

Sports

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Union 56, Gilmer 14: Panthers open with a win for 14th straight year

By Todd Forrest
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Ellijay – The locations and opponents may vary but the script remains unchanged over the past 14 seasons.

Union County opens the season with a win and prepares for week two with a 1-0 record.

Since 2004, the Panthers have won every season opener and last Friday night was no different. Union County won the toss, scored the game's first 42 points, then put in the reserves and let them cruise to a 56-14 victory with a running clock in the second half.

You know, just your typical week one, Union County result.

Senior quarterback Cole Wright put up 300-plus yards in 2.5 quarters of play before handing the keys to sophomore Pierson Allison and freshman Kaston Hemphill. Through the air, Wright connected on 20-of-30 pass attempts for 233 yards and 2 touchdowns.

With that much success throwing the ball and the outcome never in doubt, there was no need for Wright to use his legs. But the few times he did, he reminded everyone why he was voted Region 7-AAA's Offensive MVP, totaling 993 yards and 2 scores on six carries. More than two-thirds of those yards came on one play when Wright chose to tuck it and run. After gaining 30-plus yards up the sideline, he cut back inside – somehow avoiding the five Bobcat defenders that were in position to either make the tackle or force him out-of-bounds – and waltzed into the end zone, delivering a 67-yard knockout blow that extended the lead to 28-0.

His first rushing score came on the first series of the game when the Panthers went 71 yards on eight plays in less than two minutes.

The drive opened with a handoff to Chad Buzzard that went for 13 yards but an incompletion and a 2-yard loss by Wright brought up a 3rd-and-13. With a perfect opportunity to make an early statement and get off the field, not only did the Gilmer defense surrender a 16-yard completion to Sawyer Drake, they waited until he stepped out of bounds to deliver the hit. The personal foul penalty added 15 yards and gave Union the ball at the Bobcats' 31. Following a Gilmer offsides penalty, Buzzard churned out 11 yards on the ground, Drake reeled in a six-yard grab, drawing another late hit penalty.

With a 1st-and-goal at the five, Wright made the call to carry it himself and scored easily on the read-option keeper.

Gilmer's first offensive series of the game began at the 24-yard line and a no-gain was followed by losses of seven and 11 yards, bringing up a 4th-and-28 at the six. The punt dealt the Panthers excellent field position at the 40, where two pass completions and four Buzzard carries put Union back in the end zone. Buzzard totaled 25 yards on the drive while Kaston Hemphill and Kyle Morlock moved the chains with a pair of catches.

Buzzard ended up 113 yards and 2 scores on 15 carries – all career highs for the junior running back.

Another junior, Chayton Schafer, who would make an impact on offense later in the game, put together a solid all-around performance that began with the Panther safety diving on a Bobcat fumble at the 6-yard line.

Despite facing an offense that rarely put the ball in the air,



The Panthers take the field prior to their season opening win at Gilmer County last week. Photo/Todd Forrest



Chayton Schafer (2) about to recover the loose ball. Photo/Todd Forrest

the Union County defensive backs were flying to the football and forcing turnovers in the run game all night long.

“Our job (in the secondary) was to get to the pitch play and provide late run help,” senior Sean Dobbins said. “They are definitely a different style of offense than what we’re used to preparing for. There’s only a few teams that we see who run an offense like that so preparation is important. You have to prepare as best you can.”

One play later senior Cole Dockrey powered his way across the goal line for a 21-0 lead with 5:15 remaining in the opening quarter.

A three-and-out by the Gilmer offense led to a punt that pushed Union back to its own 37-yard line, but Wright capped off a one-play, 67-yard scoring drive all by his lonesome. The first quarter came to a close with the Panthers on the move once again. Passes to Drake and Dockrey had Union inside the red zone when the second quarter got underway. Wright connected with sophomore Cayden Rich for 8 yards and a 1st-and-goal at the six. On the very next play, Wright scrambled out of the pocket, keeping his eyes downfield and eventually finding an open Kaston Hemphill in the back of the end zone for six.

Junior Brian Smith's fifth extra point of the game made it 35-0 with 11:19 to play before halftime.

Gilmer's fifth consecutive three-and-out gave the ball back to Union but after moving inside the 2-yard line, a fumble out of the end zone handed the ball back to the Bobcats at the 20.

