

Sports

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Duo of Lynch and Wright too much for Banks; Union moves to 4-0

Panthers put unbeaten record on the line at No. 1 Greater Atlanta Christian as region play begins

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Homer - Cole Wright and Bo Lynch combined for 409 rushing yards and five scores as Union County broke open a 28-28 fourth quarter tie to improve to 4-0 for the third straight season with a 42-28 victory at Banks County.

Wright finished with three touchdowns and 220 yards on the ground - the most rushing yardage by any Union County quarterback in recent history, topping Joseph Mancuso's career high of 180 yards at Fannin County last season.

Lynch came one yard short of matching his career high with 189 yards on Friday night - he went for 190 when the Panthers defeated Greene County, last October.

However, it was the offensive line that helped clear the way for Union's top rushing performance of the decade. Last season, the Panthers churned out 300-plus yards on the ground vs Greene County (343) and at Washington Wilkes (344), but no Union squad has posted more than 400 rushing yards in a game during this decade.

"The offensive line played really well, nobody stood out, but they all played consistent," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "We blocked really good on the edge and our outside receivers also did a good job of blocking."

Union was able to overcome the Leopards' one-man show of junior running back Clayton Dykehouse, who rushed for 208 yards on 33 carries, but did most of his damage in the first half as the two teams traded jabs and went into the break tied at 21-21.

Dykehouse's scored Banks' final touchdown of the game on a 1-yard run when he dove over the pile and stretched the ball across the goal line to knot the score at 28-28 with 11:41 left in the game.

The Panthers responded with a 28-yard score by Lynch, coming on the heels of a 37-yard carry by Wright. Earlier in the drive, Union was faced with a 3rd-and-6 but Lynch moved the chains with a gain of 11.

Leading 35-28 with 9:52 to play, the defense couldn't have selected a more opportune time to force its first three-and-out of the game, bringing up a punting situation.

Facing a 3rd-and-5 deep in Leopard territory, Banks County senior quarterback Griffin Goodwin was sacked by Zach Gilliam for a loss of seven. A solid punt return by sophomore Kanon



Slade Thompson (33) congratulates an exhausted Bo Lynch, who tallied a career-high 27 carries during the win at Banks County. Lynch Photo/Todd Forrest

Hemphill gave Union excellent field position at the Leopard 41-yard line, and three plays later, the Panthers' offense put Banks County in a 14-point hole.

Wright opened the drive with a 12-yard pickup to move the chains, that was followed by a short gain from Lynch. Wright capped off the drive with a 26-yard scoring run to give his team a 42-28 advantage with 7:01 remaining.

"We didn't panic (when Banks tied it at 28-28) because we knew the pressure was on the Banks County defense," Wright said after the game. "Our offensive line did a great job and we never doubted that our defense would get the stops that we needed."

Wright was correct, the pressure fell on the Banks County defense, who was unable to force a Union punt until the contest was already decided with less than 80 seconds to play.

The Leopards' only other stop came late in the third quarter when they stuffed the Panthers on a 4th-and-3 from the Banks County 23-yard line. The turnover-downs was after a 24-yard touchdown run by Wright was called back, forcing Union into a 2nd-and-22.

On their final drive of the game, the Leopards were able to reach the redzone during the waning seconds but a Hemphill interception in the endzone kept Banks

off the board one last time.

Junior linebacker RJ Banton picked off a pass earlier in the second half when the Leopards were trying to tie the game at 28-28. Faced with a 4th-and-8, backed up to their own 30-yard line, the Panthers' defense forced its first turnover of the night when Banton showed blitz, then backed off into zone coverage. With a blitzing Bryan English bearing down on him, Goodwin didn't see Banton, who read the eyes of the Banks County quarterback and stepped in-front of Dykehouse for the interception.

"(Banton) began at outside (linebacker) but injuries have forced us to move him (to inside linebacker) and he's played very good," Coach Allison said. "He's getting better and better and I think we may have found his home (at inside linebacker)."

Banton returned the pick to midfield but the drive would stall when Wright's touchdown was penalized and the Panthers eventually turned it over on downs.

