

# The Beach era gets underway with a 70-36 victory at Towns County

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**Hiawassee** - The Union County Lady Panthers' performance in their first game under new head coach Crystal Beach was an impressive one with four players topping 11 points and seven chipping in at least a half-dozen during their 70-36 win at Towns County.

Sophomore Ava Hunter led all scorers with 15 points and senior Andelin Hill added 14. Freshman Ellie Cook finishing with 12 points and senior Kait McCarter added 11.

Union County made quick work of the Lady Indians in what could be considered a revenge game from last season when Towns County stunned an uninspired Lady Panthers squad, 52-48 in the Consolation Game of the Battle of the States Christmas Tournament.

Earlier in the 2018-19 season, Union County took care of the rival Lady Indians, 43-31 in Hiawassee and 51-38 in Blairsville as Hunter scored 43 points in the two wins combined.

Fast-forward nearly 11 months and the two familiar foes squared off for the first of three potential matchups over the next five weeks. But this time, the Lady Panthers left little doubt to the outcome as they jumped out to a 17-2 advantage and were never threatened the rest of the way.

Tied at 2-2 in the early going, Union County rattled off 15 unanswered points before closing the opening period with an 18-5 advantage.

Hunter and McCarter each poured in six points while Cook knocked down a three to account for 15 of their team's 18 first-quarter points.

"I'm really proud of the way we came out but we really need to start faster from the jump," Coach Beach said after the game. "But you can't fault their effort. They played so hard for their first game out and were led by some great senior leadership."

Senior Andelin Hill came



Union County freshman Ellie Cook with one of her two 3-pointers. She finished with 12 points in her high school debut. Photo/Todd Forrest

to life with eight points in the second frame as the Lady Panthers extended the lead to 28-7 at the four-minute mark.

Towns County refused to go away, however, outscoring Union 7-0 to trim a 30-9 margin to 30-16. But that's as close as they would get as the Lady Panthers answered with a 9-2 spurt over the final 2:11, extending its advantage back to 21 at 39-18 entering the break.

The run began with two free throws from Hill then a corner jumper from sophomore Riley Allison made it 34-16. Leading 34-18, Hill scored the half's final five points in less than 30 seconds as she converted a put-back with 50 seconds left and drilled a trey from the top of the key at the 23-second mark.

In the third, senior point guard Brooke Dockrey cracked the scoring column with a 3-pointer before a steal-and-

score by Hill and a jumper by Cook opened up a 46-24 advantage. Dockrey drilled another triple from the corner to stretch the lead to 25 at 49-24 at the five-minute mark of the third.

The margin continued to grow as Hill split a pair from the line, then hit a three-ball over the wing. Later, sophomore Rebekah Chambers hit 2-for-2 at the stripe followed by a bucket from Cook that blew things wide open at 57-26. The third period would close with Cook sinking her second three of the game and McCarter adding a layup in the paint to cap off a 13-0 run.

After Towns countered with six-unanswered, McCarter and Hunter each added a bucket during the mercy-rule shortened fourth quarter to double-up the Lady Indians at 64-32.

Leading 66-34, the final four points of the game went to



In a display of mutual respect and good sportsmanship, both teams gathered at mid court for a prayer at the conclusion of the Union-Towns girls game. Photo/Todd Forrest

Chambers as the Lady Panthers equaled its largest lead of the night with the 70-34 final.

Dockrey, Allison and Chambers each contributed six points each to round out the Union County point totals.

"Our scoring was spread out and I told them that we're a team and it doesn't matter who has the most points, I'm just concerned with our team effort all the way around," Beach said, following her introduction to the Towns-Union rivalry. "This (Towns County) is a really great environment so I'm just really proud of our girls for the way they stepped up, embraced the environment and came away with the win."

Towns County junior Kennedy Henson led the Lady Indians with 11 while fellow junior Vanessa Floyd added nine.

On Monday, Union County traveled to North Hall

to take on the West Hall Spartans in a neutral site contest at 3 p.m. On Tuesday, the Lady Panthers head back across the mountain to face White County in Cleveland at 6 p.m.

The Lady Warriors return five starters off last year's 13-12, Class AAAA State Tournament squad, including All-Region selection Dasha Cannon.

