

UCMS Panthers whip Basin, gearing up for finale at Lumpkin

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Union County Middle School football team has one game left in the regular season, and it's a big one.

After throttling Copper Basin, Tenn. 34-6 last week, the Panthers return to league play on Thursday when they travel to Lumpkin County for a battle to determine second place and home field advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

During Union's tune-up game with Copper Basin, the Panthers pounced on the Cougars early for a 28-0 lead at the half.

Nic Rodriguez scored two touchdowns. His first was a 3-yard touchdown run, right up the gut. His second was a pick-6 that he took back 65-yards for a score. He also returned the opening kick 95-yards for a touchdown but had it called back because of a block-in-the-back penalty.

Quarterback Bo Lynch was his usual self, rushing for a 48-yard touchdown in the second quarter. Meanwhile, Micah Gilbert scored from 15 yards out for Union's final score of the half.

Seventh grader Cole Wright scored from 20 yards out during the third quarter to make it a 34-0 game.

Kicker Parker McCombs connected on four extra point attempts for the Panthers.

"We played well but started a little slow because of turnovers and penalties," Coach Casey Jones said. "Those are mistakes we've got to fix before we face a team like Lumpkin."

After Rodriguez's kick return was called back, Union suffered from a bad snap and was forced into a punting situation. On Basin's first play from scrimmage, the Panther defense forced a fumble that set up the Panthers at the Cougar 33-yard line. However, two plays later, Union would suffer from another bad snap and would turn the ball back over to the Cougars.



Union County Middle School football during its 34-6 victory over Copper Basin, TN. Union County will visit Lumpkin County on Thursday to decide home field advantage in the first round of next week's playoffs. Photos by Todd Forrest

The Panther defense would respond by forcing Basin into another three-and-out before their punt was partially blocked by the Panthers, giving Union ideal field position - 31 yards from pay dirt.

On the first play Lynch hit Zach Stone on a screen that was taken 28 yards before he stepped out of bounds at the 3-yard line. On the next play, Union didn't try anything fancy and gave the ball to Rodriguez and the Panther running back powered his way into the end zone.

After Basin took over on its own 24-yard line, two plays later Stone snatched a Cougar pass at midfield but Union's offense was unable to convert on fourth down and handed the ball back to the Cougars.

As the second quarter started and the teams flipped ends of the field, the Panthers also flipped the switch and the rout was on.

Rodriguez's interception was returned for a touchdown and 15 seconds into the quarter, Union led 14-0.

On the ensuing kickoff, McCombs' perfectly placed pooch-kick was recovered by Rodriguez. Facing a third-and-15, Lynch took off and scored from 48 yards out to give Union a 21-0 advantage with 6:46 remaining in the half.

Basin would fumble again and just like that, Union found themselves up 28-0 when Gilbert scored on a 15-yard rush.

The Cougars finally moved the football on the fol-

lowing drive as they picked up their first and only first down of the half. What little momentum they had didn't hang around long after seventh grader Cole Dockery broke up a pass on a fake punt attempt.

Union County turned the ball over on downs but Andrew Ensley redeemed the Panthers when he intercepted a Basin pass with 1:33 to play before halftime.

During the second half Union County added another score late in the third quarter when seventh grader Cole Wright's 20-yard scamper made it a 34-0 game.

The Cougars finally got on the board in the fourth for a 34-6 final score.

"Other than the turnovers on the first two drives,

we played really well," Coach Jones said. "The younger kids came in late and did a great job for us."

Now Union turns its attention to Lumpkin County in a game that will decide the second seed in the upcoming playoffs. The two teams will again meet the following week, with the winner of Thursday's game hosting the second meeting. However, this situation is not unfamiliar to Coach Jones and the Panthers.

"We were in the same position last year," he said. "We had to beat them twice in two weeks and we were able to come out on top in both games."

Coach Jones knows that albeit a familiar spot, it's still difficult to beat the same

team, especially one the caliber of Lumpkin, in consecutive weeks.

"It's kind of a catch-22," Coach Jones said. "If we win, we have to turn around and play them again. If we lose, we know we still got another shot at them the following week. As long as we play good, solid football, we'll be fine. My plan is to go over to Lumpkin and wear them out in the first meeting where they will dread having to come back across the mountain to face us again."

If Union County can come out on top and advance to the finals at Rabun County, the Panthers will get another shot at the defending league champs, who Jones feels is not as talented as his Panther squad.

Union led Rabun 19-6 in the opening game before some injuries and bad luck allowed Rabun to squeak out the win.

"We want to get this win over Lumpkin for sure," Coach Jones said. "But we're more interested in getting that second win because we want another shot at Rabun County."

Lady Panther Cross Country takes Murphy meet

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The Union County Girls Cross Country team finished in first place last week during a meet at Murphy, NC.

