

# Panthers end four-game slide with late run vs Andrews, NC

## Spartans shoot the lights out as Union County falls 75-31 at Greater Atlanta Christian

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The Panthers (14-6, 3-5) welcomed back sophomore Sawyer Drake on Saturday night as they ended a four-game skid with a 52-37 victory over Andrews, NC.

As close to full strength as they've been in two weeks, Union County needed all the help they could get to fend off a hot-shooting, upset-minded Wildcats squad.

"It was nice to get back on the winning side of things before we head into the final stretch of region games," Union coach Casey Jones said.

The Panthers trailed 19-12 in the second quarter until a 10-0 run sent them into the break with a 22-19 advantage.

Leading 28-21 in the third, Andrews pulled within a point at 32-31 with 1:10 left in the period. Union, however, was able to pull away with an 18-1 run that put things out of reach at 50-32 with two minutes remaining.

"I told Coach (Kevin) Hughes, 'if we don't stretch this (lead) out pretty quick we're going to be in a fight at the end,'" Jones said. "Luckily we were able to make a few shots and push the lead on out."

One day earlier, the Panthers were roughed up 75-31 by 4th ranked Greater Atlanta Christian. Scorching hot from 3-point range in the first half, the Spartans sprinted out to a 29-8 lead after one and 50-15 at halftime.

Union County hosts North Hall and East Hall this week with an opportunity to put a stranglehold on fourth place in Region 7-AAA. Currently, GAC, Dawson, and East Hall have one loss apiece while the Panthers lead North Hall by one game in the win column after defeating the Trojans in Clermont last month.

"They're going to be gunning for us because we beat them down there," Jones said. "They're playing pretty good right now and that's everyone's goal is to be playing well this time of the year."

Union fell 77-61 at East Hall earlier this month but took the Vikings down to the wire in last year's meeting in Blairsville.

**Union 52, Andrews, NC 37** - Drake led the way with 15 points, eight steals, and four assists off the bench after missing two weeks due to a knee injury suffered Jan. 5 vs Lumpkin County.

The Panthers, who were without backup center Britt Waller, used a 10-0 run to close the second quarter, then a needed 16-1 run in the fourth to put the Wildcats away for good.

Andrews found early success from long distance, connecting on 6-of-15 through three quarters. The Wildcats used the three to open up a 19-12 advantage in the second quarter, then pulled within a point in the third after the Panthers stretched their margin to seven.

Andrews started fast, holding leads of 4-0 and 10-9 after one before three straight treys to open the second allowed the Wildcats to build its largest lead of the night at 19-12.

An RJ Banton layup stopped the bleeding, pulling the Panthers within five, but with his team still reeling on both ends of the floor, Drake helped ignite the 10-0 run by swatting an Andrews shot attempt into the arms of



Left: Sophomore Sawyer Drake returns to the floor for the first time in two weeks. Right: RJ Banton with a layup in the fourth to stretch the lead to nine points vs Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

Baggett, who raced down the floor, splitting two defenders at the foul line before going up and floating a right-handed layup off the glass and through the hoop.

The Drake block and Baggett deuce brought the Panther-faithful to its feet, sensing a shift in momentum that favored the home team.

Consecutive baskets by Drake gave Union its first lead of the quarter at 20-19, then Candler Colwell put the finishing touches on the half with a dribble drive to beat the horn, awarding the Panthers a three-point lead at the break.

"It's nice to have Sawyer (Drake) back," Jones said. "He does a lot of things to help us statistically, but he also does a lot of things that don't show up in the stats. His energy on both ends of the floor is something we feed off of."

Union County wouldn't relinquish the lead at any point during the second half and extended the lead to seven at 28-21 thanks to treys from Baggett and Drake.

But Andrews wasn't ready to throw in the towel, outscoring the Panthers 10-4 over the next five minutes to pull within a point, 32-31.

Pierson Allison would add two free throws late in the third when he was hacked on a drive into the lane.

Up 34-31 to start the fourth, Union County finally found its stride after some free throw line struggles by the Wildcats left the door wide open for the home team.

