

Sports

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Too close for comfort: Panthers narrowly escape at Towns

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HIWASSEE - A career-long 44-yard field goal by senior Eric Hougrand right before the half proved to be the difference maker in Union's 17-14 victory at rival Towns County.

Hougrand's kick gave Union a comfortable 17-0 lead at the intermission.

The second half was a different story.

Towns was able to take advantage of four Panther turnovers in the second half as it appeared the Panthers were cruising to an easy win.

With just over five minutes remaining, and Union leading 17-8, senior Clay Burnette picked off an Indian pass and returned it into Towns County territory.

The Panthers would drive into the red zone before Union's third fumble of the half set up a 66-yard scoring drive to get the Indians within a field goal with 1:55 left to play.

Union's Jacob Rogers recovered Towns' onside kick and three plays later, senior quarterback T Bentley took a knee and the game was over.

"We had three series in a row where we were moving the ball, then we just started fumbling," Union Head Coach Brian Allison said.

"We played the entire first half without a turnover or a penalty and played pretty good defense. Then the second half we just didn't play."

Towns County's plan early was to establish the running game. However, Union's defense shutdown the Indians thanks to a front seven consisting of sophomores Chase Barnett, Brett Dietz, junior Luther Jones, seniors Cody



Luther Jones and Brett Dietz swallow up Towns County's running back behind the line of scrimmage. Photo/Todd Forrest

Davenport, Craig Jones, and CJ Byers, who dominated Towns' offensive line for most of the game.

It wasn't until the fourth quarter when Towns opened up the playbook and counter-punched the Panthers.

"We played a good game that got a little too close at the end," Luther Jones said. "It was first game jitters. We had a lot of new kids, we got called for a few penalties, but that's part of it. But I love coming over to Towns County and playing because we always beat them."

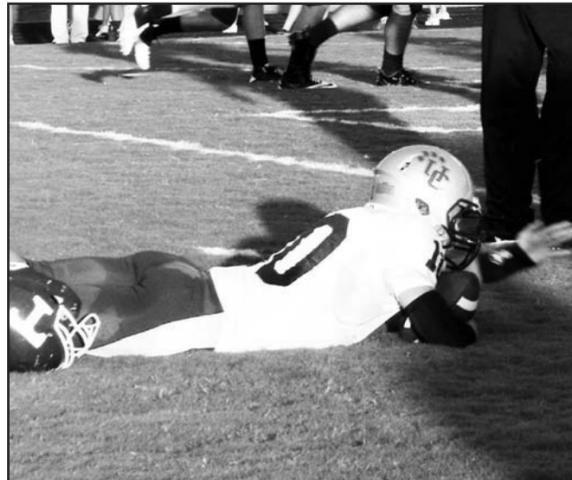
Jones wasn't being cocky when he made that statement, he was only stating the facts. Union has never lost at Frank McClure Stadium in Hiwassee.

Although the contest last Friday night is the first time that a Union vs. Towns game has been decided by less than six points, Union has still come out on top in 26 of the 27 meetings between the rivals.

Early it looked as if Union would cruise to its 15th consecutive victory over the Indians. After forcing the Indians to punt on its first two

possessions, which saw senior Lalo Rivera pick up a key third down sack on a corner-blitz, Union struck on their first play of the series. Bentley connected with fellow senior Josh Kim on a 47-yard go-route and the receiver would streak down the near sideline for a Panther touchdown with 1:21 left in the opening quarter.

"We were setting them up for it," Kim said. "We got them in man coverage, I had a mismatch and I won. The safety was over and T (Bentley) read



T Bentley stretches and signals for a Panther first down following a 'de-helmeting' of an Indian defender. Photo/Todd Forrest

it perfectly and it was just a great play."

The Union County defense would again respond by forcing another Indian punt and that's when Bentley and the Panther offense would go to work on the ground.

Bentley carried the ball for a Union first down to set up another deep ball. This time, the Indian defender was beaten on the play and was forced to draw a pass interference flag to prevent a would-be Panther touchdown.



UC's kicker, #2 Eric Hougrand, gets set for the opening kickoff of the 2012 season. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union reached the Indian 15-yard line where they were faced with a 4th-and-2. Bentley would rush his troops back to the line of scrimmage and a misaligned Towns defense was drawn off sides by Bentley's hard count.

Two plays later, Burnette would rush it in from 8 yards out to give Union a 14-0 lead with 6:39 to play in the half.

