

Sports

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Marevka's 25 propels No. 6 Union into BOTS Championship Panthers rout Coosa and No. 4 Rabun, face Franklin, NC for title

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Hiwassee - The No. 6 Union County boys are back in the Battle of the States Championship game for the third straight year following two blowout wins over Coosa and No. 4 Rabun County.

The Panthers and Franklin, North Carolina met in Monday night's title game. No results were available at press time.

With a victory over Franklin, Union would win its fifth Battle of the States title. The Panthers also finished as runner-up in 2005, 2019 and 2022.

No. 6 Panthers 83, No. 4 Rabun County 62 - Junior Vince Marevka scored a game-high 25 points and Union County outscored the Wildcats 32-11 in the second quarter, erasing an early eight-point deficit during the Battle of the States semifinal round on Saturday, Dec. 28.

Marevka, who was knocked unconscious on Dec. 17, wasn't sure if he'd be cleared in time for the Battle of the States. But luckily for the Panthers he was ready to go just 11 days removed from his trip to the emergency room.

"We found a mismatch with Vince," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said. "So we just started punching it inside and that obviously worked out for us."

"We knew that Vince was very capable (coming into the season), but he's having success against bigger opponents. He's just a workhorse. Everyone you talk to says, 'that guy plays so hard.'"

Rabun County knocked down six 3-pointers in the first quarter and took a 22-14 lead into the second. Rabun maintained its 8-point edge at 27-19 until the Panthers found another gear, finishing the half with a 27-6 run for a 46-33 halftime advantage.

"We had a very clear Plan A and that was our 1-3-1 [defense], and a very clear Plan B: Our 2-3 [defense]," Garrett said. "We talked about what would happen if they came out and hit shots against our 1-3-1,



Junior Vince Marevka scored 17 points in the win over Coosa and 25 during Union's semifinal victory over Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

and they did. So we went to our Plan B and it took [Rabun] out of their rhythm."

The Wildcats didn't threaten in the second half as Union grew its lead to 67-46 after three when Houston Henry connected from 3-point range at the horn. Rabun moved within 67-50 early in the fourth but got no closer as Marevka put the finishing touches on his 25-point evening with an 11-point final frame.

After a 6-6 tie, Rabun County used a 13-5 spurt to open up a 19-11 lead near the 2-minute mark of the first. Holden Payne's triple stopped the bleeding, but the Wildcats closed the first with a trey to keep their lead at eight.

Two baskets by Marevka and a Hayden Hughes 3 trimmed the margin to 27-21. A Hughes free throw and a Henry trey had Union within two before Marevka tied the game at 27 just

shy of the 5-minute mark.

Rabun answered with a quick 3-pointer, but Young's fast-break layup, followed by a 3 in transition, put the Panthers in front 32-30 -- a lead they wouldn't surrender.

Young, who finished with 19 points, capped off his one-man 10-0 run by breaking out for a layup off a Henry steal, followed by a 24-footer that spotted Union a 37-30 edge at the 3-minute mark. The lead eventually expanded to 43-30 when Payne split two free throws, Hughes hit from long range and Marevka muscled his way inside.

A Rabun 3 finally halted its 4 1/2-minute scoreless drought, but Kaden Combs' 3-point play bumped the lead back to 13 at the break.

"That spurt was huge," Garrett said. "Maddox got hot and we found our plan defensively. We didn't have to change

much at halftime. I was proud of the guys; they never quit."

Marevka and Hughes grew the Union lead to 51-36 early in the third, and later, near the 4-minute mark, Young's 3 made it 56-40.

A pair of Rabun turnovers resulted in a Combs bucket and a Payne breakaway for a 62-42 lead with 2:16 left in the third.

Henry capped off the quarter with an off-balance trey at the buzzer, sending Union County into the fourth with a commanding 67-46 lead.

The Panthers went scoreless over the first 3-plus minutes of the fourth, but Rabun only narrowed the gap to 67-50 until Henry found Marevka underneath on consecutive trips, growing the lead back to 21 at the 4:22 mark.

A Marevka layup with 2:20 remaining, followed by a free throw moments later, awarded Union its largest lead of the night at 78-56.

"We knew once Rabun had to start pressing we were going to get some easy baskets



Senior guard Maddox Young had 19 points, including 10 straight, in Union's 83-62 win over Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

and ice the game," Garrett said at the buzzer.

Henry and Hughes finished with 13 points apiece. Payne scored 8 points and Combs added five.

Rabun County was led by 18 from Hayes Free and 14 from Huey Blalock.

No. 6 Panthers 90, Coosa 51 - Union County put Coosa away early with a 51-19 first half in the Battle of the States opener on Dec. 27.

"Over the break, we talked about getting into rhythm," Garrett said. "We know during the Christmas tournament it's all about getting into rhythm, and whoever gets into rhythm first will probably win the thing. And we came out and were clicking on all cylinders from the get-go."

Hughes led the way with 23 points on four 3-pointers; Marevka scored 17.

Hughes had 18 in the first two quarters as the Panthers raced ahead 8-0 early and 22-6 after one, then used a 29-point second quarter to end the contest by halftime.