A fast-break layup by Baggett gave the Panthers a bit of breathing room at 38-32. Then, just inside the 4:00 mark, Candler Colwell missed the second of two foul shots but Banton ran down the loose ball to retain possession. Following a Union timeout, Banton was rewarded for his hustle as the Panthers went inside to the senior, whose up-and-under layup made it a 41-32 game.

On the ensuing possession, Allison delivered a dagger when he turned a Wildcats' turnover into an and-one on the other end. Moments later, Allison was fouled and hit 1-of-2 at the line for a 45-32 advantage at the 3:00 mark.

A free throw and a bucket by Drake and another break-away layup by Baggett opened the floodgates on Andrews at 50-32.

The Wildcats finally got their first field goal of the fourth quarter with 1:38 remaining - nearly an entire quarter since hitting a trey with 1:10 left in the third to trim the Union lead to 32-31.

Banton hit 2-of-2 at the line 26 seconds later - the Panthers' final points of the night.

**Game Notes (Individual):** Drake shot 6-of-8 from the floor while connecting on his first 3-point field goal of the season.

Baggett finished with 4 assists while shooting a perfect 4-for-4 from inside the 3-point line and 1-4 from beyond the arc.

Allison connected on 5-of-7 at the line and ended up with 9 points despite struggling from 3-point range (0-for-3).

Banton scored 6 points; Candler Colwell had 2 points, with team highs in rebounds (7) and assists (5). He also came up with a pair of steals.

Dillon Phillips led Andrews with 14 points.

**Game Notes (Team):** Union County finished 20-of-42 (48-percent) from the floor but only connected on 2-of-13 (15-percent) from three. The Panthers also hit 10-of-19 at the line (53-percent).

Andrews dominated the offensive boards, limiting Union to a season-low, 3 offensive rebounds while hauling in 12 themselves.

The disparity in rebounding could've been caused by the Wildcats making just 11-of-40 shot attempts. Andrews cooled off from three late in the game, finishing 7-for-21 after starting 6-for-15.

**GAC 75, Union County 31: NORCROSS** - The 4th-ranked Spartans came out sizzling - sinking eight of its first 10 attempts from beyond the arc.

Following a brief 3-0 Union County lead on a Baggett trey, GAC scored 13-unanswered on the way to a 29-8 first quarter onslaught.

"If they missed a three, I don't remember it," Jones said of the GAC's first half shooting performance. "They beat Dawson by 40 so they're hot right now."

The Spartans continued to bomb away from 3-point distance, extending the lead to 50-15 at the half.

Allison would sink two treys in the third and Baggett would get in on the action with a three-ball of his own. Candler Colwell added a deuce and the Panthers trailed 65-26 after three.

Candler Colwell sank a trey early in the third before Coleson Daniel and Colton Day each split a pair from the line.

**Game Noes (Individual):** Allison led Union County with 12 points on 4-of-10 shooting from downtown. Baggett chipped in 11 points on 2-of-3 from long distance but had a

difficult time finding space to operate as GAC smothered him all night with 6-foot, 4-inch guard, Ben Sheppard, who is quite possibly the Spartans best all-around player.

Banton led the team in rebounds with six - four coming on the offensive end.

Despite getting shutout of the scoring column, Crawford Colwell's three assists and two steals were both team-highs.

Candler Colwell had 5 points, three rebounds, and two assists. Daniel finished with 2 points and Day added one.

The Panthers lost Waller who took an elbow to the head, resulting in stitches. He is expected to return this week.

Juniors Roy Dix (17) and Chris Hinton (13) led GAC while Sheppard, another junior, scored 12.

On Saturday night, the Spartans traveled up to Dawsonville and took the Tigers to the woodshed in an 87-47 beatdown. GAC will get a shot to avenge its only region loss of the season when they host a short-handed East Hall squad, who lost two players due to ejections at North Hall last Friday.

For some reason, North Hall is the popular location to get ejected this season.