Prior to the fumble, Wright and senior receiver Austin Pattee hooked up for a 20-yard gain and Buzzard added 22 more on the ground. With a second down from the 15, Dockrey appeared to have his second touchdown of the day but a chop block penalty negated

the score. On 3rd-and-25, Buzzard was stopped for a short gain but senior Logan Dyer came to the rescue with a 27-yard reception to keep the drive alive, inside the 10.

With a 1st-and-goal at the nine, Wright tossed a screen pass out wide to Kaston Hemphill, who battled his way inside the five but just as he neared the pylon, the ball was jarred loose and rolled out of the end zone – awarding a touchdown to Gilmer at the 20.

“Kaston was running his butt off trying to score and it was just one of those football plays,” Coach Brian Allison said after the game. “It was a turnover. It happens. We just have to try and fix it and get better.”

After catching its first break of the game, the Bobcats' offense responded with its only first down of the half – a 19-yard run on 3rd-and-2. Unfortunately, Allison recovered a Gilmer fumble two plays later and Union was back in business near midfield.

A second down give to Buzzard was good for seven, then Wright found Pattee for the sixth. Three plays later, the Panthers were faced with a 4th-and-7 from the 36 and were unable to convert when Wright's pass fell incomplete.

“We were playing a good game early but then we just let up a little bit,” Coach Allison said immediately following the game. “We gave up a first down on defense then we weren't able to score again on offense. I think we were pressing and trying to do a little bit too much. I told them just to ‘stay within what we do and we'll be alright.’”

Union would get one more shot at putting points on the board when junior Kyle Williams scooped up a Bobcat fumble at the 45 with 1:09 to play before the break.

A false start put the Panthers in a 3rd-and-15 but Wright weaved his way through traffic for 20 yards and a fresh set of downs. On second



Cole Wright is fired up after his 63-yard TD run. Photo/Todd Forrest

down, Wright hit Dyer across the middle for 31 yards and the score but a yellow handkerchief was sitting at the 10.

Holding was the call and Union had to settle for a 37-yard field goal but Smith pushed his kick wide left and the score remained 35-0 at the half.

Coach Allison was able to refocus his squad during the intermission and the Panthers came out with new life in the third quarter. Pierson Allison recovered his second fumble of the game on the opening series of the half and Wright set up shop at the 21.

A completion to Dyer moved the ball to the five then two running plays to Buzzard were snuffed out by the Bobcats, bringing up third down. That's when Union County went play-action and Wright hit a wide-open Pattee after the defense bit on the fake to Buzzard. All alone in the flat, Pattee glided into the end zone unchallenged for Wright's fourth and final score of the game.

On the ensuing Bobcats' drive, they decided to go up-top on second down and it worked. From their own 13, Gilmer went deep and caught the secondary on its heels. The catch-and-run went for 87 yards and the Bobcats were on the board for the first time all season.

The Panthers would immediately answer.

Kaston Hemphill returned

Tri-County and Blue Ridge results

By Blake Lynch
North Georgia News
Sports Special

Tri-County Racetrack held back to school nickel night and the 602 Alpha Art Thunder Series. There was no modified hobby this week here's the top 5 for each class

Street Stock- #14 Charles Devine, Jr. took home another win. Followed by Marlin Gunter in the #91 car 3rd place was Michael Barnett in the #1 car 4th place was Jacob Lynch in the #01 car and 5th place was #05 of Ron Gill.

602 Thunder- Dale Timms took home the \$1500 followed by Cameron Crow in second. Third was Blake Craft, fourth was Justin Sims and fifth was Bobby Elkins.

Front wheel Drive- 1st place was #05 Hunter Hughes; 2nd place was J-3 Josh Deese; and 3rd was 10 year old #56 Colton Berrong.

Pony was won by T-11 Colton Thomason; 2nd was #55 Jamie Cross; 3rd was #43 Tain Ross; 4th was Chris McCulloch and 5th was #22 Shawn Stillwell.

Limited was won by #16w of Wesley English; 2nd was #55 Kip Cochren; 3rd was #1 David Conley; 4th was 19B of Kevin Bradshaw then 5th was #37 of Michael Barnett.

Crate was won by #17 Brett Shook; 2nd was #7 Jason Deal then 3rd was #12 Deever then 4th was # Floyd Self then 5th was #9 Kenny Barrett.

Super Late was won by #8

David Payne followed by #x15 of Shawn Chastain; 3rd was Danny Ledford; 4th was #17 Kurt English then 5th was #38 of Jamie Oliver.

