

Lady Panthers fall to fourth at BOTS despite opening round victory

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HIAWASSEE - Following a thrilling overtime victory on day one, the Union County Lady Panthers (8-4, 2-1) dropped consecutive heartbreakers to close out the 25th Annual Battle of the States Christmas Tournament.

Faced with the daunting challenge of navigating a bracket featuring the last three BOTS tournament champions, Union County survived the opener against Hokes Bluff, AL -- the 2015 and 2016 champions -- but needed an overtime session to escape with the 54-51 victory.

The second day saw the Lady Panthers and Murphy, NC face off for the second time in eight days with this meeting going down to the wire, unlike the blowout loss the Lady Bulldogs handed Union County back on Dec. 20.

The Lady Panthers trailed most of the game -- by as many as nine points in the first half and five in the second -- but stormed ahead late behind a red-hot 60-percent shooting performance on the night. It wouldn't be enough, however, as Murphy got off a putback at the buzzer to escape with the 56-55 victory.

On the heels of back-to-back barnburners against two of the top three teams in the tournament, Union County dropped into the consolation game where they met up with Towns County for the third time this season. With the Lady Panthers ripe for an upset, the well-rested Lady Indians -- whose starters weren't needed down the stretch of a 25-point win over Copper Basin, TN and a 39-point loss to Lumpkin County -- took advantage of an uninspired Union County squad and scored their first victory in 17 tries over their arch-rival.

"That's what happens when you don't show up to play," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said afterward. "We're a team that can be good but we're also a team that can be bad. Tonight we were bad."

As the calendar flips to 2019, the Lady Panthers can regroup and focus on Region 8-AA with a pair of measuring-stick games this weekend. On Friday, Union visits region frontrunner Rabun County (10-1, 3-0) where the Lady Panthers get the opportunity to see where they stack up against one of the top programs in Class AA.

The following day, Union hosts Putnam County (10-3, 3-0) in a Saturday showdown against the same Lady War Eagles squad that eliminated the Lady Panthers during the 2016 Class AA Sweet 16. The only current Union County player to see action in that second-round playoff game at Putnam County is senior Adeline Dockrey, who was a freshman back in 2015-16.

Both Rabun and Putnam are undefeated in region play but with one region loss already on his ledger, a weekend split isn't good enough for Coach Garrett.

"With the loss to Monticello we really want both of these," he said.

Lady Panthers 54, Hokes Bluff, AL 51 (OT) -- Three players scored in double-figures for Union County as they held the Lady Eagles without a field goal during the extra session.

Adeline Dockrey finished the game with only 2 points but no shots were bigger than the two free throws she sank on a 1-and-1 attempt with 19 seconds remaining in overtime.

The senior forward had only taken two shots up until that point, but over the final 20 seconds of overtime, she played like a McDonald's All-American. After hitting nothing but net on her second free throw, Adeline Dockrey blanketed the Lady Eagles' leading scorer Kristen Shields, who finished with 24 points. She would need 27 to force a second overtime.

Shields took possession at the top-of-the-key with nine seconds left and her team trailing 54-51 but was unable to create an opening off the dribble and with a pump fake so she gave up the basketball. Almost immediately the ball ended up back in Shields' hands at the top of the circle, and with time running out, Adeline Dockrey stood tall and forced an airball from the 22-feet.

"We talked about urgency [before the game] and I think we showed a sense of urgency in overtime and in the fourth quarter after Brooke [Dockrey] fouled out," Union County coach Corey Garrett said after the win. "After that, everyone just kind of stepped up their intensity, their energy and showed a sense of urgency and I think that's what got us the win."

The 4-minute overtime period got underway with the game all-square at 49-49 but there would be no scoring for almost



Top: Andelin Hill was named All-Tournament. Bottom: Anselly Collins provided a spark off the bench for Union. Photos/Todd Forrest

two minutes. McCarter posted up and scored in the paint at the 2:13 mark for a 51-49 advantage. At the 1-minute mark, Hokes Bluff drew a foul and hit 1-of-2 at the line.

