41-14: Panthers dominate Towns County in all phases

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Twenty years have passed since that September evening at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium in 1993 when Towns County defeated the Panthers for the first and only time in the history of

Going into last Friday night, the intensity of the of rivalry had been renewed. And after the Indians repainted 'The Rock' at Union County High School, the bad blood had reached a nearboiling point when the Indians rolled into town.

However, Towns County quickly realized that all they had done was awaken a sleeping giant. The Panthers' defense set the tone early and often, sparking the offense to 21 first quarter points, then a 31-0 halftime lead on the team from the other side of Brasstown Creek.

"We've been waiting all summer for this game," junior Robert Prunier said. "This game was like a playoff game for us."

Offense, defense, and special teams. Union County was firing on all cylinders.

The Panther defense's front-seven smothered and covered the Towns County running attack, rendering their Wing-T offense useless. After one quarter, the Panthers had 21 points, while the Indians' offense went backwards with minus-21 yards of total offense. In the second quarter Towns managed 47 yards of offense, getting them on the plus-side with 26 total yards of offense at the break.
"We were sweating that

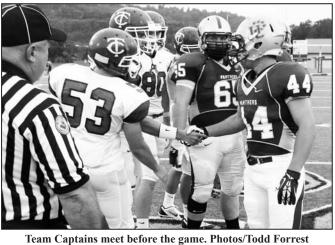
Wing-T, and I didn't know if we were going to be able to play it, but we did a pretty decent job in the first half against it," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said.

It wasn't just the defense who played lights out in the first half. The offense was clicking all night, and more importantly, played turnover-free football for 48 minutes.

Sophomore quarterback Joseph Mancuso threw for three scores in the half, sophomore running back Nick Whittle added a score, Prunier returned a punt to the Indian 3-yard line, and senior T.J. Smith connected on a 31-yard field goal as time expired in the



The Panther defense makes an early statement. Photos/Todd Forrest



second quarter.

With the Panthers sporting a 31-point lead, the mercy rule was enforced, and the second half was played with a running clock. Sophomore kicker Jake Walts connected from 29 yards out, making it a 34-0 game after three quarters.

Towns got on the board with an 80-yard scoring drive topped off with a 2-yard sneak by senior quarterback Jackson Noblet with 5:53 to play.

The ensuing Indian kickoff was fielded by Prunier at the 8-yard line where he followed his blockers, found a seam on the right side and took the kick 92-yards to the house, putting an exclamation point on the Panthers' blowout.

Trailing 41-7, the Towns County faithful that hadn't exited the stadium were given a flash of excitement, and a glimpse of the future when freshman running back Kobe Denton went 80 yards down the far sideline on the Indians' first play of the drive, capping off the scoring for both teams.

The contest got underway

with the Umpire warning both

sides' Team Captains that he was well aware that it was a rivalry game and this wasn't his first rodeo when it came to Towns and "This is my third Towns

and Union game, I know it's a rivalry but I'm not going to tolerate any trash talking," the Umpire told Towns County's captains, and Union Captains Chase Stancil, Luther Jones, and Chase Barnett. He added that the respon-

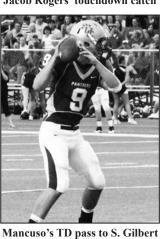
sibility would fall on the captains to keep their teammates in line, and he would give them a chance to control the jawing, but if the chatter continued, the yellow flags would fly. The game concluded with-

out incident, although after the Panther defense smacked the Indians in the mouth early, it was clear that Union would let their play do the talking.

Smith sent the opening kickoff into the endzone for the first of his seven touchbacks.

On the opening play, Towns County running back Cruz Shook





was gobbled up in the backfield by Jones and junior lineman Dakota Evans for a 2-yard loss. On 3rdand-12, junior linebacker Brett Dietz blew up a sweep forcing a 4th-and-16. With Towns backed up in-

side the 15-yard line, Prunier took

the Panthers' decent field position

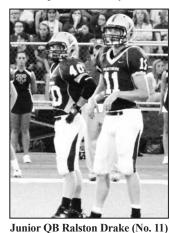
and turned into good field position with a punt return to the Indian 37-yard line. On the first play, Mancuso hit a wide open Jacob Rogers down the near sideline, and the junior jogged into the endzone for

the first score of the season. The second score wasn't far behind after Towns went threeand-out and punted again.

On 4th-and-1 from the Indian 32-yard line, Whittle went to work. He took the handoff from junior quarterback Ralston Drake, breaking loose for a 27-yard pickup. Two plays later, Whittle was rewarded for all his legwork, punching it in from a yard out.

With a two touchdown cushion, the Panthers defense turned up the heat, continuing to fly around and make plays.