**Game Notes (Team):** Union County shot a season-low 23-percent (9-for-39) from the field and 46-percent (6-for-13) at the line. The Panthers were a solid 35-percent (7-for-20) from 3-point distance.

GAC finished 31-of-61 (51-percent) from the floor; 9-of-17 (53-percent) from downtown, and 4-of-7 (57-percent) at the line.

The Spartans turned 20 Union turnovers into 22 points while out-rebounding the visitors 40-26 overall and 25-15 on the offensive glass.



Left: Sophomore Sawyer Drake returns to the floor for the first time in two weeks. Right: RJ Banton with a layup in the fourth to stretch the lead to nine points vs Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest



Candler Colwell drives inside vs Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest



### Union County Recreation Department 2018 Evening Step-Aerobics Program Ages: 50 and over

You asked and we listened! Union County Recreation Department is now offering evening fitness classes! If you are looking for an indoor exercise program to fit your work schedule and other needs, then come on down to the Union County Recreation Department and sign up for our new Step-Aerobics program. The Program Director of Union County Parks and Recreation will be leading step-aerobics sessions two times a week for February and March for 45 minutes. This is a great time to socialize and exercise with a fun group for a very low cost. Step-Aerobics Registration begins on January 15, 2018 and ends February 2, 2018 at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.) Registration must be done in person due to class size limits. If you have any questions, please call our office at (706) 439-6074. NJan17.MJ.SH

### Union County Recreation Senior Dance Program Winter 2018 Ballroom Dancing Program Ages: 50 and over

Did you know dance could be fun? You do not need to have coordination to have a great experience dancing! The Program Director of Union County Parks and Recreation will be leading the next session of beginning ballroom dance two times a week for 4 weeks in this winter session. You will learn the basics of four ballroom dances, such as the Waltz and Foxtrot. This is a great time to socialize and dance with a fun group. We will meet at Union County Recreation Room and dance our hearts out for 60 minutes.



\*\*Winter session registration begins on January 8, 2018 and ends February 2, 2018 at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.).

Registration must be done in person due to cap on participants per session. If you have any questions, please call (706) 439-6074. Price discount the more lessons you sign up for.

### SPRING SOCCER REGISTRATION

Age Groups U6-U16

Register online at: [www.mountainsoccer.org](http://www.mountainsoccer.org). Registration forms are also available to print from the website. Forms can be mailed to PO Box 1862, Blairsville, GA 30514.

Deadline to register is January 31, 2018. For additional information please check out our website at: [www.mountainsoccer.org](http://www.mountainsoccer.org) or email us at: [musa.soccer@gmail.com](mailto:musa.soccer@gmail.com).

## Swimming: Williams is State-bound



Union County High School has another state qualifying swimmer.

Brian Williams will compete in the 200 Yard Individual Medley: swimming 50 yard butterfly, 50 yard backstroke, 50 yard

breaststroke, 50 yard freestyle.

He qualified this weekend at Westminster Academy in Atlanta, GA. The High School Swim Team will be bringing 4 athletes to the State Swim Meet on Friday, Feb. 2 and Saturday, Feb. 3 at

Georgia Tech Aquatic Center.

Aidan Francis qualified for his 50 yard freestyle and the boys relay team qualified in the 200 Yard Freestyle Relay: Brian Williams, Luke Gambrell, Grayson Blocker & Aidan Francis.



## 2018 Baseball and Softball Registration opens at the Union County Recreation Department

You may register at the Union County Recreation Department located at 310 Wellborn Street or online at [unioncountyga.gov](http://unioncountyga.gov).

### Age Groups

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|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3-4 Coed- Smart Start    | 11-12 Boys- Baseball  |
| 5-6 Coed-T-Ball          | 11-12 Girls- Softball |
| 7-8 Boys- Machine Pitch  | 13-14 Boys- Baseball  |
| 7-8 Girls- Machine Pitch | 13-14 Girls- Softball |
| 9-10 Boys- Baseball      |                       |
| 9-10 Girls- Softball     |                       |