

Sports

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Union scores early and often in much anticipated clash with Rebels

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The atmosphere was electrified at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Friday night when the rival Fannin County Rebels and their following, known as "Rebel Nation" rolled into town.

For just the second time since 2001, Union and Fannin met with both squads sporting a winning record. Fresh off a pair of one-sided victories over Murray County and Armuchee, the Rebels under the tutelage of first-year Head Coach and former Gainesville High School Defensive Coordinator Jim Pavao, brought a 2-1 record to Blairsville.

Awaiting the confident Rebels were the unbeaten Panthers, sitting at 4-0 for the first time since 2008. While Fannin was looking for its first signature win under Coach Pavao, Union sought revenge from last season's debacle at Fannin where the defense was torched in a 43-35 loss.

Unlike last year, the Panthers refused to allow Fannin to hang around and went for the jugular early. By the time the first quarter buzzer sounded, Union was in complete control. A 28-0 lead after one quarter sucked the life out of the visitors and silenced their followers. From there, the Panthers' offense put it into cruise control while the defense continued to play lights out. Fannin was unable to put up any points until the final minutes of the game when a Rebel touchdown and two-point conversion made it a 35-8 final.

Junior quarterback Joseph Mancuso connected on four touchdown passes in the opening 12 minutes - setting a school record for touchdowns thrown in a quarter. He finished with 257 yards and five touchdowns through the air.

As for the Panther defense that was embarrassed in Blue Ridge a year ago, they answered the call and stuffed the Rebels on consecutive fourth-and-short situations on Fannin's first two drives of the game.

Right before halftime, the defense flexed its muscle once again when the Rebels were denied points following a first-and-goal at the 5-yard line.

"I think our kids just came out and played their butts off," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "It wasn't anything that we the coaches did, our kids just wanted it more."

Union's opening possession went 75 yards in 10 plays with a 26-yard scoring strike from Mancuso to junior receiver Sam Gilbert capping off the drive.

During the drive, senior receiver Robert Prunier caught two passes, senior running back



Senior Robert Prunier holds the "King of the Mountain" jug high after the win over Fannin. Union County will keep the jug until Fannin's football team is able to defeat the Panthers. In a friendly wager earlier in the week, the losing sides' principal must wear the winning teams' colors at school all week. The jug and the bet between principals is a new tradition that began this year. Photo/Todd Forrest

Chase Barnett carried once for 8 yards and caught a 9-yard pass, and sophomore Bo Lynch had runs of 4 yards and 6 yards. The Panthers were also aided by an offside flag against Fannin on a third-and-two.

The Rebels' opening drive needed some assistance as well. Facing a third-and-10 from its own 20, Fannin drew a pass interference flag against the Panthers - giving the Rebels a fresh set of downs.

The drive would eventually stall at the Union 44-yard line when sophomore linebacker Chris Thompson denied Fannin on a fourth-and-two.

From its own 44, Union needed just two plays to make it a 14-0 game.

Mancuso hit senior receiver Jacob Rogers on a quick screen that went for 5 yards. On second down, Mancuso found a streaking Prunier down the left hash for a 51-yard score.

When the Rebels' offense took over for the second time, they quickly connected on a 41-yard pass play. With a first down at the Union 39-yard line, the Panther defense responded again.

On fourth-and-one from the 30, Union smothered the Rebels for no gain, handing it back to their red hot offense with 4:19 left in the first.

A facemask against Fannin was followed by a Union County false start. On first-and-15, Mancuso hit Gilbert for 14 yards. He then dumped it off to Barnett who rumbled 43 yards. On first-and-goal, Mancuso recorded the hat trick with a 5-yard toss to Rogers for six more points.

Leading 21-0, the Panthers forced Fannin's offense into a three-and-out and a punt. Starting at its own 45 with 26 seconds left in the first, Mancuso and the offense went back to work.

On first down Mancuso used his legs for 20 yards while drawing a personal foul on Fannin. Another false start moved Union backwards and three straight incompletions followed. On fourth-and-15, Mancuso went back to Rogers over the middle for a 24-yard scoring strike on the final play of the quarter.

Junior Knox Kiernan connected on the extra point to put Fannin into a 28-point hole before some fans made it to their seats.

The second quarter went by quietly with each offense exchanging punts to open the period.

With 8:59 to play before the half, junior safety Andrew Brown picked off a Rebel pass and returned it 30 yards. Starting in Fannin territory, the offense turned it over on downs and Fannin took over at their own 22-yard line with 6:39 left in the half.

The Rebels marched their way deep into Union territory with the help of another pass interference call against the Panthers. On third-and-nine from the 14, Fannin was able to move the chains with a 9-yard completion, setting up first-and-goal at the Union 5-yard line.

On first down the Rebels got a yard but on second down, junior corner back Josh Daniel blew up the play for a 2-yard loss. On third-and-goal, sophomore Zach Stone broke up a pass attempt to

bring up fourth down. On Fannin's last attempt to reach the endzone before the half, Prunier picked off an under thrown jump ball in the front of the endzone.

