

Sports

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Defense smothers Hokes Bluff as Lady Panthers stroll into Round Two

Union ladies reach semi finals of Battle of the States for third time in four years

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Hiawassee - Union County Head Coach David Tucker and his band of sharpshooters have relied heavily upon the 3-point shot during their 7-3 start, and will continue to live and die from beyond the arc.

Although, one aspect that's easily overlooked, and just as important, is the Lady Panthers ability to clamp down on the opposition's outside shooters. And during last weekend's 57-27 opening round victory over a sound Hokes Bluff Ala. squad, Union's defense limited the Eagles to just one trey and a shooting percentage south of 25 percent.

The defensive effort didn't stop at the 3-point line, in fact, after Hokes Bluff's first basket of the game at the 5:54 mark of the first quarter, the Lady Panthers didn't allow another field goal until their lone trey, which came five minutes into the third quarter.

The Eagles (7-6) followed with a short jumper moments later and then a layup in the final two-and-a-half minutes of the third.

A basket in the paint came with 2:40 left in the game for their fifth and final field goal of the day.

Two days removed from Christmas, it was no surprise that both offenses were a bit sluggish in the early going. Luckily for Union, they brought their A-game on the defensive end, and when the offense finally found its groove in the third quarter, it allowed them to run off and leave the visitors from the Yellowhammer State.

Union's Brooke Maddox led all scorers with 19 points to go along with a game high 4 steals. She went 6-for-8 at the charity stripe - all coming during a 10-point first half for the senior guard.

Less than 50 seconds into the contest, Maddox showed a sign of things to come with a steal that resulted in a 2-for-2 trip to the line.

That's as close as Hokes Bluff would be all game.

Junior Layne Colwell forced a jump ball that led to a Lisa Nalaschi trey for a 5-0 Union lead.

Following an Eagles basket, sophomore Holly Stroman swiped Hokes Bluff and connected on a short jumper in the paint and then connected on a trey from the wing for a 10-2 Lady Panthers advantage.

A pair of free throws by Hokes came at the 2:51 mark of the opening frame and almost a



Brooke Maddox advances up the court and shot six free throws in the second quarter thanks to her aggressiveness. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

minute later, Colwell's second foul resulted in one more free throw to slice the Union lead in half at 10-5.

That score would hold up for the remainder of the period, but the Lady Panthers opened the second frame with a quick spurt that escalated into a 14-4 run.

Less than 10 seconds into the second, Maddox drew a foul on a drive to the basket and hit 1-of-2 at the line. Colwell then forced another turnover and with her team in the bonus, senior Kaitlyn Day hit two from the stripe.

Nalaschi recorded her second foul that sent the Eagles to the line for two, to stay within two possessions of Union at 13-7.

On the ensuing possession, Maddox nailed a 16-foot jumper but on the other end, Nalaschi was whistled for her third personal foul - sending the senior to the bench with 6:07 to play before halftime.

Maddox wasted no time in returning the favor and drawing a foul on Hokes and knocking down both her free throw attempts to put Union on top at 17-7. Less than 20 seconds later Maddox cashed in another turnover, going coast-to-coast for a layup, to stretch the lead to 19-7 with just over five minutes until the break.

That's when the Eagles appeared to catch a break moments later when Colwell picked up foul number three. Two free throws made it a 19-9 game with two Union starters on the bench in foul trouble.

But the Lady Panthers' bench came through immediately when junior Stephanie Busse putback a Union miss.

Maddox continued her thievery with another pick that led to a free throw and a 22-9 lead at the halfway point of the second quarter.

After a rare missed free throw by Hokes, junior Kim Coyne blew past her defender and went baseline for a nifty reverse layup for a 24-9 score.

As the clock ticked under three minutes, Maddox joined Colwell and Nalaschi on the bench with her second foul, leaving the door slightly cracked for the Eagles to stick a foot in.

They would outscore Union 7-4 for the remainder of the half with three Lady Panther-starters relegated to watching from the sidelines.

Coyne, who finished with a career-high 11 points, used her speed to attack the basket for two more layups for a 28-13 lead with 2:36 before the half.

Union maintained its double-digit margin over the final two-plus minutes thanks to three missed free throws - after the Eagles were 11-for-12 over the game's first 14 minutes. They also turned it over twice and missed a layup and two point-blank putback attempts off a rare Union turnover. (The Lady Panthers turned it over nine times during the contest).

With only two 3-point baskets in the first half, Union still held a 28-16 advantage, built mostly on the backs of their defense.

The Lady Panthers also controlled the boards and early in the second half, Stroman made a statement with an offensive rebound and basket for a 30-16 score.

