

Sports

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Panthers prevail over Gilmer County, Mother Nature in opener

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Union County outlasted a pesky Bobcats squad, and a 1 hour, 52 minute weather delay on Friday night to take their season opener for the 13th consecutive season.

The Panthers pulled away in the second half for a 36-16 home victory, but when the third quarter began at approximately 10:30 p.m., Union held a slim 9-3 advantage.

With the Panthers on top 9-0 and just over six minutes to play in the second quarter, lightning was spotted south of Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium and play was delayed around 8:10 p.m.

Nearly two hours later, the game resumed at 10:02 p.m. but a Union fumble at their own 32-yard line, with 4:17 to play before the break, set up a Bobcats' field goal on the final play of the half.

"The lightning delay didn't effect our momentum but fumbling the football did," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "When we came back out from the delay, we stopped them, they punted to us and we fumbled, which gave them momentum and field position."

"We talked all week long about how we were going to handle adversity and I thought we came out after halftime and handled it pretty well. So maybe the delay wasn't that big of a deal, it was just the turnover."

Following a Gilmer punt on the opening series of the third quarter, the Panthers were faced with a 4th-and-goal from the Bobcats' 20-yard line when Cole Wright found a diving Erik Strayer in the endzone for Wright's second of three scores – giving Union County a 15-3 lead with 7:08 left in the third quarter.

The score was set up by runs of 20 and 16 yards by Wright and a pass interference penalty on the visitors.

Union's junior quarterback finished 12-for-17 through the air with a score, he also rushed for 126 yards and two scores in his first varsity start behind center.

A Gilmer County special



Matthew Beise (53) and Zach Gilliam (43) bring the heat on the Gilmer quarterback in the endzone - resulting in a safety. Photo/Todd Forrest



Cole Wright lowers his shoulder into a Gilmer defensive back instead of running out-of-bounds. Photo/Todd Forrest

teams miscue awarded the Panthers splendid field position after the snap sailed over the punter's head, setting up the offense at the Bobcats' 14-yard line.

On the first play of the series, junior receiver Sean Dobbins took a reverse 14 yards for the score. The point after by Slade Thompson put Union ahead 22-3 at the 4:50 mark of the third.

Dobbins finished with 64 yards on two carries and caught two passes for 41 yards.

Both teams exchanged

punts as the third quarter came to a close with the Panthers in control. The fourth began with another swapping of punts before Gilmer found the endzone for the first time with 6:27 to play. The extra point sailed wide left but Union's lead was trimmed to 22-9.

The Panthers recovered the onside kick attempt and Wright and the offense set up shop just 53 yards from paydirt.

The drive opened with a 15-yard pickup by senior Nic Rodriguez, then two plays lat-



Sophomore Kanon Hemphill fights for extra yards during a first half punt return. Photo/Todd Forrest

er Wright tacked on 13 more with his legs. The Bobcats were flagged for 'hands to the face' on a short gain by Wright to give Union a 1st-and-goal at the nine.

Senior Bo Lynch surged forward for 3 yards, then on second down, Wright capped off the drive with a 6-yard score – extending the advantage to 29-9 with 3:47 remaining.

Gilmer answered with a 1-play, 80-yard scoring drive when they connected on a deep touchdown pass to make it a 29-

16 game.

On the ensuing kickoff, with Union preparing for another onside kick, and everyone except for returner Zach Stone less than 15 yards off the ball, the Bobcats tried to drop a pooch kick behind the front line but the kick traveled a bit too far and Stone was able to field the ball cleanly on one bounce and race down the near sideline for six points.

Moments after Gilmer struck with the deep ball, Stone's 84-yard touchdown return put the Bobcats away for good as the

home team stormed ahead 36-16 with 3:10 left.

Despite Gilmer adding a few new wrinkles to their offense for the Union, the Panthers defense limited the Bobcats to just 42 rushing yards on 39 carries for the game. The Panthers were also playing without their leading tackler from a year ago, senior linebacker Chris Thompson, who suffered an ankle injury vs. Rabun Gap and remains doubtful for this week's game with Hayesville, NC.

In the second half, Gilmer was forced to the air and connected on 7-of-17 passes for 176 yards – with 80 yards coming on one play. For the game the Bobcats were 9-for-22 with 195 passing yards. Prior to the weather delay, Gilmer's offense was going backwards with -3 total yards.

"Their offense was different than what they showed us against Fannin County and in their scrimmage game so we had to adjust on the fly," Coach Allison said. "I thought our guys did a nice job adjusting to what they were doing. We held them to (42 yards rushing) and they're a team that wants to run the football."

Union defensive tackle Matthew Beise put two points on the board when he bull rushed the offensive line for a quarterback sack, and a safety, to make it a 9-0 game with 35 seconds remaining in the opening quarter.

The game opened with a pair of punts before the Panthers found the endzone for the first time in 2016 on a 13-yard carry by Wright.

On the second play of the scoring drive, Dobbins took an end around 50 yards then senior running back Bo Lynch took a swing pass 19 yards – setting up a 13-yard Wright scoring run.

A sack by junior defensive end RJ Banton forced a three-and-out and punt on the ensuing Gilmer possession.

Back on offense and facing 3rd-and-11, Wright scampered for 23 yards before hitting Lynch on another 18-yard swing pass.