Union County received the second half kickoff and went 75 yards on 11 plays to take a 28-21 lead at the 7:59 mark of the third quarter.

Wright found Logan Dyer for a 6-yard completion before Lynch picked up a pair of first downs with runs of 3, 5, and 5 yards. Junior Cole Dockrey provided Lynch with a breather and

gained 6 yards on first down, then Wright moved the chains with a 4-yard run.

Lynch returned and carried for gains of 6 and 8 yards but it was Wright who did the majority of the damage on the drive when he gained 18 on 2nd-and-4, then capped off the drive with an 11-yard scoring run.

Sophomore kicker Brian Smith was a perfect 6-for-6 on extra point attempts and sent four kickoffs into the endzone for touchbacks.

Banks County's only lead of the night came after they took the opening drive 80 yards for a 7-0 advantage. The Panthers were flagged for roughing the passer on the third play of the game when Goodwin's 3rd-and-10 pass fell incomplete.

Union caught another tough break when they recovered a fumble but the runner was ruled down and the Leopards' drive continued. They eventually found the endzone when Goodwin and Bryce Bennett hooked up on a 5-yard touchdown pass after chewing nearly 7 minutes off the clock.

The Panthers responded with a 64-yard scoring drive that was highlighted by a 17-yard run from Lynch, and carries of 16 and 13 yards by Wright. Lynch put his team on the board with a 2-yard scoring run with 1:21 left in the first.

A high punt snap on Banks'



Union County's read-option offense, led by QB Cole Wright (8) kept the Leopard defense off balance all night. Photo/Todd Forrest

ensuing possession was recovered by Gilliam at the Leopards' 21-yard line and three plays later, Union was ahead 14-7.

Wright connected with Sean Dobbins for 13 yards, then two plays later, Wright kept it himself and found the endzone from 8 yards out.

Banks evened the score at 14-14 thanks to a 40-yard run by Dykehouse that moved the Leopards inside the 15-yard line. Two plays later, Goodwin took a quarterback keeper in for the score.

The tie didn't last very long as Union scored for the third time, less than 4 minutes later. Wright and receiver Slade Thompson hooked up twice on the drive for gains of 7 and 26 yards. The Panthers were also aided by two Leopards' penalties.

With a 1st-and-goal at the 1-yard line, Wright handed it to the team's short-yardage specialist, Nic Rodriguez, and the senior running back powered his way across the goal line for six points.

Banks County had 5:01 to work with and needed nearly every second as they tied the game with an 18-yard touchdown pass to Dykehouse with 25 seconds remaining.

The scoring drive was kept alive by conversions on 3rd-and-11, 4th-and-8, and 4th-and-10.

"We made a bunch of mistakes (defensively) in the first half

and that's my fault as the coach," Allison said. "We were in wrong gaps and we (the coaches) didn't do a good job of putting them in the right spot."

Zach Stone returned the ensuing kickoff 48 yards, inside the Leopards' 40-yard line but a penalty brought the Panthers back to their own 30 and negated any scoring possibilities before the half.

Looking ahead... the Panthers will travel to No. 1 Greater Atlanta Christian (3-1) to open Region 7-AAA action with the favorites to win the State Championship in their inaugural season in Class AAA.

The Spartans are led by Stanford commit Davis Mills at quarterback, who was named First Team All State in Class AA last season, preventing Mancuso from claiming the honor for the second straight year. They also have one of the State's top three offensive linemen in the Class of 2019 in 6-5, 275-pound sophomore tackle Chris Hinton Jr.

GAC is coming off a 12-2 season where they reached the Class AA Final Four and must replace its leading rusher and receiver from that 2015 semifinal squad. They do return senior receiver Harrison Sloan (8 catches, 1 TD this year), junior running

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Lady Panthers edge East Hall in another thriller for the home crowd

Union moves into a tie for second in Region 8-AA entering final week of Region play

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The Lady Panthers moved into a tie for second place in Region 7-AAA last week with victories over Dawson County and East Hall. With two games remaining on the region slate, Union County must win out and hope that East Hall falls to North Hall in order to claim second place outright entering the Region Tournament.