A first down false start handcuffed the Indian offense. After the penalty, senior linebacker Mekiah Martin came around the end on a blitz, crippling their Wing-T with a sack, putting Towns in 2nd-and-27. From the shadow of their own endzone, Towns played it safe and ran the ball twice for some breathing room before punting from the 7-yard line.

"We ran a little blitz on that waggle and we were able to back them up to the three," Coach

As it turned out, the Indians would have been better off going for it on 4th-and-23 when Prunier brought the punt back to the Towns County 3-yard line. Like Whittle on the previ-

ous score, Prunier was allowed to put it in the endzone when Mancuso hooked up with him for Union's third score.

Down 21-0, the Indians managed to string together a pair of first downs, reaching Panther territory but the drive stalled and the Indians' punt was downed inside the 5-yard line.

Drake used his wheels to give the Panthers back their field position, breaking off an 8-yarder, 12-yarder, a 5-yarder, and then connected with sophomore Sam Gilbert through the air for another first down. The drive ended at midfield when Union was unable to convert on 4th-and-6. Towns would continue to

spin its wheels when they took over, going three-and-out and punting on 4th-and-13.

"We knocked them back on

defense a little bit in the first half and (Coach) Robby (Roxbury) called a great game defensively," Coach Allison said. Starting at their own 32,

Mancuso hit Sam Gilbert for

16 yards on third down. Whittle

rushed for 24 yards before Mancuso found another wide open receiver, this time it was Sam Gilbert on the other end a 30-yard scoring strike with 4:39 to play in the half. "We had great field position all game," Coach Allison said. "We had three touchdowns on less than 100 yards of total offense.

Robert (Prunier) doing a great job fielding and returning punts." The Indians picked up a first down through the air but a sack by junior lineman Reid Watson brought up a 4th-and-17 and

That's because of our defense and

another punt for Towns. With 89 seconds left in the half, Drake entered as quarterback. A pair of handoffs to Whittle, an end-around to Mancuso, and a

scramble by Drake put the Panthers into Indian territory. A 12-yard gain by Whittle was turned into a 27-yard net gain when the Indians were flagged for a facemask on the tackle. With time running out, Smith came onto the field to attempt at 36-yard field

goal. The snap was low and Smith didn't get a chance from 36 yards, however Towns jumped offsides, giving him another shot from 31 yards. This time the snap was perfect and Smith split the uprights with zeroes showing on the clock to go along with a 31-0 score staring at the Indians as they trotted to the visitors' field house. An early penalty derailed the Panthers' first drive of the

second half but after a punt by Prunier pinned the Indians at the 12-yard line, the defense pounced again when Watson jarred the ball

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Chambers shuts out Jefferson twice in one day; Union 5-0 in Region

8-AA Champs and their J.V. unable to score on Union's freshman; Lady Panthers tee off on Greene 16-0 and 25-0

By Todd Forrest North Georgia News sports@nganews.com

It was the best of teams, it was the worst of teams scheduled for the Union County Lady Panthers (8-3, 5-0) last week.

On Tuesday, Union shutout defending Region Champion Jefferson 1-0 in another instant classic between the Lady Panthers and Lady Dragons. Union's freshman pitcher

Laken Chambers worked 7 innings in a 6-0 victory for the Lady Panther J.V. squad. She then turned around and worked another complete game shutout in Union's win over Jefferson's varsity unit. The Lady Dragons escaped

Union with a 1-0 win and the Region Championship last October so Lady Panther Head Coach Jessica Stewart didn't have to emphasize what this game meant to her squad, they were already well aware.

On Thursday, an overmatched Greene County Lady Tigers squad came to Blairsville for a double header and came out on the wrong end of 16-0 and 25-0 thrashings from the Lady Panthers.

It's debatable whether or not Greene should even be playing a Region schedule, but since it was an 8-AA contest, Union had to take them seriously, and that didn't bode well for the girls from Greensboro.

Lady Panthers 1 Jefferson 0

Union County scored the game's lone run in the fourth inning when senior Madison Rich led off the inning with a

Junior Hallye King reached on an error and junior Courtney Busbee singled to right to load the bases with one out. Junior Kelsey Nix went down swinging but during a pickoff attempt at third, the catcher's throw got past the third baseman, allowing Rich to score on the error.

Chambers worked around trouble all game to improve to 4-0 on the year.

"It feels awesome and I was just glad I could help the team win," Chambers said about shutting out the defending Region



Champs. "Jefferson is a very good team. Hopefully we gain some momentum from this win and keep working hard."

5 hits, including a leadoff single in the second but Chambers recorded a strikeout and catcher Courtney Busbee caught a Lady Dragon runner napping at first and picked

her off for the second out. In the fourth, Jefferson got two aboard via walks but a grounder to shortstop Crystal Busbee ended the threat.

