

Sports

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No. 7 Panthers tame Colts, outmatched at No. 2 North Cobb Union County can secure No. 2 seed in Region 7-AA this week

By Todd Forrest
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No. 7 Union County (17-4, 8-3) played in front of the home crowd for the first time in over a month last Tuesday, cruising to a 78-58 victory over Coahulla Creek behind Houston Henry's 29 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

During Friday's 74-57 loss at No. 2 North Cobb Christian, the Panthers were the victims of a 16-2 first-half run followed by a 30-16 stretch to close the game.

North Cobb's win puts the Eagles just one win shy of clinching the No. 1 seed in next month's Region 7-AA tournament. Second-place Union County is one game up on Lakeview Fort-Oglethorpe (LFO) in the standings, however, the Panthers face an easier path the rest of the way as LFO still has contests remaining at North Cobb Christian and at fourth-place Coahulla Creek.

Union County hosts Murray County on Tuesday night before hitting the road to face Ringgold on Friday.

No. 7 Panthers 78, Coahulla Creek 58 - Union County, playing without junior starter Vince Marevka (illness), all but locked up a top-three seed in the region tournament via a blowout victory over then-third-place Coahulla Creek on Tuesday, Jan. 21.

"Obviously I was worried going up against [Coahulla's size] without Vince," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said. "He's been huge for us all year, but Holden [Payne] and Ethan [Hogsed] stepped up and played one of their best games. It was definitely Ethan's best game of the year."

The Panthers stormed ahead 14-4 and never looked back against a Coahulla Creek squad that enters the final week of January having lost seven of eight following an 11-2 start.

During Tuesday's win, Union County held a 17-11 edge after one and maintained its 6-point edge at 21-15 until Henry, who scored 17 of his



Senior Houston Henry splits two defenders to score 2 of his 29 points vs. Coahulla Creek. Photo/Todd Forrest

game-high 29 in the first half, hit two free throws and Young knocked down a triple, growing the lead to 26-15 with 5:45 left in the half. Later, a Young free throw and a Kaden Combs bucket handed the Panthers a 29-17 advantage.

Union preserved its 12-point margin into the break at 34-22, then put the game out of reach with a 12-0 run to start the third. The defense ignited the spurt when Henry's steal resulted in a Hayden Hughes layup. Two more Coahulla turnovers led to a Hughes free throw and a Payne trey.

Two more Hughes 3-pointers capped the run and opened up a 46-22 advantage with 4:25 left in the third.

Coahulla answered with 7-straight points until Henry, Combs and Hogsed accounted for their team's next 10 points, growing the lead to 56-31.

Another Hogsed trey to start the fourth expanded the margin to 59-33, and later, Combs' fast-break tip-in grant-

ed Union its largest lead of the night at 67-39 with 4:41 to play. Hogsed finished with a career-high 12 points on 3 of 6 from long range. Hughes had 11 points, three boards and two steals. Young went for 9 points, seven rebounds and three steals. Payne finished with 8 points, a rebound and a steal. Combs recorded a career-best six steals to go with 7 points, two rebounds and two assists. Hayden Price added a steal.

Despite getting out-rebounded 39-21, Union County won the turnover margin 22-8 and outscored Coahulla 31-9 off turnovers.

"As our defense goes, our offense goes," Garrett said. "Forcing 22 turnovers was huge, and we hit 13 threes, so that helped a lot."

No. 7 Panthers 57, No. 2 North Cobb Christian 74 - Union County was held under 60 points for the first time in 13 games and the Eagles pulled away by outscoring the visitors 30-16 over the final 9+ minutes.



Sophomore Ethan Hogsed has his best game of the year vs. Coahulla Creek according to head coach Corey Garrett. Photo/Todd Forrest

"We obviously didn't do enough to win, but I still think we can beat them," Garrett said. "I'm not saying we should beat them, or we're going to beat them more than they beat us, but we can beat them."

"[North Cobb is] a great team so we would have to shoot the ball very well, but their size is something that's tough to contend with for 32 minutes."

During the early going, Union trailed 14-11 after one but inched ahead 20-18 in the second before North Cobb closed the half on a 16-2 run, taking a 34-22 lead into the half.