Currently, White County is at 1-3 with a pair of close losses to Lumpkin County and West Forsyth to open the season. They followed that up with a win over Habersham Central before falling 64-62 to South Forsyth. Even with a 1-3 mark, the Lady Warriors are only -3 on the year in total scoring thanks to four close calls.

As for West Hall, the Lady Spartans are coming off a 5-18 season with only two returning starters. However, they are currently off to a nice

start at 2-1 with a blowout win over Johnson and a 50-49 victory over Jackson County.

Their lone defeat was a 19-point loss to Monroe Area in the opener.



Senior Brooke Dockrey

# Shorthanded Panthers fall 83-70 at Towns County despite Hughes' efforts

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**Hiawassee** - Playing without several key players, the Union County Panthers dropped a rare decision to rival Towns County despite a gutsy performance from sophomore Lake Hughes, who poured in 19 points on 6-of-14 shooting from long distance.

"Lake is a competitor," first-year head coach Corey Garrett said. "He can shoot it and he likes to take big shots and he proved that at Towns."

Trailing most of the evening, the Panthers refused to quit as four starters and a few others were unavailable due to the Class AA football playoffs. As a result, Coach Garrett was forced to use an inexperienced rotation that featured two reserves from last season and a roster full of guys making their varsity debut.

"I think (Towns County) was very similar to the Rabun Gap game, we played hard, we played with a lot of intensity and a lot of effort," Garrett said. "I think Towns was able to get us out of our comfort zone a little bit. Our guys really wanted to win so I think they started trying too hard and it got us out of sync a little bit. But they played hard and that's all I ask of them."

Trailing 11-4 out of the gates, Hughes connected on his first three to pull the Panthers within four before the first of two Union County technical fouls allowed the Indians to stretch the lead back to 14-7 with three free throws.



Left-handed sophomore Lake Hughes squares up for one of his six 3-pointers on the night at Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Towns County junior guard Kolby Moss paced the Indians with 19 of his game-high 32 points in the first half to keep the Panthers at bay. Meanwhile, Sawyer Brey, the lone Panther with any starting experience, scored 10 of his 12 points in the first half to keep his team within striking distance in the face of a 25-16 deficit after one quarter.

Hughes and senior Bryson Lariscy opened the second with back-to-back triples to pull Union within seven at 29-22, but the Panthers had no answer on the defensive end as Towns County shot 55% from the floor and 41% from

downtown.

Union County's offensive numbers were respectable at 45% overall and 33% from distance but it wasn't enough to keep pace with the red-hot Indians, who hit 20-of-26 at the line, compared to 7-of-12 for Union.

Towns County went into the break with a 45-35 advantage, and despite four second-half treys from Hughes, the Indians held a 68-49 lead after three and eventually cruised to an 83-70 victory.

"We talk everyday in practice about trusting the process and getting better," Garrett said. "I was able to call some



Sophomore Landon Kight (35) scores inside for two of his 10 points at Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest

timeouts late and draw up some plays and we executed them, so I feel like we got better."

Sophomore Landon Cox finished with 15 points, 4 rebounds and 3 assists; Lariscy had 12 points, 4 assists and 2 steals.

Meanwhile, Brey had 12 points, 3 rebounds and a block in just 16 minutes of action. Sophomore Landon Kight added 10 points and a game-high 5 assists to go with 3 boards and 3 steals.

Sophomore Daniel Snow rounded out the Union County scoring with 2 points plus a game-high 9 rebounds and 2 blocks.

Collin Crowder added 19 points for Towns County and Aidan Berrong chipped in 14.

Union County returned to action on Monday when they faced White County in a neutral site game at North Hall. The Panthers' football season ended on Friday but how much action the returning players will see has yet to be determined.

"You will see them for sure," Garrett said. "We'll get them in there and there to try and get their legs back a little bit. We practiced (on Sunday) and went over some things so you'll see them (on both nights)."

The Warriors are currently 2-2 with a blowout loss to South Forsyth and a close loss to Tallulah Falls. The wins came vs Habersham Central and Lumpkin County.

On Tuesday, the Panthers will take on North Hall at White County with the guys game scheduled to tip first at 4:30 p.m. with the girls game to follow.

The Trojans were also recently eliminated from the football postseason but are sporting a 2-1 record with wins over Chestatee and Jackson County to go with a one-sided loss to Habersham Central.