Ava Hunter stretched the lead back to a deuce when she split a pair with 46 seconds remaining; the Lady Eagles followed suit 20 seconds later when they went 1-for-2 at the foul line.

Hunter would lead Union County with 17 points. She also pulled down eight boards and blocked a shot. Brooke Dockrey had 14 points, four assists and two steals before fouling out with 3:01 left in regulation. As for McCarter, the junior grabbed a season-high 14 rebounds while scoring 10 points and collecting a pair of steals.

Despite spending more time on the perimeter this season after adding the 3-point shot to her repertoire, the second half saw Coach Garrett put McCarter on the block, allowing the two-time All-Region 7-AAA selection to go to work in the post.

"Usually Ava [Hunter] draws the biggest defender so we felt like we had a mismatch with [McCarter down low], especially when they tried to use [a man-to-man defense] on us. Whenever they'd go zone [defense], we'd put our two biggest girls on the block and our best shooter in the corner and just see if they can stop it."

Andelin Hill, Union County's All-Tournament Team selection, had an off-night shooting the ball, hitting only 3-of-9 for 9 points but she would finish with three assists.

Adeline Dockrey and freshman Ripley Allison each scored 2 points apiece as Allison filled in for Dockrey when she went to the bench with five fouls. Forced to steer the Lady Panther offense through constant full-court pressure, Allison didn't flinch when she took over the point guard duties for the disqualified Brooke Dockrey during crunch time.

"We know [Ripley Allison] can do it and she didn't have a choice," Coach Garrett said. "She had to grow up today and I think she did a good job."

In the early going, Union County jumped out to a 7-2 lead but Hokes Bluff pulled within a bucket at 10-8 after one. The Lady Panthers opened the second with a 7-2 spurt as Hill, Brooke Dockrey, and Allison all helped their team take a 17-10 advantage. After six-straight from the Lady Eagles, an and-one from Hunter made it 20-16 at the midway point of the period.

That would be the final Union County points of the half as Hokes Bluff took a 21-20 lead into the intermission.

"It was a game of runs but our styles were very different," Coach Garrett said. "[Hokes Bluff] had five guards on the floor and we pretty much use four post players so we had a tough time finding a defense that would work. Sometimes our style would work for us and sometimes their style would work for them."

Fourteen of Union's 20 first half points belonged to Hunter (eight) and Hill (six) but Brooke Dockrey would quickly heat up in the third quarter.

Leading 23-21, Dockrey scored in the paint for the first of her 12 second half points. Unfortunately, Hokes Bluff responded with a 9-0 run for a 30-25 lead at the 4:48 mark of the quarter.

Another 3-point play by

Hunter and a putback by McCarter kept the Lady Panthers close at 33-30 before Hunter picked up her third foul with 2:29 to play in the third.

With its leading scorer on the bench, Union turned to Brooke Dockrey, who scored her team's final six points of the quarter, including a coast-to-coast buzzer-beating layup as time expired, to knot things up at 36-36.

Brooke Dockrey used a putback on the first possession of the fourth quarter to put the Lady Panthers on top before a trey from Hill made it 41-36.

A McCarter and-one and a Hunter bucket gave Union its largest lead of the second half at 46-40 with 4:47 remaining. Following a Lady Eagle triple, Brooke Dockrey scored on a dribble drive but Hokes Bluff responded with its second straight three to pull within 48-46 at the 2:50 mark.

Following a 90-second scoring drought by both squads, the Lady Eagles tied it up with two free throws before taking the lead with a 1-for-2 trip at the 35-second mark.

Hunter drew a foul inside with 15 seconds to play and hit 1-of-2 for a 49-49 tie. On the ensuing possession, Hokes Bluff was able to get an open look from the base line but the shot rattled out as the horn sounded.

TEAM STATS: Union County shot 41-percent on 20-for-49 from the floor. They were 2-for-10 (20-percent) from long distance and 12-for-21 (57-percent) at the line. Union out-rebounded Hokes Bluff 32-26 overall and 15-7 on the offensive boards. The Lady Panthers had 18 turnovers while forcing 17.