Down 37-24 early in the third, Union rallied to within 44-41, when Hughes' 3 sparked the comeback, moving his team within 10. Young scored the next four points, followed by another triple by Hughes, narrowing the gap to 37-34 at the quarter's 4:55 mark.

Buckets by Combs and Young kept Union within three at 41-38 but the Panthers couldn't hit on four attempts

on its next possession, missing a would-be game-tying try and three second-chance opportunities.

North Cobb connected from downtown moments later, but Hughes responded with a 3-pointer of his own for a 44-41 score with 2:45 left in the period.

After both teams swapped misses, North Cobb's 3-point play, followed by a converted offensive rebound quickly grew the lead to 49-41. Henry fired back by scoring in the lane but an Eagles trey closed the frame with Union behind 52-43.

Henry and Marevka kept the Panthers within 10 inside of 5:30 but North Cobb's size was too much down the stretch, scoring via a tip-in and a layup on its next two possessions. The Eagles knocked down a 15-footer with 4:08 remaining, putting Union County in a 62-46 hole.

A North Cobb triple at the 2:15 mark, making it 69-51, put the game out of reach.

"We've shown that we can compete with them," Garrett said. "But [their size] always seems to creep in and get us at the worst time."

Hughes finished with 17 points on 5 of 13 from behind the arc. He added two boards and two steals in the loss. Young had 17 points, three rebounds and a steal.

Henry's night ended with 12 points, nine assists and four rebounds. Combs had 4 points, 13 rebounds and four steals. Payne added 4 points, a rebound and an assist.

Marevka, recovering from an illness, came off the bench to finish with 1 point, two rebounds and a steal in eight minutes. Hogsed chipped in 2 points.

North Cobb out-rebounded Union County 30-15 on the offensive glass and 41-26 overall. The Eagles, who also hit 12 of 13 at the charity stripe, shot 47% from the floor compared to Union's 37%.

Up next: On Tuesday, the Panthers host a Murray County squad that took them down to the wire in Chatsworth in December. The Indians are currently 6-13 overall and tied for sixth in region play at 4-7. Murray is coming off an 83-82 upset victory over Coahulla Creek on Friday, Jan. 24.

Union County visits Ringgold on Friday, Jan. 31 to face a 9-11 Tigers squad currently tied for sixth in Region 7-AA with a 4-7 record. Like Coahulla Creek, Ringgold has lost seven of eight with one of those losses coming in Blairsville by a score of 81-52 on Jan. 3.

Tip-off for Tuesday's varsity games is at 6 p.m. Friday's action gets underway at 7 p.m.

The Panthers could wrap up the No. 2 seed in 7-AA as early as Friday night should they collect wins vs. Murray County and Ringgold, and LFO drops its road contests at Coahulla Creek and North Cobb Christian.

