

Sports

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Allison's record-tying performance enough to hold off furious Towns rally

Pierson Allison hits 9 treys as Towns County overcomes 11-point deficit in final two minutes

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@ngame.com

Pierson Allison tied a school record with nine 3-point field goals as Union County (1-1) withstood a late Towns County surge via Sawyer Drake's game-winning free throw with 1.7 seconds left, giving Union a 63-62 victory.

"Anytime Sawyer (Drake) has the ball in his hands with Pierson (Allison) in the corner, that's about as good as you can draw it up," Union County Head Coach Casey Jones said after the win. "With the way Sawyer can get to the rim and the way Pierson can shoot it, if they want to help on Sawyer we'll kick it to the corner."

Meanwhile, Drake talked about what it's like playing with a shooter that's capable of going off at any moment.

"When Pierson is hitting threes like that it makes the game a whole lot easier, both offensively and defensively," he said. "He's a beast and we'll keep feeding him."

After the game, Allison was asked at what point he realized that he was in the zone and something special was in store.

"The first half was a little rough but I felt better in the second half," he said. "I was able to fix things at halftime and in the second half I was feeling good."

Allison finished with 29 points on 9-of-16 shooting from 3-point land as the Panthers appeared to have things wrapped up, leading 59-48 with under 2 minutes to play.

With 1:48 remaining, Union was well on its way to victory until a bucket by Indian senior Will Travis sparked a 12-1 run that evened the score at 60-60 with 35 seconds remaining.

Towns County was able to erase the 11-point deficit in 73 seconds thanks in large part to Union County's struggles at the charity stripe.

Down the stretch, the Panthers shot 2-for-9 at the line with one of the makes coming after the Indians were whistled for a lane violation on a Sawyer Brey miss -- the junior was awarded another attempt, which he made.

With Union still holding a comfortable 59-50 advantage with under 1:20 to play, Towns County sophomore Kolby Moss did his dad-level best to steal the win. With 1:15 remaining, Moss nailed a trey and the Panthers missed the front-end of a 1-and-1, allowing Brett Denton to knock down a mid-range jumper, pulling the Indians within four at the 1-minute mark.

Brey sank 1-of-2 thanks to a lane violation and Union County was up 60-55 with :54 left in the game.

Moss responded with a 22-footer from the wing to slice the Panther lead to 60-58 before quickly fouling and sending a struggling free throw-shooting team to the line. Despite sinking nine treys, Allison misfired on both free throws with 42 seconds to play, leaving the door wide open for Moss and the Indians.

On the ensuing possession, Moss drove into the lane and while his runner in the paint bounced off the iron, he drew the foul and sank both free throws to even the score at 60-60 with 35 seconds left -- the game's first tie since 0-0.

With Towns County applying full-court pressure, Union's Britt Waller got behind the defense and Allison, from the Towns County free throw line, hit



L-R: Junior Pierson Allison sizes up a Towns County defender before nailing a 25-footer to beat the third quarter buzzer. Junior Sawyer Drake (14) draws a foul with 1.7 seconds remaining while driving to the basket on Union County's final possession of the game. Photo/Todd Forrest

the streaking big man in-stride for an open lay-up at the other end.

Back on top by two, the Panthers knew Moss would be the go-to guy and they were prepared as Waller cut off his dribble-drive and appeared to cleanly disrupt the 12-foot jumper of the much-smaller Moss. Unfortunately, Waller was tagged with the foul.

Once again, Moss calmly sank both attempts to knot things back up at 62-62 with 16 seconds to play.

Despite having a timeout in his back pocket, Coach Jones decided to let his team play out the final moments and it paid off.

"If you call the timeout you have to get the ball in, then you have to get (the offense) set up but Sawyer got the inbounds pass right away and they already knew what we wanted to do," Jones said.

Drake brought the ball up the court as Allison went to the right corner to spread the defense. After holding the ball until the 5-second mark, Drake went on the attack, driving to the basket where he was hacked across the arms, sending him to the charity stripe with 1.7 seconds on the clock.

"I was going to take it off the dribble and if the back (defender) came over, I was going to dish it to Pierson for the three," Drake said following the game. "I was going to go a little earlier but I heard Coach Jones yelling at me to wait a little longer so (Towns) would have less time."

"We know that nobody can guard Sawyer, but if they decide to help, I'm in the corner," Allison said, returning the praise to his teammate.

Drake's first free throw attempt found the net after bouncing around on the rim for what seemed like an eternity. He would miss the second but with Towns County out of timeouts, it worked out since all they could get off was a desperation heave from 75-feet after coming down with the rebound.

According to Coach Jones, he didn't tell Drake to miss the second free throw on purpose, although he says he probably should have.

"During a timeout with about three minutes left, I told the guys to be patient but I feel we weren't very patient and we missed too many free throws down the stretch," Coach Jones said. "But we were able to find a way to win and that's always

good."

Drake finished the game with 14 points, 9 rebounds, 5 assists and 3 steals -- all but points were team highs.

As for Allison, he finished with 4 rebounds, 2 assists and a steal to go with his career-high 29 points on 10-of-20 shooting. His nine treys ties a school record that has been accomplished three teams previously - most recently by Michael Ross, who did it twice during the 2006-07 season.

The first player to hit nine in a game was Blake Williams during the 2003-04 season.

Early on vs Towns, Allison gave a glimpse of things to come when he pulled up from well-beyond the arc and sank a triple to open the scoring.

