - 4th place; Hannah Sheffield - 6th place.

(MS) Nicholas Nushtayev - 3rd place; Will Doyle - 10th place; Grace Cook - 6th place; Anniston Howse - 8th place.

100-Yard Butterfly: (HS)

Aiden Wilkes - 4th place
50-Yard Butterfly: (MS) Lily Helton - 8th place; Grace Cook - 9th place.

100-Yard Freestyle: (MS) Liam Smith - 4th place.

200-Yard Freestyle Relay: (MS) Nicholas Nushtayev, Will Doyle, Eli Gwynn, Liam Smith - 3rd place; Grace Cook, Arianna Protsman, Anniston Howse & Lily Helton - 3rd place.

100-Yard Backstroke: (HS) Steven Williams - 3rd; Courtney Foster - 8th place.

50-Yard Backstroke: (MS) Will Doyle - 7th place; Anniston Howse - 5th place

50-Yard Breaststroke: (MS) Nicholas Nushtayev - 5th place; Eli Gwynn - 6th place; Brooklyn Brown - 10th place.

On Nov. 9, Union returned to Clarksville and the high school placed fifth and the middle school was second. The Top-10 finishers were as follows:

200-Yard Medley Relay: (HS) Blake Caputi, Hunter White, Alden Wilkes and Daniel Herrera

- 6th place. (MS) Nicholas Nushtayev, Eli Gwynn, Liam Smith and Grayden Cobb - 2nd place.

Bo Brown, Andrew Farmer, Will Doyle and Cooper Allen - 5th place; Anniston Howse, Lily Helton, Grace Cook and Olivia Loyd - 2nd place; Lydia McNabb, Cheyenne Doche, Reese Jones and Brooklyn Brown - 6th place.

100-Yard Individual Medley: (MS) Nicholas Nushtayev - 4th place; Eli Gwynn - 6th place.

50-Yard Freestyle: (HS) Hunter White - 3rd place; Aiden Wilkes - 6th place; Hannah Sheffield - 4th place; Courtney Foster - 8th place; Hana Gregory - 10th place. (MS) Nicholas Nushtayev - 2nd place; Grayden Cobb - 4th place; Will Doyle - 7th place; Grace Cook - 2nd place; Olivia Loyd - 6th place; Brooklyn Brown - 8th place; Reese Jones - 9th place.

100-Yard Butterfly: (HS) Aiden Wilkes - 4th place.

50-Yard Butterfly: (MS) Lily Helton - 2nd place; Grace Cook - 4th place.

100-Yard Freestyle: (MS)

Liam Smith - 2nd place; Anniston Howse - 2nd place.

200-Yard Freestyle Relay: (HS) Hunter White, Daniel Herrera, Blake Caputi and Alden Wilkes - 6th place. (MS) Bo Brown, Andrew Farmer, Cooper Allen and Eli Gwynn - 5th place; Grace Cook, Olivia Loyd, Anniston Howse and Lily Helton - 2nd place; Reese Jones, Lydia McNabb, Lillian Collins and Brooklyn Brown - 5th place.

100-Yard Backstroke: (HS) Courtney Foster - 5th place.

50-Yard Backstroke: (MS) Grayden Cobb - 3rd place; Will Doyle - 4th place; Anniston Howse - 5th place; Reese Jones - 8th place.

100-Yard Breaststroke: (HS) Hunter White - 1st place; Hannah Sheffield - 4th place.

50-Yard Breaststroke: (MS) Liam Smith - 2nd place; Eli Gwynn - 6th place; Andrew Farmer - 10th place; Lily Helton - 2nd place; Brooklyn Brown - 8th place.

Union County basketball returns Tuesday with scrimmage

| 2019-2020 VARSITY SCHEDULE | | | |
|----------------------------|--------|---|----------------|
| date | time | opponent | location |
| 11/12 | 5:00pm | Rabun Gap (scrimmage) | HOME |
| 11/19 | 6:00pm | Towns | @Towns |
| 11/22 | 7:00pm | Fannin | @Fannin |
| 11/25 | 3:00pm | West Hall | @North Hall |
| 11/26 | 6:00pm | White | @White |
| 12/3 | 6:00pm | Tallulah Falls | HOME |
| 12/6 | 7:00pm | Towns | HOME |
| 12/13 | 6:00pm | Elbert* [Teacher Appreciation Night] | HOME |
| 12/14 | 2:00pm | Monticello* | @Monticello |
| 12/17 | 5:00pm | Social Circle* | @Social Circle |
| 12/21 | 6:00pm | Gilmer | HOME |
| 12/26 | TBD | TBD | @Towns |
| 12/27 | TBD | TBD | @Towns |
| 12/28 | TBD | TBD | @Towns |
| 1/3 | 7:00pm | Rabun* | HOME |
| 1/4 | 3:00pm | Putnam* | @Putnam |
| 1/7 | 6:00pm | Banks* | @Banks |
| 1/10 | 6:00pm | Oglethorpe* | HOME |
| 1/11 | 6:00pm | Fannin | HOME |
| 1/14 | 5:00pm | Elbert* | @Elbert |
| 1/17 | 6:00pm | Monticello* | HOME |
| 1/21 | 5:00pm | Social Circle* | HOME |
| 1/24 | 6:30pm | Rabun* | @Rabun |
| 1/25 | 3:00pm | Putnam* [Senior Night] | HOME |
| 1/28 | 6:00pm | Banks* | HOME |
| 1/31 | 6:00pm | Oglethorpe* | @Oglethorpe |