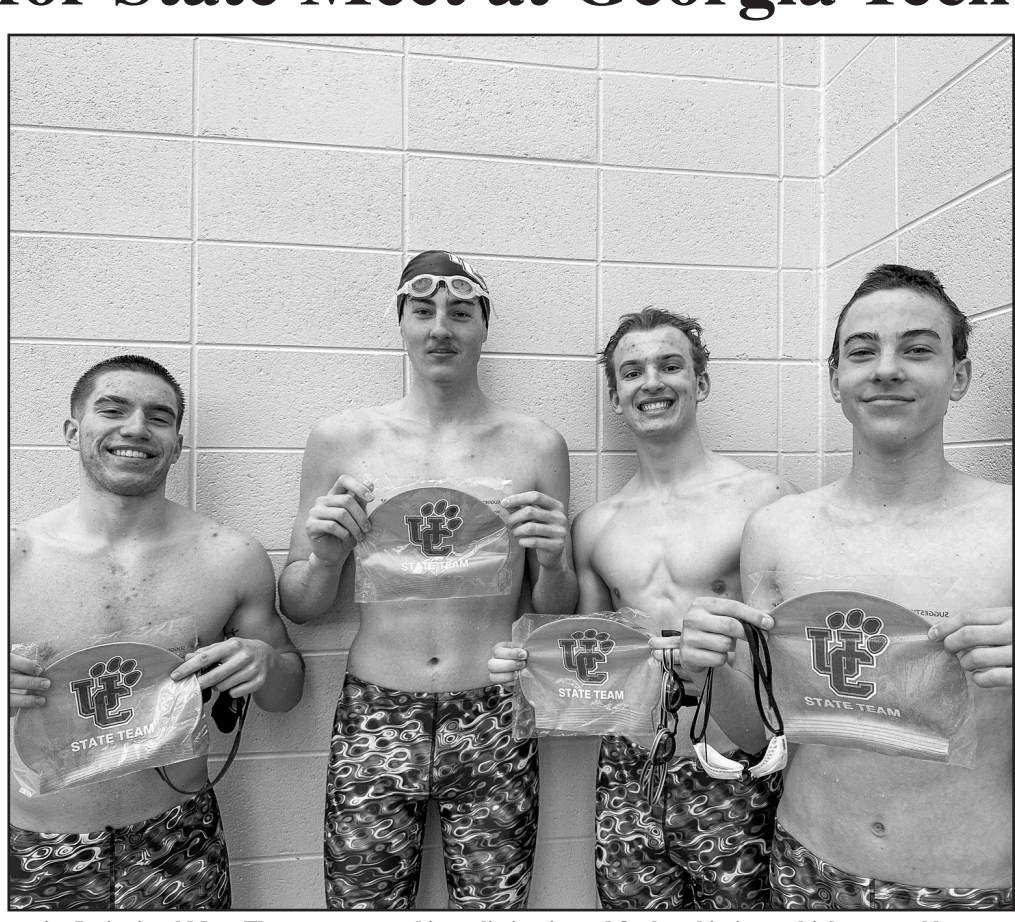
"We just need to take care of business," Garrett said. "It's as simple as that. If we come ready to play, everything will take care of itself."

Four UCHS swimmers qualify for State Meet at Georgia Tech

UCHS SWIM TEAM TOP FINISHES

LIGHT IN THE MOUNTAINS INVITATIONAL MEET | TALLULAH FALLS | JAN. 18

<p>200 MEDLEY RELAY BOYS A TEAM- 3RD: ANDREW NUSHTAYEV, WYATT CHANDLER, COLE ORLANDO, NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV GIRLS A TEAM- 8TH: LILLY COLLINS, LILY HELTON, SOPHIA LICAVOLI, ISABEL HOOVER</p> <p>50 FREE 2ND: NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV 5TH: COLE ORLANDO 14TH: LILLY HELTON</p> <p>100 FLY 6TH: WYATT CHANDLER</p> <p>100 FREE 2ND: NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV 4TH: ANDREW NUSHTAYEV 8TH: COLE ORLANDO 14TH: ISABEL HOOVER</p>	<p>200 FREE RELAY *BOYS A TEAM- 3RD: COLE ORLANDO, JOHN TIPPENS, ANDREW NUSHTAYEV, NICHOLAS NUSHTAYEV GIRLS A TEAM- 9TH: LILLY HELTON, LILLY COLLINS, SOPHIA LICAVOLI, ISABEL HOOVER *NOTATES STATE QUALIFYING TIME</p> <p>100 BACK 10TH: IAN LANDER 10TH: LILLY HELTON</p> <p>100 BREAST 3RD: ANDREW NUSHTAYEV 11TH: JOHN TIPPENS 13TH: ISABEL HOOVER</p> <p>OVERALL: BOYS: 3RD GIRLS: 12TH TEAM: 5TH</p>
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The Union County High School swim team traveled to Tallulah Falls on Saturday, Jan. 18 for the Light in the Mountains Invitational Meet. The team competed in preliminaries and finals, achieving multiple personal best times. Additionally, the boys' relay team earned a State-qualifying time in the 200-yard freestyle relay and will be attending the State meet in February. Swimmers pictured L-R: Cole Orlando, Nicholas Nushtayev, John Tippens and Andrew Nushtayev. The swim team concluded their season this past Saturday at The Westminster School's Metro Invitational. An overwhelming majority of the team swam personal best times. This season brought over 100 top-10 finishes for our swimmers and four swimmers have qualified and will be heading to Georgia Tech Feb. 5 for the state meet hosted by GHSA.

Lady Panthers clamp down on No. 10 Coahulla, North Cobb

Union hosts No. 4 Murray County on Tuesday, at Ringgold on Friday

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Union County (13-8, 6-6) picked up two double-digit wins over No. 10 Coahulla Creek and at North Cobb Christian, heading into this week's showdowns vs. Class AA's No. 4 Murray County and at Region 7-AA's third-place Ringgold.