On Tuesday, the Lady Panthers traveled to Dawson County, where they founded the home team 11-2 to force a showdown with East Hall on Thursday, and for the second consecutive home game, Union was victorious in its final at bat.

This time, Aladriel Arnold scored on a wild pitch to give her team the 3-2 win. However, the Lady Panthers had a chance to put the game away in the top half of the seventh but a dropped pop-up led to a Lady Vikings' RBI single that knotted the score at 2-2.

Laken Chambers was able to catch a pair of East Hall batters looking at strike three to escape the top of the seventh with two runners aboard.

The softball gods showed the Lady Panthers some sympathy when Arnold led off Union's half of the seventh with a pop fly to shallow centerfield that bounced off the second baseman's glove to begin the bottom half of the inning in the same fashion as the top half.

Ellie Garrison reached when she beat out a bunt after an errant throw pulled the first baseman off the bag. With two on and nobody out, East Hall elected to walk freshman catcher Mary Wischmeyer to load the bases for sophomore Maddie Sutton but a wild pitch scored Arnold while Sutton was still at the plate.

The Lady Vikings took a 1-0 lead in the top of the sixth



Freshman catcher Mary Wischmeyer fires first for an out while Lydia Arrowood (left) and Jillian Lawn (right) charge the East Hall bunt. Union County wore pink on Thursday for the annual Cancer Awareness Pink Out game. Photo/Todd Forrest

when a stolen base attempt at third base forced a high throw into left field - resulting in the go-ahead run.

In the bottom half of the inning, Union answered on a two-out, two-run single by Chambers to take a 2-1 advantage entering the seventh.

Sutton led off the bottom of the sixth with a bunt single and was advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt by Braden Poteete. Kendra Tanner put two in scoring position when she singled and stole second with one out. With two down, Chambers lined a base hit over the head of the second baseman to score Sutton and Tanner.

Chambers tossed a complete game, striking out seven, walking one, and allowing five hits. She was 1-for-3 at the plate with 2 RBIs.

Jillian Lawn and Tanner each finished 1-for-3 while Sutton went 1-for-2 and Garrison was 1-for-3.

Earlier in the week, Union overcame an early 1-0 deficit with four runs in the third and three runs in the fifth to blow open a region contest at Dawson County. The Lady Panthers tacked on one in the sixth and three in the seventh to take a 11-2 victory.

Chambers went the distance without surrendering an earned run and fanning eight while yielding four hits.

Arnold went 4-for-4 with a double and 3 RBIs, while Lawn was 2-for-5 with a double and 2 RBIs. Lydia Arrowood posted a three-hit performance with a pair of RBIs, Tanner was 1-for-5 with an RBI, Wischmeyer went 1-for-4 with an RBI while Sky-

ler Ludlum and Megan Bright scored twice and Poteete scored once.

Over the weekend Union took part in a tournament at Morgan County where they prepared for the home stretch of region play with games against much larger competition.

The Lady Panthers were victorious over Creekview but were defeated by Eastside and Starr's Mill.

On Tuesday, Union will resume 7-AAA action with a trip to Norcross to face GAC, who the Lady Panthers shutout 3-0 in Blairsville. First pitch is scheduled for 5 p.m.

Senior Night will be held on Thursday when Union hosts rival Fannin County at 6 p.m. The Lady Panthers will honor its three seniors, Arrowood, Chambers, and Tanner.



Laken Chambers drove in two in the bottom of the sixth vs East Hall for her 105th and 106th RBIs of her career - tying her with Callie Dyer for the most in program history. Photo/Todd Forrest

Region 7-AAA Softball Standings

| TEAM | REGION | OVERALL |
|----------------|--------|---------|
| 1. North Hall | 8-1 | 8-6 |
| 2. East Hall | 7-3 | 11-8 |
| 2. UNION CO. | 7-3 | 11-10 |
| 4. Lumpkin Co. | 5-5 | 9-11 |
| 5. GAC | 3-6 | 8-9 |
| 6. Dawson Co. | 2-7 | 6-11 |
| 7. Fannin Co. | 1-8 | 1-16 |