After opening with an 8-0 run, Union County closed the first with eight straight, turning a 14-6 score into a 22-6 lead when Payne connected from 3

A Combs free throw and a Hughes trey expanded the margin to 26-6 less than a minute into the second. Ethan Hogsd's triple made it 40-10 with 2:58 left in the half.

Union kept its foot on the gas with Hughes' step-back triple opening up a 49-15 margin and Combs' basket making it 51-17.

Marevka scored 12 in the third and the Panthers took a 70-39 lead to the mercy-rule-shortened fourth.

Combs and Payne finished with 12 each; Hogsd had 10 points; Young had 6 points; Ryland Chambers had four; Hayden Price and Jackson Nichols had 3 points apiece.

With the weekend victories, Union County moved up one spot to fifth in the Class AA rankings.

Up next: Union County resumes Region 7-AA play by hosting Ringgold on Friday, Jan. 3. The Ringgold contest will serve as basketball homecoming.

The Panthers visit Fannin County on Saturday, Jan. 4 in non-region action before traveling to North Murray on Tuesday, Jan. 7.



Senior guard Houston Henry cuts his eyes at his defender after knocking down a contested off-balance 3-pointer to beat the third-quarter buzzer vs. Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Hayden Hughes celebrates during Union County's second-quarter rally vs. Rabun County. Hughes had 23 points in the win over Coosa and 13 vs. Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers one win away from first Battle of the States title

Union's first win over Rabun in 10 years punches ticket to finals

By Todd Forrest
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Hiwassee - The Lady Panthers (8-4) are one win away from the program's first Battle of the States Tournament Championship following wins over Coosa and Rabun County over the weekend.

Union County faced Polk County, Tennessee in Monday's title game, but no results were available at press time.

Saturday's semifinal victory over Rabun County propelled Union County into its second consecutive Battle of the States Championship game. Entering Monday's title matchup, the Lady Panthers are winless in four previous trips to the championship game.

Lady Panthers 60, Rabun County 55 - The Union girls scored their first win over Rabun County in nearly 10 years and just the program's second victory over the Lady Cats since 2009.

Hope Taylor led the way with 22 points and 14 rebounds as Union County pushed ahead by 15 points in the second half before holding off a late Rabun County surge.

Tied 11-11 after one and 13-13 early in the second, the Lady Panthers opened up some breathing room when Ariel McCarter hit two from the line and Taylor scored in the low post. Sloane Dyer added a free throw, and Aubrie Akins converted a second-chance opportunity, spotting Union a 20-13 edge near the 4:30 mark of the quarter.

On the ensuing Rabun possession, McCarter picked off a pass and went the other way for 2 points, opening up a 9-point lead and prompting a Lady Cats timeout.

After the teams swapped



Senior Aubrie Akins scored 16 points during Union County's 75-45 opening-round victory over Coosa on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union its first double-digit lead at 42-30 with 2:41 left in the period, then Nomi Nelson's triple made it 45-32 less than 70 seconds later.

A Mady Adams putback at the 1-minute mark capped Union's 13-2 run, putting her team up 47-32. Rabun knocked down a trey to close the quarter down 47-35, but Trlica's 3-pointer kept the margin at 15 as the clock ticked under 7 minutes.

But Rabun refused to go away, using a steal-and-score to get the deficit back to 10 with 5:40 remaining, then a Lady Cats 3 had the margin at 52-43 a minute later.

A McCarter 3 handed



Hope Taylor had 22 points during Union County's semifinal victory over Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union's lead shrunk to 53-45 at the 3:20 mark and 57-52 with under 90 seconds left. Rabun split two free throws with 53 seconds to play, cutting the gap to 57-53. After Rabun's trip to the line, McCarter broke the full-court pressure and found Akins for a layup that put the game away at 59-53.

McCarter finished with 17 points, 6 rebounds, 5 assists and 5 steals. Nelson had 7 points, 4 steals, a rebound and an assist. Akins had 5 points and 8 boards; Trlica ended her night with 5 points, 4 rebounds, 4 assists, 2 blocks and a steal.

Adams had 2 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists and a block. Dyer had 1 point, 6 rebounds, 4 assists and 2 steals. Hood had 1 point and 2 rebounds.

The win marks Union's third victory over Rabun's girls in 15 years. The Lady Panthers, under head coach David Tucker, last defeated Rabun County in February 2015 by a 63-52 score in Blairsville.

Before that night, Union County hadn't defeated Rabun since a 57-51 win during the 2009 Region 8-AA semifinals in Tiger under head coach Jim Hughes.

Lady Panthers 75, Co-

osa 45 - Union County had no trouble with Coosa in the tournament's opening round on Friday, Dec. 27.

Ten different Lady Panthers scored in the win, led by 16 points and 14 boards from Akins.

Union County led 14-6 after one and took a 39-23 lead into the locker room. Up 55-37 after three, the Lady Panthers blew things open in the fourth, outscoring the Eagles 20-8 over the final 8 minutes.