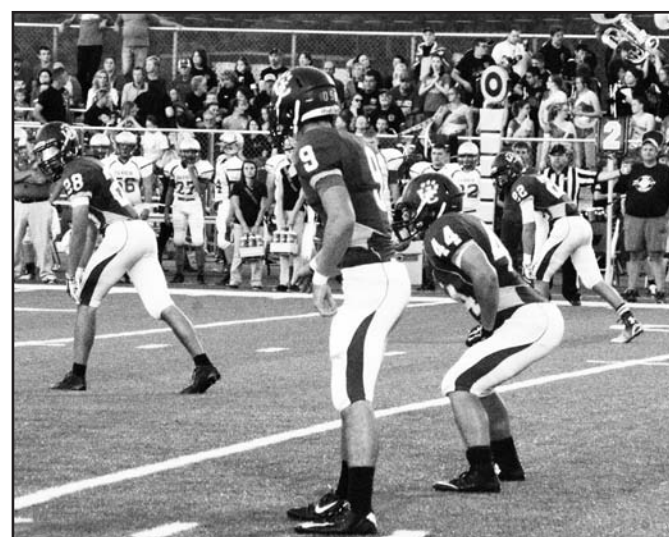
"Our defense did a great job stopping them twice on fourth down and then we held on the goal line right before halftime," Coach Allison said. "We got hit with a couple of pass interference calls and (Fannin) completed one long pass on a play we hadn't seen from them. So overall, I was proud of the way we played defensively."

With 1:50 left before halftime, Lynch carried for 10 yards but another Union false start and a sack forced the Panthers' coaching staff to go conservative and take their 28-point advantage to the locker rooms.

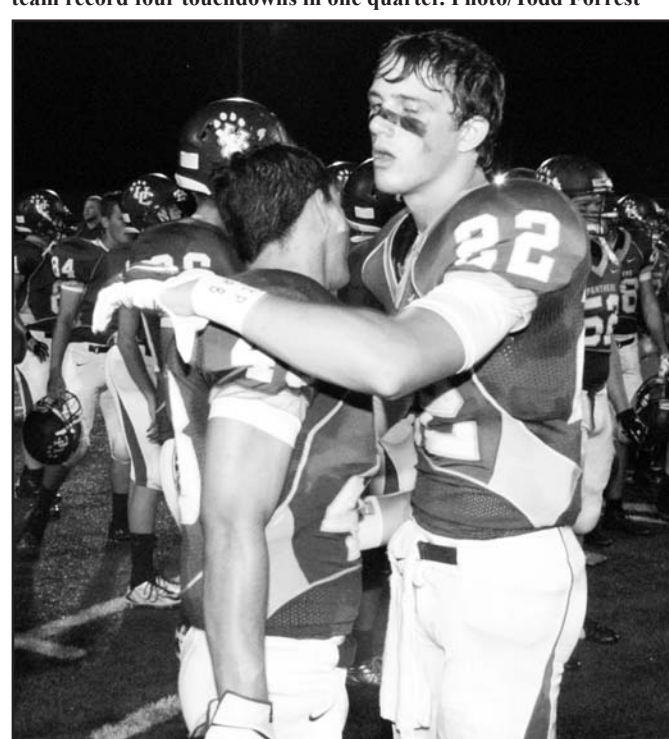
Early in the third, neither offense could sustain a drive and Union wouldn't score until its third drive of the quarter.

Starting at the 32, the Panthers put together a 12-play scoring drive. A 7-yard reception by Gilbert and a 14-yard carry by Mancuso moved Union into Fannin territory. A pass to Prunier went for 16 yards, Barnett ran for 8 yards, then facing another fourth down, Mancuso used his wheels for 8 yards and a first down. Rogers hauled in a 7-yard grab, Lynch rushed for three more yards before Mancuso dropped a 5-yard touchdown pass into the hands of Rogers in the back corner of the endzone.

With a 35-0 lead in the final minutes of the third, the Panthers' defenses forced the Rebels into another punting situation. At the



The Union offense played turnover-free for the third straight game and team record 28 points in the first quarter with Mancuso throwing a team record four touchdowns in one quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest



After catching three touchdown passes, senior Jacob Rogers can breathe a sigh of relief after the game knowing that he beat Fannin three times in four years. Photo/Todd Forrest

2:23 mark of the quarter, Union took over on the Fannin 35.

A first down completion to senior Brett Dietz went for 12 yards and Mancuso ran for four more. On fourth down, Kiernan came on to attempt his first field goal of the year. From 36 yards away, the kick had plenty of distance but caught the left upright and deflected backwards. Despite the miss, Kiernan was extremely effective all night long. The junior kicker went 6-for-6 on extra points and sent all six of his kickoffs across the goal line for touchdowns.

With a running clock in the fourth, the Rebels were able to find the endzone with just over two minutes left on a 8-yard touchdown pass. The two-point conversion was successful, mak-

ing it 35-8.

The Panthers' defense forced the Fannin offense to become one dimensional as they limited the Rebels to just 18 rushing yards. Fannin racked up 218 yards on 43 attempts through the air with 11 first downs.