The Panther defense, yet again, coerced Towns into another punt and Union took over, deep in its own territory with 1:30 to work with.

That's when Coach Allison and Offensive Coordinator Howard McCombs came to a conclusion that possibly won their team the game during the second quarter.

With momentum on the Panther sideline and knowing they would receive the opening kick of the second half, the Panther coaching staff could've played it conservatively and simply ran out the clock.

"Coach McCombs had asked me what we wanted to do before the half and how aggressive we should be, and I

told him to wait and see if we could get a first down," Coach Allison said.

Bentley responded with two runs to the left and got Coach Allison his first down.

Not only did Coach Allison get what he wanted, it also had the Towns County staff convinced that Union was content to take a 14-0 lead into the locker room.

"Towns started playing up and we knew we could hit them deep," Coach Allison said.

Bentley would again pick on the same corner back with the deep ball. This time he hit Rivera for a 40-yard gain and set Union up on the Towns 27-yard line.

Bentley got his troops back to the line to spike the ball with 12 seconds left.

On the ensuing play, Bentley hit Rivera on a corner route in the end zone but the Union receiver was ruled out-of-bounds.

"We were two inches from a third touchdown but Lalo was just out of bounds," Coach Allison said.

With 6 seconds showing on the clock, Hougrand marched onto the field and nailed his game-deciding 44-yarder as time expired in the half.

However, the Panthers would fumble on the opening possession of the third and later, Towns took advantage of a pass interference and an unsportsmanlike conduct flag on the Panthers to set up their first score of the evening with 1:08 left in the third. Jackson Noblet scored on a 4th and goal quarterback keeper.

Bentley moved the Panther offense to midfield before throwing his lone pick of the game as time expired in the third.

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Lady Panthers fend off Dragons; demolish Tigers

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Ninth ranked Union County (10-2) picked up two more Region 8-AA victories last week over Jefferson and Greene County.

On Wednesday, Union picked up a vital 3-2 win over Jefferson to keep the Lady Panthers in thick of things, atop the region standings.

Thursday, they rolled into Greensboro and posted a football score in a 20-0 romp of the Tigers that was called after three innings.

Hannah Hughes continued to power the Lady Panther offense, hitting two homers and driving in seven runs in two games. Hughes already has five homers and 26 RBIs on the year, both team highs.

From the circle, Bailey Byers pitched a complete game against Jefferson for her sixth win of the season, while Chelsey Cook picked up win number three at Greene.

**Lady Panthers 20
Greene County 0**

GREENSBORO-Union scored 10 runs in the first inning, eight in the second, and two in the third during a complete dismantling of Greene County last week.

Union's 20-run margin is the largest in school history and the most runs the Lady Panthers have scored in a game during Coach Jessica Stewart's six-plus year tenure. Not even Union's State Runner-Up squad of 2010 broke the 15-run barrier during its 32-win season.

"I subbed in the first after a 10-1 run lead," Coach Stewart said. "Greene was struggling just to get an out but it's always good to get some different players playing time."

Fifteen different Lady Panther players went to the plate as Coach Stewart did all she could to keep Union from batting all the way into Friday morning.

Hughes drove in five runs and homered, Allie Stroman doubled and knocked in two runs while Shawna Brown, Crystal Busbee, and Courtney Busbee each tripled and picked up an RBI.

Others adding to Union's offensive onslaught were Byers and Amber Seeba who doubled, Madison Rich was hit by a pitch and scored a run, Madison Garrett went 2-for-3 with an RBI,



Exhausted seniors: Bailey Byers, Hannah Hughes, and Shawna Brown after a grueling battle with Jefferson. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Allie Stroman

Carly Adams walked twice, scored twice, and stole a base. Haylle King contributed a run and an RBI, Karly Nix scored two times, Courtney Payne swiped two bases and scored, and Rebekah Stanton and Johannah Langston, each chipped in with a base hit.

Cook threw all three innings in the win, allowing one hit and striking out two.

"It was a long trip for three innings of softball," Coach Stewart added.

**Lady Panthers 3
Jefferson 2**

Despite being no-hit for the first 3 2/3 innings, Hughes ended Jefferson's bid at both a perfect game and a shutout after lining a shot over the left-center field fence.

pitcher) was living on the outside corner and they needed to start looking to hit the ball middle-right instead of trying to pull it and pop up."

Byers was one out away from the first complete-game shutout of her career, when Jefferson strung together four consecutive singles following a Union error to get them within a run. The senior pitcher slammed the door by getting the final out on a grounder to short.