In the two wins last week, Union County held its opponents to 61 combined points - marking the third time this season the Lady Panthers held opponents under 35 points in consecutive games. However, unlike the previous two occasions, the latest came vs. a pair of teams with winning records.

"I was really proud of our effort," Union County head coach Thomas Nelson said. "Having Katelyn Brown back has really helped us a lot defensively."

Lady Panthers 46, No. 10 Coahulla Creek 31 - Union County closed on an 15-3 run during a low-scoring affair in Blairsville on Tuesday, Jan. 21.

Sophomore Regan Trlica led the way with 13 points, five steals, three rebounds and two assists. Ariel McCarter finished her night with 9 points, seven steals and five assists.

One of McCarter's steals sparked Union's late run, resulting in Trlica's fast-break layup to close the third with her team up 33-28.

A Colts' bucket with just under 6 minutes to play turned out to be their final points of the game, allowing Union to pull away down the stretch.

Senior Katelyn Brown and Trlica answered Coahulla scores, keeping the margin at five early in the fourth, then Trlica split two free throws before knocking down a baseline jumper that bumped the lead to 39-31 with 4:46 left.

Aubrie Akins' turnaround jumper and a Trlica free throw opened up a 42-31 lead, and then Hope Taylor followed with a bucket in the paint at the 3:10 mark.

Brown's free throw iced the game with 1:52 remaining and Sloane Dyer added one



Senior Katelyn Brown drew praise from head coach Thomas Nelson for her energy on the defensive end of the court. Photo/Todd Forrest

climbed within 19-15 inside of two minutes ahead of a late Union turnover, allowing the Colts to narrow the halftime deficit to 21-19.

Coahulla split two free throws early in the third to get within a point, but Taylor scored in the post and McCarter hit 1 of 2 at the charity stripe for a 24-20 lead at the midway point of the frame. Following two Colts free throws, Adams scored inside and Dyer put back a McCarter miss to bump the lead to 28-22.

"I can't say anything bad about how our girls played," Nelson said. "Of course we have Murray County coming up, so I'm bragging on the girls now, but we will be tested this week."

Lady Panthers 55, North Cobb Christian 30 - Union County avenged December's upset loss by leaving no doubt in Friday's rematch in Kennesaw, pulling away courtesy of a 12-4 run to begin the

second half. "Our loss to North Cobb at home was probably our worst loss of the season," Nelson said. "I'm just glad we were able to put that one behind us and get the win down there."

With her team up 28-14 at the intermission, McCarter started the third with consecutive buckets, followed by back-to-back lay-ins by Akins for a 36-16 advantage.

Dyer's reverse layup and Trlica's floater continued the second-half surge, expanding the margin to 40-18 near the quarter's 3-minute mark. Later, with Union up 40-21, Dyer and McCarter each hit from long range opening up a 25-point lead.

Ahead 46-25 with under 5:30 remaining, the Lady Panthers put the contest to bed when Akins scored off a feed from Brown, and Trlica connected from downtown.

Trlica led the way with 16 points, five assists and three steals. Akins had 13 points, eight rebounds and a steal. McCarter finished with 12 points, six boards, two assists and a steal.

"Ariel McCarter and Aubrie Akins both had really big games," Nelson said. "I'm really proud of how the girls are sticking together and the seniors are stepping forward near the end of the season."

Brown had 7 points, eight rebounds and two assists in Friday's win. Dyer ended her night with 5 points, five assists and three boards. Taylor had 2 points and two rebounds.

Adams finished with seven rebounds; Nomi Nelson dished out two assists; Hood had two rebounds and an assist; Ragan McCarter added two boards.

Up next: Despite playing at Murray County three times in the last 23 months, Union County's girls will host Murray County for the first

time in more than 25 years on Tuesday, Jan. 28.

The No. 4 Indians suffered a loss to No. 6 Sonoma last week, resulting in a tie atop the region standings between the two squads.

Murray County dismantled Union 63-38 in Chatsworth last month, however, the Lady Panthers were without the services of Brown, and Taylor (illness) was only available in a limited role.