"At that point in the game, that shot was adrenaline more than it was confidence," Allison said.

During the first quarter, Drake got in on the 3-point barrage, converting a 4-point play after he was fouled behind the arc. Already leading 8-2, Drake's three and free throw spotted Union a 12-2 advantage.

Leading 14-4 at the 1:25 mark of the first, the Panthers would give up six unanswered to close the period as Towns pulled

within 14-10 after one.

A Drake free throw, a Brey deuce and an Allison trey opened up a 20-11 advantage with 5:08 left in the half.

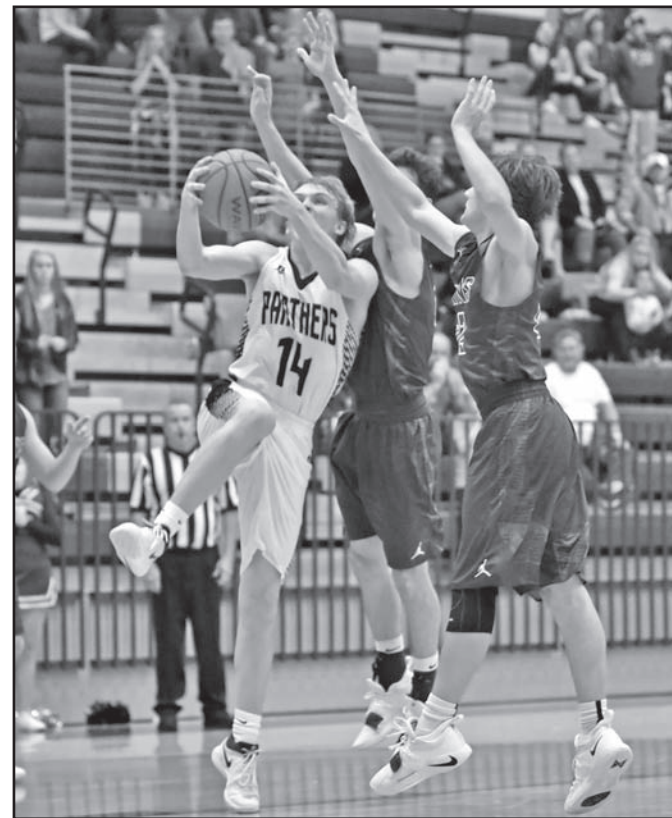
Once again, the Indians would storm back with a 7-0 run to pull within two before Union responded with a 7-0 surge of its own, consisting of an Allison trey and two put backs by Drake.

Towns County refused to go away as they scored 5-straight over the final 1:50 for a 27-23 score at the break.

"I didn't think we very efficient on offense, especially during the first half," Jones said. "I think we relied a little too much on the three, although I always tell the guys they are free to shoot it. I liked the defensive effort in the first half but not the offensive efficiency."

Two Allison treys and buckets by Brey and Drake stretched the Panther lead to 37-29. Free throws by Jared Nelson and a Drake lay-in kept Union up by eight until another trey by Allison gave the Panthers their largest lead of the night at 44-33.

Two more Allison 3-pointers, including a 25-footer at the third quarter horn, kept Union on top by double-digits, 54-44 entering the fourth.



"I've had shooting streaks before but none that lasted the whole game," Allison said during his postgame interview. "I've hit four-straight in a quarter but never continuously like tonight. But it's just a lot of hard work and time spent in the gym paying off."

After an Indian basket cut the margin to eight, Allison drilled his ninth and final three for a 57-46 Panther advantage. They would maintain an 11-point advantage until Travis' bucket pulled Towns within nine at the 1:48 mark.

Brey turned in a solid performance with 9 points, 6 boards, 4 assists and 2 steals. Nelson had 3 points to go with 2 rebounds and 2 assists; Waller had 2 points, 7 boards and a team-high 3 blocked shots.

Kanon Hemphill scored 2 points with 3 rebounds; fellow senior Coleson Daniel had 2 points, an assist and one steal. Junior Cayden Rich added 2 points and a rebound.

Sophomore Colton Day had 2 rebounds with an assist and a steal. Senior Christian Robertson pulled down one rebound.

As a team, Union County shot better from beyond 19-feet than it did from anywhere else

on the floor, finishing 10-of-24 (42-percent) from 3-point range, 23-for-65 (35-percent) overall and 7-for-18 (39-percent) at the foul line.

The Panthers would turn it over 17 times -- mostly on traveling violations -- while dishing out 16 assists and recording 11 steals. Towns would cough up the ball 16 times while handing out 14 assists and picking up nine steals.

The Indians shot 21-for-49 from the floor (43-percent), 5-for-16 (31-percent) from distance and 15-for-20 (75-percent) at the stripe.

Towns County was without the services of starting forward Trent Bradshaw, who was out of town for the week.

Looking ahead - With the Black Knight football team making a deep playoff run, Tuesday's contest with Robbinsville, NC has been postponed to a later date. As a result, Union County's only contest this week is Friday at Fannin County. The girls tip-off at 7 p.m.

The Rebels are currently 1-1 with a 59-54 win over Pickens County -- whose football team was eliminated the night before -- and a 42-40 loss to rival Gilmer.



Union County players breathe a sigh of relief after surviving a late haymaker from Towns County that nearly floored the Panthers, who led by double-digits with under two minutes remaining. Union has now won 41 of the last 44 games vs Towns. Photo/Todd Forrest