Byers allowed seven hits, walked one and struck out one.

"In that seventh inning we did make a couple mistakes and I knew we needed to put the game away and finish it," Coach Stewart said. "I think Bailey pitched great. The defense played well behind her, up until the last inning, and we came out with a good region win."

The Lady Panthers were able to survive despite only getting four hits, although three went for extra bases.

Hughes finished 2-for-3 with two RBIs and two runs, Brown singled and reached on an error, and Rich doubled and scored.

This week Union hosts another Lanier Point rematch, this time with Dawson County on Tuesday. Dawson defeated the Lady Panthers 7-3 last month in the Lanier finals.

The Lady Panthers will go for the season sweep when they host Rabun on Thursday, before heading off to Oconee County for the Veterans Tournament on Friday and Saturday. Union will open with Stephens County on Friday at 4 p.m.

Union County will resume action on Monday, Sept. 10th as they travel to Dawson County in the third and final meeting of the season between



Crystal Busbee records the second out of the seventh inning against Jefferson. Photo/Todd Forrest

UCHS Football Schedule

Sept 7 vs Fannin County (Recognizing the 1957 Panthers)
Sept 14 vs Andrews, NC (Recognizing Middle School Team)
Sept 21 - Bye Week
Sept 28 vs Washington Wilkes (Recognizing Rec Dept Teams)
Oct 5 @ Oglethorpe County
Oct 12 vs Riverside Military Academy (Homecoming)
Oct 19 @ Greene County
Oct 26 @ Rabun County
Nov 2 vs Social Circle (Senior Night)
Nov 9 @ Jefferson

UCHS upcoming Softball games

Sept. 4 vs Dawson County
Sept. 6 vs Rabun County
Sept. 7-8 Veterans Tournament (@Oconee Co.)
Sept. 10 @ Dawson County
Sept. 11 vs Social Circle

Joe Collins

Tips from the Range

For several weeks now, we have been studying the mechanics and fundamentals of the golf swing to try and understand how the whole of the swing works. We've looked at balance, posture, grip, alignment, rotation and weight transfer. All of these elements need to be as close to proper as possible in order to give yourself a decent chance of moving the club to what our focus will be about this week and that is our ultimate goal, impact.

That magical point in the swing where the ball actually makes contact with the face of the club is what determines the flight and direction of the shot. All our efforts are focused on the split second that the ball leaves the ground and begins its journey to what we hope is our chosen target. It's the impact, of the ball and the club face, which gives us the instant feedback that determines what the next word out of our mouth will be when, or sometimes before, the swing is finished. The only way to control the impact is to correctly do the things which return the club to the original set-up position and those are the mechanics and fundamentals we have been discussing the past few weeks.

Once the club head has moved through the ball, or has passed impact, we move into what we call the "follow-through". This area is the mirror image of the back swing with the triangle in front of the chest and the arms extended. This burning off of energy is where you will find out if you have made a good swing or a bad swing so always finish the follow-through or you will cheat yourself out of some good feedback. This information is vital in determining whether or not you made a good effort at

swinging the club.

If we were to try and pick out the one thing that will affect impact the most, when the swing is done correctly, it would have to be the function of the forward arm. Balance is always first and foremost the primary goal, but if the balance is perfect and the forward arm doesn't perform correctly, the shot can still end up bad.

The forward arm should be straight throughout the swing until the follow-through is nearly finished. Always allow the forward arm to rotate naturally so the following arm will finish over the top of the forward arm after impact. This will make the swing feel smooth and graceful.

This concludes my overall look at the golf swing and the elements that define the proper function of the swing. Remember that you want to think of swinging the club and not "hitting" the ball. The ball simply gets in the way as the club approaches the bottom of the swing. Swinging a golf club correctly is difficult and should be given the respect it deserves by practicing. Nobody hits the ball the same way as anybody else and rarely do we hit it the same way from round to round. Someone once asked the great Sam Snead before a tournament round if he was going to play a fade or a draw today and he replied, "can't say cause I haven't been to the range yet, I'll let you know in a little while." This is an example of how fickle the golf swing can be so if he had trouble from day to day then imagine what us normal people will go through.

Next week we will look at the most important and most difficult part of playing the game; chipping and putting. Until then keep practicing the things we have talked about the last few weeks and hopefully your swing will improve.

Good luck and I will see you on the course!