Union County visits Ringgold on Friday to face the region's third-place team. The Tigers rallied from a double-digit deficit to knock off Union 59-51 in Blairsville on Jan. 3.

The tip-off for Tuesday's contest is at 6 p.m. Friday's varsity games at Ringgold get underway at 7 p.m.

"That Ringgold game will be a big one for us," Coach Nelson said. "We just didn't finish them off when we had the chance during the first meeting."



Regan Trlica dives on a loose ball for one of Coahulla Creek's 24 turnovers. Additionally, the sophomore guard got back on track offensively last week, leading Union in scoring during two wins. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union Wrestling second at Toombs County's Sweet Onion Invitational



Union County wrestling placed second at Toombs County's Sweet Onion Invitational in their final competition ahead of this weekend's Traditional Area tournament at Stephens County. Photo/Jaime Legatt

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Lyons - In a final tune-up before this weekend's Traditional Area tournament, Union County placed second at Toombs County's Sweet Onion Invitational with 180 points, coming in behind West Laurens (222.5).

The Panthers won individual gold in two weight classes: Eli Flowers at 113 lbs and Paxon Legatt at 157 lbs. Second-place finishers included Andrew Engle at 150 lbs and Payton Legatt at 165.

Aiden Hyatt (126) and Asa Smith-Foot (190) each placed third.

In girls' action, Kristyn Kraft was first at 140 lbs and Jada Taylor came in second at 155 lbs.

Michael Lindsey (157), Ben Gary (165), Isaac Milam (175) and Zane Barnett (215) all collected gold in the guys' JV tournament.

In 113-lb varsity action, Flowers scored pin falls over Screven County, Jeff Davis, West Laurens and Harlem to punch his ticket to the finals, where he recorded a 19-1 technical fall over Tyler Johnson of Wewahatchee High School.

Paxon Legatt picked up a 22-5 technical fall vs. Swainsboro in the opening bout before pinning Bacon County in the quarterfinals. He notched a 19-4 technical fall over Temple

in the semis and pinned Jones County's David Little in the finals.

Payton Legatt scored two pinfall victories to reach the semis, where he recorded an 18-2 technical fall over Vidalia. However, West Laurens' James Bowers took home gold via a 17-2 technical fall.

Payton Legatt edged Harlem's Chase Faamausili in the second-place bout via a 1-0 decision.

Engle recorded three consecutive pinfall wins to reach the championship match, where he lost to Harlem's Ryan Rector via a 20-2 technical fall. He defeated Bacon County's Ashton Anderson 1-0 in the second-place match.

Smith-Foot reached the semis by way of two pinfall wins, but he dropped his semifinal bout to West Laurens' Jayden Watkins in a 23-7 technical fall. Smith-Foot bounced back with a 5-0 decision over Jones County in the consolation semis, then he defeated Temple's Robert McCoy 6-3 in the third-place bout.

Hyatt received a bye to the semis but suffered a 16-0 technical fall to Westfield's Daniel Sapp. Hyatt scored a pin over Jones County's Nate McDaniel in the consolation semis and a 7-6 decision against East Laurens' Marquez Thomas in the third-place match.

Kevin Kilpatrick came in fourth at 175 lbs, reaching the semis via a 12-3 major decision

in the quarters vs. Harlem. He suffered a pin in the semis but defeated Toombs County 5-4 in the consolation semis.

Union County wrestlers finishing outside the top four include Michael Raines (120), Riley Mortensen (138), Ayden Lee (215) and Jackson Arthur (285).

In JV competition, Eli Hancock was second at 106 lbs, Jacob Parawana came in second at 215 lbs, Brayden Tullar was second at 165 lbs, David Tiu placed third at 126 lbs, Evan Helbert finished third at 165, Ryker Lambert was third at 144 lbs and Parker Dobson came in fourth at 144 lbs.

Union County begins its individual postseason tournaments with this weekend's Traditional Area tourney at Stephens County on Jan 31 and Feb. 1.

Mountain High Hikers Schedule

Mountain High Hikers offers three hikes in the local area each week: Tuesdays - a long hike from 8-14 miles and a shorter hike of 5-8 miles. Thursday we lead a leisure hike usually around 5 miles. We also maintain over 100 miles of trails in North Georgia and Western NC area and run trail maintenance hikes on Thursdays each week.