Blue Ridge Motorsports Park didn't have Crate Motorsports but they had Super Late Models instead here are the top 5 of each class.

Super Late Models- David Payne took home the win 2nd place was Kurt English; 3rd was Blake Spencer ;4th was Joyce Stanridge; 5th place was George Mashburn.

Modified Hobby- Brad Thomas took home the win; 2nd place was Kevin Fisher; 3rd was Jr Whitener; 4th was Chris Gilbert and 5th was Danny Mcleard.

Beginner 602- Jake Green took home the win followed by Adam Purrett; 3rd was Jacob Parris; 4th was Jeff Holloway then 5th was Jonny Manning.

Limited- Trigg Parris took home the win followed by Dawen Dilbeck; 3rd was Jimmy Ivester; 4th was Galen Robinson and then 5th was Tim Ford.

Front Wheel Drive- Josh Deese took home the win; 2nd was Hunter Hughes; 3rd was Jason Berrong; 4th Lucas Beaver then 5th was Colton Berrong.

Pony- Franklin Burk took home the win followed by Andy Winkler 3rd was Dannie Lowe 4th was Colt Thomason then 5th was Tain Ross.

Street Stock- Charles Devine, Jr. took home the win followed by Marlin Gunter 3rd was Tom Darby then 4th was Josh Morrow.



Chad Buzzard finished with 113 yards and 2 TDs. Photo/Todd Forrest

Meanwhile, nine different receivers caught passes for the Panthers with six of them catching two passes each. The leading pass catchers were Drake (67 yards) and Pattee (39 yards, 1 TD) with four each while Dyer led the way in yardage with 68.

Hemphill also finished with three grabs for 23 yards and a score. Morlock and Buzzard had to catches each while Rich, Schafer, and Dockrey had one reception apiece.

On the other side of the ball, Jackson Colwell led the Panthers with 11 tackles, Matthew Beise had nine, and RJ Banton had eight. Pierson Allison ended up five tackles while Dobbins added three.

Kicker Mason McCombs hit 1-of-1 extra points.

Up next is a visit to Hayesville, NC to face the 1-1 Yellow Jackets. Two weeks ago, Hayesville was the victim of a late offensive surge by the Indians at Towns County in a 38-21 loss. Last week they rebounded with a 13-0 home victory over Copper Basin, Tenn.

Last season Union demolished the Jackets 61-7 but Coach Allison acknowledges that last year's Hayesville team was coming off two losses and was in total disarray when they came to Blairsville.

This time around, Coach Allison is expecting a slobber-knocker.

“Whenever I was in school it was a battle every time we played at Hayesville,” he said. “As a coach it's been no different. We went up there when Kolt Owenby was the quarterback (2009) and it was a battle then. We're in for quite a challenge this Friday night.”

For the entire interview with Coach Allison and Dobbins, visit the NGNSports Blog online at www.ngnsports.wordpress.com.

Be sure to visit the blog throughout the week for additional previews of this week's road contest in Hayesville, NC.

If you are unable to attend a Union County sporting event, have no fear, we've got it covered. Follow your sports reporter, Todd Forrest on *Twitter* @hotrodd25 for scores, stats, and more during games. You can also follow to receive updates on when new stories have been added online.

Basketball Registration at the Union County Recreation Department

Age Group
5/6 yrs old
7/8 yrs old
9/10 yrs old
11/12 yrs old

Begins August 21st



Registration Ends
September 29th
September 29th
October 27th
October 27th

**Registration fee is \$50.00 and open to both boys and girls. **

Registration can be completed online at unioncounty.gov.com or at the Recreation Office located at 310 Wellborn Street. If you need any additional information, please call 706-439-6074.

Union County Recreation Art-Tastic Program 2017 Youth Art-Tastic Holiday Camp Ages: 4-7

Does your young child enjoy painting and designing art? This program is designed for children, ages 4-7 to explore their artistic side. Children will meet for camp 4 days in October, 4 days in November, and 4 days in December for this special Art-Tastic Holiday Camp! Participants will participate in arts and crafts designed for each holiday in the designated month. We will meet in the recreation room at the Recreation Office. All sessions will be led by the Program and Start Smart Director.



**Session Registration begins on September 5, 2017 and ends October 5, 2017 at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.). Cost is only \$35 for 12 art and craft sessions!

Registration must be done in person due to cap on participants per session! (You did not have to attend previous sessions.) If you have any questions, please call Jennifer at (706) 439-6074.