Meanwhile, Union put up 424 yards, 257 passing and 167 rushing on Coach Pavao's highly touted 3-4 defense that has been credited for much of Gainesville's recent success - including the 2012 State Championship.

Mancuso finished 17-of-30 passing with 257 yards, 5 scores, and no picks. He also rushed for a game high 71 yards on 8 attempts while being named the Offensive Player of the Game.

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Union thumps Lumpkin on Senior Night; riding four game win streak

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The Lady Panthers scored a pair of lopsided victories over Lumpkin County and Pickens County last week for wins number 20 and 21.

Twenty win seasons have become the norm for Union County softball, and while it's a nice accomplishment, the Lady Panthers have learned the hard way that the only wins that matter come in October. Lately, Union has struggled to find a signature postseason victory and there isn't anyone that understands the struggles anymore than this year's seniors.

On Monday, four Union County seniors were honored for the blood, sweat, and tears that they have faithfully shed for the Lady Panthers softball program and Union County High School.

Before the tears could flow during the Senior Night festivities, they had to dispose of Lumpkin County (8-13), which required no blood and very little sweat. The Lady Panthers scored two in the first and four in the second to take a commanding 6-0 lead. They tacked



Union County seniors with Coach Lauren Dyer (far left) and Head Coach Jessica Stewart following the Senior Night festivities last Monday.

on one in the fifth and three in the sixth to make it 10-0 and bring the 'mercy rule' into effect.

Laken Chambers knocked in 7 runs, four coming on a second inning grand slam to highlight a 3-for-4 performance at the plate, all while recording her 15th win from the circle. The Union County sophomore fired a two-hitter in six innings of work, striking out five

and walking one. The slam was her fourth homer of the season, breaking a 16-game homer drought.

Sophomore Lydia Arrowood, senior Crystal Busbee both walked and junior Karley Nix reached on a bunt single to load the bases for Chambers.

Senior Kelsey Nix gave the home crowd a Senior Night treat when Union's first baseman went

yard in the fifth inning for her first big fly of the year.

Courtney Busbee, another member of the Class of 2015, singled in two runs in the first inning to start the night off right.

Arrowood scored twice, walked, and led off the sixth inning by lining a single into left field. Crystal Busbee singled to center, and Karley Nix reached on an error

to load the bases for Chambers. This time the Lady Indians kept Chambers in the ball park but she still inflicted serious damage on the visitors by ripping a 2-1 pitch into left, clearing the bases, and ending the game early with a 10-run lead.

The first two hitters in Union's lineup kept the heart of the order well fed. Crystal Busbee went 2-for-3 with 2 runs and a walk and Karley Nix finished 1-for-2 with 3 runs.

Junior Maddie Garrett went 2-for-3 and Braden Poteete scored a run.

Wednesday the Lady Panthers traveled to Pickens County (9-14) and dished out a 14-1 beatdown to the Lady Dragons.

A seven-run second proved to be the difference maker as Union scored in every inning until the game was called after the fourth.

Courtney Busbee drove in 4 runs and doubled during a 2-for-3 performance. Chambers went 2-for-2 while doubling and knocking in 3 runs. She also recorded her 16th win of the season to match April Harper's 2006 win total - the third highest mark in team history for wins in a season. In two innings, Chambers allowed an unearned run and a hit while striking out three.

Crystal Busbee and Karley

Nix both finished 2-for-2 with 2 runs and a RBI, Kelsey Nix finished 1-for-3 with an RBI, and Kendra Tanner went 1-for-3 and scored once.

The Lady Panthers also received significant contributions from their freshman. Jillian Lawn replaced Chambers in the circle and surrendered 2 hits and no runs in two innings and went 1-for-1 with an RBI at the plate. Braden Poteete scored twice, Anna Owenby drove in a run, and Logan Seabolt scored once.

Channa Carroll scored and drove in one, Arrowood, King, and Garrett also scored.

Union County (21-4, 6-2) will wrap up the regular season this week with road games on Tuesday and Thursday. On Tuesday, Region action concludes with a double-header at Washington Wilkes (6-16, 2-6) at 5:30 p.m. and the season finale will be Thursday at White County (5-14) at 5:55 p.m.

A sweep at Wilkes will clinch second in 8-AA and guarantees Union a trip to State and home field in next month's Region semi-finals.

Union JV 4, Lumpkin 0

Freshman pitchers Lawn and Seabolt fired a five-inning shutout over the Lady Indians in last week's JV contest.

Seabolt was 2-for-3 at the plate with a double, a run, and a stolen base. From the circle she fanned two in one hitless inning. Lawn started and went 3 1/3 innings, allowing one hit, one walk, while punching out two. With the bat she went 1-for-3 with a run.

Owenby drove in a run and scored. Carroll also drove in a run for the Lady Panthers.

Freshman Maci Everett walked and scored, sophomore Miranda Miller singled, freshman Megan Lockaby walked, and Poteete stole a base.

The Union JV will face White County on Thursday at 4:30 p.m. On Saturday they will participate in a JV tournament beginning at 9 a.m. at Fannin County.



Senior infielder Crystal Busbee



Senior catcher Courtney Busbee



Senior infielder Halle King



Senior infielder Kelsey Nix