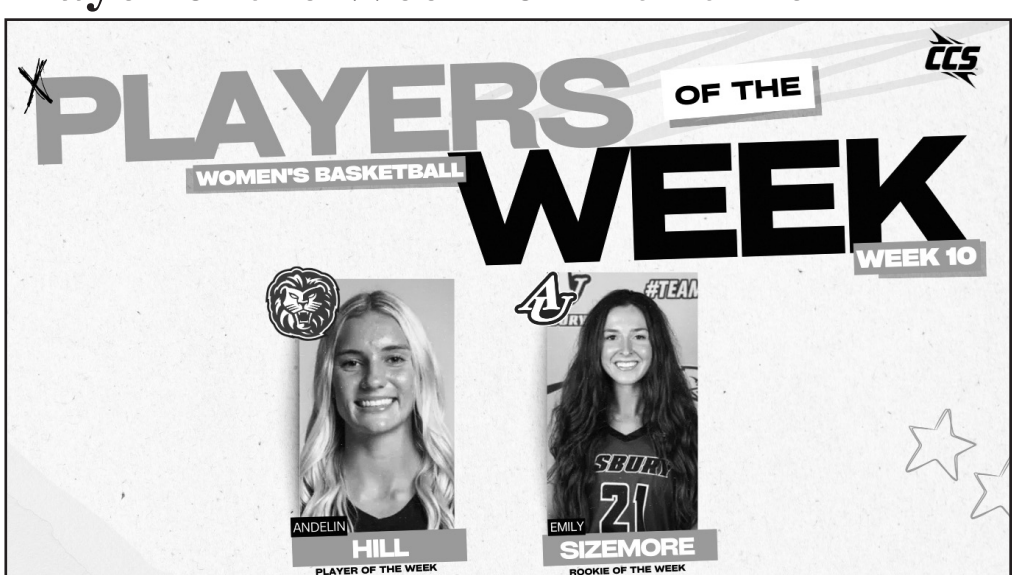
For more information visit <http://www.mountainhighhikers.org>. NT(Jan29,22)/CA

Hughes recognized for 1K milestone



Hayden Hughes, alongside coach Corey Garrett, is honored ahead of last Tuesday's win. Photo/Todd Forrest

Blairsville's Andelin Hill named CCS Player of the Week for fifth time



Atlanta - Andelin Hill (Piedmont) was named The Collegiate Conference of the South Player of the Week for Week 10.

Senior forward Andelin Hill had an exceptional week, averaging 23.0 points, 15.5 rebounds, and 2.0 blocks per game to lead Piedmont to wins over LaGrange and Belhaven.

Across the two games, Hill shot an efficient 61% from the field (17-of-28). Hill set a career-high with 24 points, adding 15 rebounds and three blocks in the victory against LaGrange. She followed up with 22 points, 13 rebounds, and two assists in the win over Belhaven.

Hill earned POW honors for Week 9, delivering a dominant performance in Piedmont's 78-66 home win over Hunting-

don, tying her career high with 22 points and setting a new career high with 16 rebounds. Hill was highly efficient, shooting 9-of-14 from the field and a perfect 4-of-4 from the free-throw line, leading the Lions to victory.

During her Week 6 POW recognition, Hill delivered consecutive double-doubles over the weekend, totaling 34 points and 25 rebounds across two games. Hill led Piedmont to a 70-65 road victory over N.C. Wesleyan with a career-high 22 points and a season-high 13 rebounds, shooting an impressive 11-of-13 from the field.

In Week 4, Hill delivered a dominant performance in Piedmont's home-opening win over Berea, scoring a career-

high 20 points and grabbing 12 rebounds while adding three assists. Hill was flawless from the field, shooting 8-of-8, and converted 4-of-5 free throws. This marked her third consecutive double-double this season.

Her first POW honor came in Week 2, turning in two consecutive double-doubles during the CCS/SAA Classic. Hill posted a season-high 17 points and 13 rebounds in Piedmont's victory over Sewanee and followed with 12 points and 12 rebounds in a hard-fought loss to Berry.

Hill is a 2020 UCHS graduate, where she was a member of the 2019-20 Lady Panthers region championship squad that advanced to the Class AA Elite Eight.