Freshman Emma Garrison was the overall winner for the Lady Panthers with a personal best time of 20:14.

Garrison was followed by ninth overall finisher Rachel Vester at 22:31, 10th overall Ansley Garrison, at 22:34, 12th overall Rachel Todd at 22:46, 18th overall Alyssa Arnold at 23:18, and 19th overall Stephanie Busse at 23:32.

"I was very pleased with the effort of the entire team," Coach Jackie Hughes said. "Many of them ran their season best at Murphy, and the hard work they have been putting in at practice is starting to show in their race times. Our goal is to improve each week, and be ready to compete well at the Region Meet."

At the Murphy meet, the boys finished second out of eight teams.

The scores for the Top 3 teams were: Hayesville - 51, Union - 74, Murphy - 97.

Jeremy Webb finished third overall with a personal



Union County Cross Country teams at the starting line last week in Murphy, NC. Photos by Joe Collins

best time of 16:59. The other top six runners were:

Cristian Garcia, 17th overall at 19:44, 18th overall Andrew Nelson - 19:49, 20th overall Ryan Rogers - 19:50, 21st overall Aaron Stafford

- 20:03, 22nd overall Will Stone- 20:04.

"The boys ran first, and it was an excellent race," Coach Hughes said. "The competition was very close, and our times again showed a lot of improve-

ment. They packed together very well, and that helped keep our score down."

Union County Cross Country teams ran at the West Hall meet on Sept. 11.

There were 20 teams in attendance. Union's girls finished tied with West Hall for fifth place, but Union's sixth place runner won the tie breaker, so Union County's Lady Panthers finished fifth.

Union County's Top-7 were: Emma Garrison at 21:08, Ansley Garrison at 22:21, Rachel Vester at 23:00, Rachel Todd at 23:53, Alyssa Arnold at 24:18, Stephanie Busse at 24:42, and Kenna Bauman rounding out the Top 7 at 24:50.

"I felt that the girls ran very well against some very good competition," Coach Hughes said. "Our times are continuing to drop, and we are still finishing in a pretty good pack."

The Union County boys were led by Jeremy Webb who finished with a time of 17:19, and received an individual medal for finishing eighth overall.

Rounding out Union's Top 7: Cristian Garcia at 19:33, Ryan Rogers at 19:41, Aaron Stafford at 19:45, Jacob Kelley at 20:16, Andrew Nelson at 20:24, and Will Stone finishing at 20:34.

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games so far in her career for us. She is at the top in batting average at .508 and is one of the best defensive players I have coached. She broke the single season home run record set by Kaitlyn Seabolt and tied Callie Dyer's single season RBI record. Hannah has been an impact player each year and will end her senior year with many accomplishments. I look forward to watching her play next season in college."

Amber Seeba: Seeba is the daughter of Kimberly Smith and has played softball for four years and lettered for three years.

Seeba plays third base and her most memorable moment is going to the State Finals during her sophomore year, the camping trip during her junior year, and turning a triple play during travel-ball.

Seeba plans to attend college, become successful, and live life to the fullest.

Seeba is handing her bat down to sophomore Crystal Busbee.

"I would like to thank my mom for being my number one fan and always being there for me," Seeba said. "I also would like to thank Shawwna Brown, Carly Adams, Hannah Hughes, and most of all Bailey Byers. They were always there for me and we grew closer together each year. I want to

thank Coach Stewart and Coach Cagle. You guys always knew what to say to make me smile. I will miss you Debbie (her nickname for Coach Stewart).

"Last I would like to thank God for everything he has blessed me with and I love all you guys."

"Amber has probably improved the most from year to year," Coach Stewart said. "Her batting average is almost 50 points higher than last season, and her defense has stepped it up a notch with all diving plays she's made on the hot corner. Amber is fun to have around, works hard and has really become an important team player."

The Lady Panthers begin the Region Tournament at noon Saturday when they host the winner of Oglethorpe County vs. Washington-Wilkes in a best two-out-of-three series. Game Three will be held on Monday at 5 p.m. if necessary.

Two wins and Union will play for its third consecutive region title on Saturday, Oct. 4th, in Blairsville.

Two losses by Union this weekend, means the Lady Panthers will still play on Oct. 4th for the third-seed in the State Tournament.

The consolation game would also be played at Union County.

Union County High School Cheerleaders hold annual Spirit Camp



The Union County High School Cheerleaders held their annual Spirit Camp Sept. 17-19. More than 75 students, kindergarten through fifth grade, participated this year. The girls were divided into small groups to learn a cheer, chant and dance. Wednesday afternoon a showcase of what they learned was presented to the parents. A special thanks to Coosa Creek Embroidery for designing the T-shirts for the camp. The cheerleaders would also like to thank the administration and staff of Union County Primary School and Union County Elementary School for their help in making this year's camp a success.