With a 1st-and-goal at the seven, Lynch powered his way inside the 3-yard line but

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Bats come to life at Fannin as Lady Panthers keep pace in 7-AAA

Union edges Habersham Central 6-5; comeback bids fall short vs No. 7 Chestatee, White County

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The Lady Panthers got back on track last week with an 8-0 victory over region rival Fannin County on Thursday to improve to 2-3 in 7-AAA, where they are currently tied with Greater Atlanta Christian for fourth place.

Union County will host GAC on Tuesday as the winner will look to remain no more than one game behind third place Lumpkin County (3-2 in region play) and 1.5 games back of second place East Hall (4-2).

However, the Lady Panthers and GAC are just one game ahead of Fannin and Dawson, who are tied at the bottom of the region standings.

Union's shutout victory over Fannin came on the heels of a 7-6 loss to White County where they entered the seventh inning tied at 1-1 before the wheels fell off and the Lady Warriors posted six runs in the top half of the inning.

The Lady Panthers responded with five runs of their own before the game ended with the tying run on second base.

Over the weekend, Union took part in a pair of games at Habersham Central, dropping a 3-2, extra inning affair to unbeaten, and 7th ranked Chestatee from Class AAAA in the first contest. Later in the day on Saturday, the Lady Panthers rebounded with a 6-5 win over Class AAAAA's Habersham Central.

In the win at Fannin, senior Laken Chambers tossed a one-hit shutout as Union run-ruled the Lady Rebels, 8-0 in six innings. At the plate she finished 3-for-3 with a triple and an RBI.

The Lady Panthers got three runs in the top of the first after Braden Poteete reached on an error and scored, Ellie Garrison singled and scored, Jillian Lawn doubled and



Cleanup hitter Jillian Lawn has been Union County's hottest hitter of late. Photo/Todd Forrest

scored, and Chambers doubled in a run.

Union added two more in the fourth when Maddie Sutton reached on an error , Poteete ripped an RBI double to left – scoring Sutton, and Garrison drove in Poteete with a single to center.

In the fifth, Kendra Tanner, Chambers, and freshman Mary Wischmeyer all singled to load the bases. Aladriel Arnold drove in Tanner, and courtesy runner Courtney Moose with a base hit to center. Later, with two outs, Poteete reached on an error to score Wischmeyer, to make it 8-0.

Garrison finished 2-for-3 with an RBI, Arnold was 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs, Poteete went 1-for-4 with 2 runs and an RBI, and Lydia Arrowood finished 1-for-3.

One day earlier, Union

and White County entered the seventh tied at 1-1 after Sutton reached on a bunt single and scored on a sacrifice fly in the third for her team's only run through six innings.

From the circle, Chambers allowed a first inning run but settled down and struck out nine batters while allowing just two hits from the second inning, until the seventh inning.

In White's final at bat, a one-out single was followed by an error. A bunt single led to a mental error by the Union infield – loading the bases. A pair of singles followed before the Lady Panthers recorded the second out on a force at home.

With the bases still full, a Lady Warriors' double brought home three runs. They would tack on one more unearned run off another Union error



Sophomore outfielder Aladriel Arnold drove in two runs in the win at Fannin County Photo/Todd Forrest

before Chambers escaped the inning.

Trailing 7-1, the Lady Panthers exploded for their biggest inning of the year, but it wasn't enough as they fell one run short.

Garrison opened the bottom half of the inning with a triple. Sutton followed with an RBI double and Poteete reached on an error – scoring Sutton.

With one out, Arrowood brought home Poteete on an error by the right fielder to trim the lead to 7-4.

Lawn doubled with two outs, bring the tying run to the plate in the form of Wischmeyer. The freshman catcher singled home Arrowood to put the tying aboard. Arnold reached on an error to score Lawn and make it a one run game. With a full count, Gar-

rison, who led off the inning, smacked a line drive right at the White County left fielder to end the game.

Chambers finished the day with nine strikeouts in seven innings, while allowing only two earned runs and no walks.

Lawn finished with a 3-for-4 day at the plate to go with 2 doubles and one run. Sutton went 2-for-3 with two runs and an RBI, Poteete was 1-for-2 with a run and an RBI, and Garrison went 1-for-4 with a triple and a run as the bottom three hitters in the Union lineup finished a combined 4-for-9 with four runs.

Meanwhile, the first three batters were a combined 0-for-10 with one run.

On Saturday, Union met a 12-0 Chestatee squad and overcame an early deficit to



Ellie Garrison

force extra innings with a run in the seventh before taking a 2-1 lead into the bottom of the eighth where the Lady Warriors edged the Lady Panthers to win the game.

Chambers went the distance for the Lady Panthers, allowing just one earned run, while driving in one at the plate with a base hit in the eighth.

With two down in the seventh, Sutton brought home Tanner with an infield single to tie the game.

In the eighth, the tie-breaker rule put a runner on second, and with one out, Lawn singled to place runners on the corners. Chambers singled to score Poteete (who began the inning on second) and Wischmeyer was hit-by-a-pitch. However, Union was unable to generate another run and it came back to haunt them.

Chestatee's half of the eighth began with an RBI single. Another single followed, and one batter later, Chestatee was able to score the winning run on a Lady Panthers' error.

Arrowood also recorded a base hit for Union County in the loss.

Head Coach Jessica Stewart's squad finished off the week on a high note as

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