Akins opened the final frame with two free throws, and then Dyer hit from 15 feet before finding Taylor on the break for a 61-39 lead. Taylor scored down low and McCarter sank two free throws for a 65-39 score with 5:11 remaining.

A corner jumper by Nelson and a Ragan McCarter trey continued the onslaught, building a 70-39 lead at the 3:40 mark. Hood and freshman Livy Haney hit a free throw each to extend Union's run to 13-0 before Coosa connected with just over 2:30 to play.

Dyer scored 15 points, grabbed 3 boards and dished out 3 assists. Nelson had 11 points, 2 assists and a steal. Ragan McCarter had 7 points, 4 steals, 3 assists and 2 boards.

Hood finished with 8 points, 2 steals and 2 rebounds; Taylor added 6 points, 11 rebounds and a steal.

Ariel McCarter had 5 points, 7 assists, 4 rebounds and 2 steals. Haney had 3 points, 2 rebounds and an assist; Adams finished with 2 points and 5 boards; Tatum Fisher had 2 points and an assist.

Up next: Union County resumes region play on Friday, Jan. 3 when they host Ringgold.

The Lady Panthers travel to Fannin County on Saturday, Jan. 4 then visit North Murray on Tuesday, Jan. 7.

Wrestling: Panthers first at Berkmar's Gorilla Warfare tournament

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Lilburn - Union County came in first at Berkmar's Gorilla Warfare tournament on Dec. 20-21, bringing home five gold medal performances.

The Panthers finished with 177.5 points, edging second-place North Atlanta (174), third-place Mt. Vernon (115), fourth-place Arabia Mountain (113.5) and fifth-place Roswell (98).

Union County's first-place finishers included Eli Flowers at 120 lbs, Thomas Gary (132 lbs), Payton Legatt (165 lbs), Kevin Kilpatrick (175 lbs) and Asa Smith-Foot (190).

Ayden Hyatt came in second at 126 lbs and Riley Mortensen was third at 138 lbs.

In the girls' tournament, Kristyn Kraft was second at 140 lbs, Jada Taylor was second at 155 lbs and Charlei Robinson was third at 145 lbs.

In the boys' 120 division, Flowers defeated Shiloh's Amir Woods by technical fall in the semis and pinned North Atlanta's Roby Egan in the finals.

Gary needed a sudden victory vs. Roswell's Trace Gibbons to advance to the 138-lb finals, where he pinned Shiloh's Bradley Smalls.

Legatt pinned Roswell's



Union County wrestling won Berkmar's Gorilla Warfare tournament on Dec. 20-21.

Brody Duffy in the semifinal round at 165 before scoring a pin over Mt. Vernon's Keon Clealand to earn gold.

At 175, Kilpatrick pinned Tristian Adeogba of Riverwood during the semis and earned another pin over Roswell's Turner Beekman.

Smith-Foot took home

gold at 190, notching a pinfall victory over Roswell's Nicholas Silva in the semifinal round and picking up another pin over Arabia Mountain's Elijah Green in the finals.

Hyatt pinned North Springs' Mike Morales in the 126 semis but fell to Deonte Smith of Druid Hills in the

finals.

Pace Lilienfeld of Mt. Vernon pinned Mortensen in the semis but Union's 138-pounder bounced back with a win over Harrison's Lawson Collier in the consolation finals.

Other Union wrestlers included Andrew Engle (7th), Ayden Lee (9th), Jackson Ar-

thur (9th) and Isaiah Batura (13th).

In girls' action, Kraft pinned Vanesa Aguliar-Gonzalez of Collins Hill in the semis but fell to Arabia Mountain's Brooke Freeman in the championship bout.

Taylor defeated Arionna Amin-Williams of Arabia

Mountain in the semis and lost to Arabia Mountain's Aniya Mciver in the finals.

Robinson lost to South Gwinnett's Lillian McLemore in the semis but battled back with two consolation wins over North Springs' Nia Hampton and Lovejoy's Ari Yonna Morris.

UCHS to crown Basketball Homecoming King and Queen on Friday

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Union County High School will crown its 2024-25 Basketball Homecoming King and Queen before Friday night's game vs. Ringgold.

The senior homecoming representatives are Ariel McCarter, Aubrie Akins, Lydia Wagner, Hope Taylor (not pictured), Houston Henry, Isaac Hyde, Maddox Young and Travis Tracy.

The junior representatives are Avery Frechette (not pictured), Georgia Hanes, Kendall Deyton, Vince Marevka (not pictured), Matthew Ekeberg and Trent Webster (not pictured).

The sophomore representatives are Isabella Anthros (not pictured), Naomi Nelson, Jaxon Thotrow (not pictured) and Ethan Hogsd.

The freshman representatives are Claire Milam, Samantha Combs, Hudson Collins and Mikey Davis.

Last year's king and queen were Caiden Tanner and Kamryn Mull.

Eli Underwood and Jaycee Seabolt took home the crowns in 2022-23.



UCHS will crown its basketball Homecoming King and Queen on Friday night ahead of Union County's region showdown with Ringgold. Photo/Todd Forrest