Hokes Bluff was 14-of-38 (37-percent) from the floor and 5-for-15 (33-percent) from downtown. The Lady Eagles would finish 18-of-24 (75-percent) at the line but connected on 15 of their first 18 attempts before cooling off in the final minute of regulation and in overtime.

Lady Panthers 55, Murphy, NC 56 -- Union County suffered a heartbreaking loss on day two after a McCarter basket gave them a 54-51 lead with a minute remaining. Following a miss by the Lady Bulldogs on the other end, Union was set to punch its ticket to the finals by playing keep away and sinking a few free throws but consecutive turnovers



Top: Kait McCarter with a late, go-ahead bucket vs Hokes Bluff. Bottom: Brooke Dockrey battles for a loose ball vs Hokes Bluff. Photo/Todd Forrest

allowed Murphy to even the score with 31 seconds remaining.

Leading 56-54 with 7 seconds to play following another McCarter bucket, Union County was tagged with a foul -- sending Murphy to the line and McCarter to the pine with five fouls.

The Lady Bulldogs hit the first and missed the second foul shot but came down with the offensive board and called timeout. With 5 seconds left, Murphy's last-second drive to the basket was met by a Lady Panther double-team in the paint, resulting in an off-balance shot attempt that bounced off the side of the iron. However, no one in purple boxed out and the shooter grabbed her own miss and beat the buzzer with a game-winning layup.

Hunter, Hill and McCarter combined for 51 of the team's 56 points but all the Lady Panthers needed was one elusive rebound in the final 7 seconds to seal the deal.

McCarter led Union County with nine boards but fouled out in the final moments after scoring 10 points with two assists.

Hunter scored a team-high 21 points on 7-of-10 shooting with three boards and a block. Hill poured in 20 points while hitting 3-of-6 from long distance and 8-of-13 overall. She would also record a team-best seven assists while pulling down another seven rebounds.

Brooke Dockrey matched Hill with seven dimes to go with 3 points and one rebound. Allison scored 2 points and Adeline Dockrey chipped in two rebounds, three assists and a steal.

Union trailed 7-2 and 16-7 out of the gates but rallied within a point at 16-15 after one. Hill would score 13 in the half and Hunter added 10 more as the Lady Panthers kept pace and went into the locker room trailing 31-30.

Murphy would outscore Union 8-4 to start the third for a 39-34 advantage at the 5-minute mark but a 3-point play from Hunter and a short jumper by Hill tied things up 68 seconds later.

Free throws by Hunter and Brooke Dockrey gave Union the lead at 44-42. A McCarter layup in the final half-minute of the third put her team ahead 46-44 entering the fourth.

The Lady Bulldogs regained control at 51-46 with seven-unanswered to begin the fourth but the Lady Panthers answered

with six-straight for a 52-51 lead at the 4-minute mark.

Both offenses went ice-cold for a spell and neither found the basket until McCarter's deuce at the 1:25 mark that made it 54-51.

TEAM STATS: Union County shot a season-best 60-percent (21-for-35) from the floor and 79-percent (11-for-14) at the line. The Lady Panthers also connected on a very solid 38-percent (3-for-8) from 3-point range.

Following the win over Hokes Bluff the day before, Coach Garrett brought up his team's poor field goal percentage in the previous loss to the Lady Bulldogs and how it would be key the second time around.

"I don't think we're going to shoot 26-percent this time," he said. "I really think we have a shot if we execute and defend. We have to pass the ball, catch the ball and score the ball."

Their undoing would be on the glass. For the first time all season, Union County was owned on the offensive boards as Murphy collected 18 offensive rebounds to Union's three. Overall, the boards were almost even as Union finished with 26 rebounds to Murphy's 27.

The Lady Bulldogs also dominated the turnover battle 16-8 despite hitting just 20-for-58 (34-percent) from the floor. They were much better from downtown, making 7-of-16 (44-percent), and at the line (10-for-14, 71-percent).

