

# Sports

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## Basketball: Lady Panthers enter Thanksgiving break at 3-0

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Union County finished the week of Thanksgiving with an undefeated record following Monday's neutral site win over West Hall and a Tuesday night victory at White County.

With three games on the slate this week, the Lady Panthers can move to 6-0 - surpassing last year's five-game streak to start the season.

On Tuesday, Union will host Tallulah Falls before welcoming Towns County for a Friday night rematch. The week will wrap up Saturday with another rivalry showdown at Fannin County.

**Lady Panthers 56, White County 51** - Sophomore Ava Hunter recorded a game-high 30 points and senior Kait McCarter scored the contest's final nine points, helping the Lady Panthers (3-0) erase a 51-47 deficit in the final minute to escape Cleveland with a 56-51 victory.

After battling foul trouble all night, McCarter was held scoreless for the game's first 31 minutes, but the senior forward would deliver when it mattered most.

"I've said so many times that the season will depend upon our senior leadership, and Kait proved that tonight," Union coach Crystal Beach said after the win. "She stepped up for us and she had ice water running through her veins. She was focused, locked in and did exactly what you would expect a senior leader to do."

Trailing 51-47 with under a minute to play, Union County turned a Lady Warrior miss from the foul line into a McCarter layup on the other end.

With 40 seconds left and still down by two, the Lady Panthers went back to McCarter in the post for the game-tying basket. She would put Union ahead 17 seconds later when she hit 2-for-2 at the line for a 53-51 advantage.

White County missed a go-ahead 3-point shot on the other end and McCarter was fouled to stop the clock with 11 seconds left. McCarter would calmly step to the line and sink both shots to open up a 55-51 lead. With the outcome all but decided, McCarter went back to the line with 7 seconds to play and hit 1-of-2 to seal the 56-51



Kait McCarter (left) scored the final 9 points after Ava Hunter (right) poured in a game-high 30 to lead Union past White. Photos/Todd Forrest

victory. "It was a great feeling to help us get the win," McCarter said following the game. "I'm really proud of all these girls that carried me while I was in foul trouble. A lot of young girls stepped up and proved that we can count on them."

Prior to McCarter's nine-point outburst in the final minute, Hunter had accounted for 30 of her team's 47 points - and they needed every single one of them.

With McCarter and point guard Brooke Dockrey in foul trouble the entire game and senior Andelin Hill struggling to find her shooting stroke, Hunter was responsible for 10 of Union's 14 field goals through three quarters.

"We (made some adjustments) at halftime and (Andelin Hill) came back out and played great defense for us," Coach Beach said. "I know Brooke fouled out but she kept her composure. This place is a tough playing environment so this win feels good."

White County opened up its largest lead of the night at 42-35 to end the third, but they were unable to put the Lady Panthers away thanks to a subpar 7-for-17 performance at the charity stripe.

Dockrey returned to the floor with four fouls and provided a spark for her squad with five quick points before fouling out just shy of the midway point of the fourth and her team down 46-45.

After the Lady Warriors missed the front-end of a 1-and-1 attempt, Hunter was fouled down low and sank 2-of-2 at the line to give Union its first lead since the opening frame. Following a 79-second scoring drought by both squads, White County used a three to regain the lead at 49-47 with 2:36 remaining. Seconds later, the Lady Warriors' full-court pressure defense forced Union County into a turnover that resulted in an easy layup on the other end for a 51-47 score.

Meanwhile, Hunter scored six of the Lady Panthers' first nine points as they never trailed



until the 2:40 mark of the opening frame. With Dockrey and McCarter both on the bench in foul trouble, White County raced ahead 16-11 after one.

Hunter scored her team's first five points of the second quarter to keep it close at 18-16. Freshman Ellie Cook sank a pair at the line to keep the margin at two before the Lady Warriors were able to stretch its lead to 30-25 at the break.

Union scored the first six points of the third with Hunter accounting for five and freshman Corinne Hill splitting a pair at the stripe. After failing to score for the first 5-plus minutes of the second half, White finally got on the board at the 2:52 mark to regain the lead at 32-31. Moments later, Union answered with a Hunter put-back for a 33-32 advantage before the Lady Warriors closed the third with a 10-2 run to build its largest lead at 42-35.

Dockrey finished with 8 points, Cook added four, Rebekah Chambers and Kyla Locklear scored 2 points apiece while Locklear recorded several

blocked shots on the defensive end.

Corinne Hill finished with a point to round out the Union County scoring. The Lady Panthers would finish 10-for-19 at the foul line.

Juniors Dasha Cannon and Maddie Futch led the Lady Warriors with 21 and 11 points, respectively.

**Notes:** With 30 points at White County, Hunter has surpassed 400 for her career. She now stands at 411 points through 28 career games. If she averages 13 a night over the next seven games, Hunter will reach 500 points before Christmas.

**Lady Panthers 66, West Hall 42** - The win at White came on the heels of a 66-42 victory over West Hall that saw Union outscore the Lady Spartans 19-6 in the first quarter and 20-8 in the third.

However, West Hall would make a game of it in the second quarter as they outscored the Lady Panthers 19-8 to pull within 27-25 at the break.

Union County would ex-

tend its lead to 47-33 coming out of the half as six different Lady Panthers scored in the third frame. Sophomore Riley Allison would knock down a pair of treys while Dockrey and Andelin Hill chipped in four points apiece in the quarter.

With four fouls, Hunter returned to score five in the fourth to finish with 13 points. McCarter and Dockrey also added 5 points apiece in the final frame to finish with 10 and nine, respectively.

Union County's leading scorer would be freshman Ellie Cook, who turned in a career-high 14 points after scoring 12 at Towns last week in her first high school game.

Andelin Hill and Allison each scored eight while Chambers and Ansley Collins added two each.

Senior Kinsey Wilson scored a game-high 15 points to lead the Lady Spartans. Sophomore guard Riley Harkin added nine.

**Up next:** Union County and Tallulah Falls (3-2) will get underway Tuesday at 6 p.m. with the guys to follow.

With no common opponents, the closest comparison came on Nov. 18 when Tallulah lost 65-49 to Highlands, NC. One week later, that same Highlands squad edged Towns County, 49-43.

Speaking of the Lady Indians, they will visit Blairsville on Friday night for a 7 p.m. girls' tip-off time.

After starting 2-0 with wins over Nantahala, NC and Hiwassee Dam, NC, Towns has dropped back-to-back decisions to Union and Highlands.

On Saturday, the Lady Panthers pay a visit to Fannin County, who currently sits at 4-0. That could change, however, as the Lady Rebels visit No. 4 Dawson County on Tuesday and North Hall on Friday.

Union and Fannin have no common opponents but the Lady Rebels own a 71-49 victory over Hiwassee Dam. Towns County also owns a 52-39 win over Hiwassee Dam.

Region 8-AA play will begin next week when Union County hosts Elbert County on Friday Dec. 13 for Teacher Appreciation Night. A day later, the Lady Panthers head out on the road when they travel to Monticello for a 2 p.m. start on Saturday, Dec. 14.



Ellie Cook (23) and Andelin Hill help Brooke Dockrey to her feet so she can complete the old fashioned 3-point play at the free throw line during the second half at White County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Kyla Locklear's shot blocking provided a huge spark during the win at White. Photo/Todd Forrest