With two outs in the sixth, Jefferson strung together consecutive singles for the first time trouble with a strike out to preserve the 1-0 lead.

A one-out double in the seventh put the Lady Dragons back in business. A groundout to Crystal Busbee advanced the ended the game with her fourth strikeout.

Union managed just two hits in the contest, one from Crystal Busbee and the other by Chambers, but it was enough for the win. Rich and sophomore Maddie Garrett drew walks for the Lady Panthers.

Lady Panthers 16 Greene County 0

A 13-run second inning and a three inning perfect game by Crystal Busbee (3-3) was to the plate recorded at least one



Junior Courtney Busbee fires to second. Photo/Todd Forrest

enough for Union in the run-rule

shortened contest. Crystal Busbee went 2-for-3 at the plate with 2 runs and 2 The freshman surrendered RBIs while striking out six from

the circle. The Lady Panthers, who were aided by seven Greene County errors, got 2 RBI's from Garrett thanks to two bases loaded walks. King went 1-for-2 with 2 runs and an RBI, Kelsey Nix, who singled with the bags packed in the first, finished 1-for-1 with 3 RBIs, a walk, and a run. Senior Allie Stroman walked and scored

In the second, all 19 Union all game, but Chambers slipped hitters that came to the plate reached as all three outs were recorded on the base paths. When the dust settled, the Lady Panthers scored 13 runs and held a 16-0

Greene County went down runner to third, but Chambers in order in the third and the game was called.

Lady Panthers 25 Greene County 0

Fourteen Lady Tiger errors and 14 first inning runs for the Lady Panthers put this one away

Crystal Busbee went back to work from the circle, picking up her fourth win of the season. She allowed two hits, no walks, and struck out six.

Every player Union sent

RBI, with sophomores Garrett and Karley Nix leading the way with three a piece.

Garrett finished 2-for-4 with 2 runs, Karley Nix also went 2-for-4 with 2 runs and a double. Courtney Busbee was

1-for-3 with 2 runs, 2 RBIs, and a double, Hallye King went 3-for-4 with 3 runs, 2 RBIs, and a double. Crystal Busbee was 1-for-4 with 3 runs and an RBI. Sophomore Johnah Langston went 3-for-4 with 3-for-4 with 4 runs and an RBI.

Freshmen Lydia Arrowood and Kendra Tanner had a good day with Arrowood going 2-for-4 with 3 runs, an RBI, and a double. Tanner was 1-for-3 with 3 runs, and an RBI. Kelsey Nix tripled during a 1-for-3 performance, driving in one and scoring twice.

Union will resume Region 8-AA action on Thursday when they host Rabun County at 6 On Friday and Saturday

Union will take part in the Veterans Memorial Tournament in Oconee County.

Friday the Lady Panthers will face Jones County from Class AAAAA at 4 p.m. and Region 6-AA's G.A.C. at 6 p.m. Saturday Union begins at 8 a.m. with Savannah Christian, then Heritage-Catoosa from Class AAAA at 12:30 p.m. The tournament concludes at 2:30 p.m. against East Hall.



Jefferson's J.V. and Varsity squads had a tough time dealing with Union's freshman pitcher Laken Chambers. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers fall 7-2 at Fannin but still win season series

By Todd Forrest North Georgia News sports@nganews.com

Blue Ridge - After an emotional win over the Lady Dragons on Tuesday and a scheduling change moved the Greene County games to Thursday, Union had to pay a visit to Fannin on Wednes-

After dropping two straight to Union, the Lady Rebels were out for revenge and had the perfect opportunity to jump on the Lady Panthers, and they struck early. Fannin leapt out to a 5-1

lead after two innings and were never threatened again. Union added one run in the

third but the Lady Rebels put them away with a two-run bottom half of the inning. The home team pounded

out 13 hits off Crystal Busbee, and despite allowing eight hits and three errors, limited Union to just two early runs. Madison Rich reached on

a one-out single and later scored when Hallye King brought her home on a two-out single, giving Union an early lead after a half

Fannin grabbed the lead for good with two doubles and

Crystal Busbee

a single in the bottom half of the first.

the Lady Panthers got a run back when Kendra Tanner led off with a single and Crystal Busbee followed suit. The pair would reach scor-

Trailing 5-1 in the third,

ing position off a throwing error before Rich brought in Tanner for Union's second and final run. Rich finished 2-for-4 with

a run and an RBI and King was 2-for-3 with an RBI. Tanner was 1-for-3 with a run, and Crystal and Courtney Busbee each singled

Crystal Busbee allowed 7 runs but only two were earned. The junior struck out three and walked two.