Lady Panthers 48, Towns County 52 -- With nothing to lose after dropping the first two meetings by double-digits, the Towns County Lady Indians threw everything they had at their rivals -- as Union had done the night before vs Murphy, NC -- in the BOTS Consolation Game.

"You hate to go into overtime on the first day (with three games in three days) but I'll take the win any way I can get it," Garrett said following the win over Hokes Bluff on day one when asked if his team would have enough left in the tank to win three games.

After jumping out front 12-6 behind six early points from Hunter, Union County struggled the rest of the way against an aggressive Lady Indian defense. At the end of the day, it was a two-quarter stretch that cost Union the game. From at the midway point

of the first quarter through the midway point of the third, Towns outscored Union 24-9 as the Lady Panthers mustered just one field goal over a span of 16 minutes and 20 seconds.

"We just have to make shots," Coach Garrett said following the loss. "As I said before, it comes down to passing, catching and shooting it. We didn't catch it. We didn't shoot it."

The final six points of the first quarter belonged to Towns County and following a back-and-forth second quarter, where most of Union's offense came from the charity stripe, the Lady Indians took a 23-21 lead into the break.

The third quarter opened with a 7-0 Towns County run as they built a 30-21 lead. Union County finally got on the board via a Hill dribble-drive with 3:18 left in the period. Prior to Hill's deuce, the last Lady Panther field goal came with 7:42 to play in the second quarter -- an Allison trey on Union's first possession of the quarter.

The only thing that kept the Lady Panthers close during their 16-minute-plus drought was a Towns County intentional foul late in the second quarter that allowed Union to pull within two at the break.

Still trailing 30-23, freshman Anselly Collins came off the bench to resuscitate her comatose squad.

At the 2:50 mark, Collins nailed a trey from the wing to make it a 4-point game -- her first points of the tournament. Moments later, she answered a Towns bucket with another triple to pull within 32-29 to end the third.

A pair of Lady Indian threes stretched the lead to 38-31 but a Brooke Dockrey fast-break layup and a Hunter and-one quickly cut the margin to 38-36.

With a chance to tie the game, a McCarter free throw was waived off due to a lane violation and Union still trailed 38-37 with 3:50 remaining. A Towns three was answered by a 3-ball from Hill to stay within a point at 41-40.

Trailing 43-40 with 1:54 left, the Lady Panthers were hit with a 5-second violation and Towns sank two free throws for a 45-40 advantage at the 1:25 mark.

Hill hit two from the stripe on the ensuing possession and Towns missed both of their attempts to give Union the ball, trailing 45-42 with 1:13 left. Unfortunately, they wouldn't have the ball long as they turned it over and Towns quickly delivered the knockout blow with a 3-point play at the 1:11 mark.

McCarter kept Union alive with two free throws to get within four at 48-44. Dockrey would hit 1-of-2 to keep the margin at four before fouling out with 29 seconds left and her team down 49-45. With time running out, McCarter sank a three that brought the final score to 52-48.

As for McCarter she would be one of three Lady Panthers to score 9 points along with Hunter and Hill. Brooke Dockrey and Collins added 6 points each, sophomore Kyla Locklear, Allison and Adeline Dockrey chipped 3 points apiece while senior Briana Hemphill pulled down one rebound.

TEAM STATS: Union County shot 33-percent (13-of-39) from the floor, 37-percent (7-for-19) from distance and 75-percent (15-of-20) at the line. For the second straight game, Union was out-rebounded by Towns County cleaning up on the offensive glass 18-6 and 38-30 overall.

The Lady Indians shot just 25-percent from the floor (14-for-55), 28-percent (9-for-32) from downtown and 75-percent (15-of-20) at the charity stripe. Towns also won the turnover battle with 14 giveaways to Union's 19.



Adeline Dockrey (10) forces a miss on the final shot of the game vs Hokes Bluff in the opening round of the BOTS. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman Ava Hunter dealt with double teams the entire tourney but still scored 17 and 21 points in the first two games. Photo/Todd Forrest