The defense continued



Senior Kaitlyn Day takes aim at the foul line as sophomore Holly Stroman and the Union County coaching staff looks on. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

to make life easy on the Lady Panthers until they found their stroke from downtown. Two minutes into the third quarter, Maddox turned a turnover into a layup that gave Union a 16-point lead.

Both teams would then

go into a three-minute scoring

drought that saw Colwell pick

up her fourth foul. Then, at the

3:02 mark of the third, Hokes

connected on its only trey of

the game. An errant Union pass

gave the ball back to the Eagles

who hit a 12-foot jumper that

suddenly made it 32-21 and

showed their was no quit in

Head Coach Jason Shields'

Hokes Bluff squad.

Unfortunately, for the

Eagles, things were about to

take a turn for the worse.

Nalaschi connected on a trey from the top-of-the-key with a defender draped all over her. Then, after missing her first seven shots from three-point land, Day found her stroke.

The Union lefty found the bottom of the net from the wing. Later, Maddox dished to an open Coyne in the corner for a dagger-trey with just under 30 seconds to play in the quarter.

In a span of 78 seconds, Union used three treys to expand its lead from 32-21 to 41-21.

The Lady Panthers continued to build on their lead with a transition layup by Maddox off an assist from Day. Maddox added another easy bucket off a turnover.

Leading 45-23 the only

thing slowing down Union's of-

fensive attack was foul trouble.

With four fouls on Nalaschi and

Coyne, the Eagles could only

trim a point off the deficit - to

45-24.

Colwell was fouled under the basket and hit both free throws. Hokes misfired on the front end of a one-and-one and Maddox hit her first trey off another feed from Day.

A Nalaschi steal resulted in trey number two for Day when the lefty hit from the corner. Leading 53-26 with 90

seconds to play, Union's start-

ers took a seat to a nice round

of applause from pro-Purple

and Gold crowd.

Senior Madison Lariscy picked an Eagles ball han-

dler and glided in for an easy

layup. And finally, freshman

Bailey Daniel dropped in an

other deuce as the final horn sounded.

Freshman Baylee Young hauled in a rebound, freshman

Grace Wishmeyer recorded an

assist and sophomore Ashley

Fair had a steal in the final

quarter.

After a 42-36 defeat to

the same Hokes Bluff squad on

day three of last year's tourna-

ment, the Union County coach-

ing staff was well aware of the

uphill battle that awaited.

Coming off a 24-win sea-

son in 2013-14, the Eagles were

one of the most talented squads

in the tournament, but wound

up in a bracket with what was

arguably the best four teams in

the tournament.

Led by its only senior

Hannah Evans, Hokes Bluff

featured the most experienced

player in the entire tournament,

and one of its most decorated

and prolific scorers.

Evans, who is also a star

on the softball diamond was

selected to play in Alabama's

North-South All Star Game

last summer following her

junior year.

In the 2010 Battle of the States, Hokes Bluff drew the Lady Panthers in the first round, and Evans made an immediate splash. Literally.

As an eighth grader, Evans was splashing the nets from downtown as one of the deadliest shooters in the tournament - hitting two threes in the opening round loss to Union.

In this year's loss, Evans was limited to 9 points and 4 rebounds. Junior Tylynn Register also chipped in 9 points and 3 steals.

As for the Lady Panthers, they advanced into the tournament's semi finals for the third time in four years.

In between Union and its third appearance in the Cham-

pionship Game is the defending champ, Hayesville, NC. A win and Union will play for its first BOTs title on Tuesday.

The results of the Union County vs Hayesville game were unavailable at press time. For results from this week's

Battle of the States, you can

visit our website at: www.

nganews.com

Union County stats

SCORING: Maddox

19, Coyne 11, Day 8, Stro-

man 7, Nalaschi 6, Colwell 2,

Lariscy 2, Busse 2, Daniel 2

REBOUNDS: Day 8, Stroman

6, Nalaschi 6, Maddox 4, Col-

well 4, Busse 4, Danek 1, Fair

1, Young 1 **ASSISTS:** Day 4,

Maddox 4, Stroman 3, Lariscy

1, Wishmeyer 1 **STEALS:**

Maddox 4, Lariscy 2, Colwell

2, Nalaschi 1, Stroman 1, Coyne

1, Fair 1 **BLOCKS:** Nalaschi 5.

TEAM SHOOTING: Overall

20-56 (36%) Three Point 7-29

(24%) Free Throw 10-14 (71%)

HOKES BLUFF: Free Throw

16-23 (70%)

Union upended by Hokes Bluff and White County at B.O.T.S.

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In the Lady Panthers game, Hokes Bluff, Ala. was held to one 3-pointer and lost by 30.

As for the the guys game, Hokes Bluff didn't hit a single trey. They didn't need to. They didn't even need to hit a single jump shot during their 42-40 victory.

Every Eagles basket came

in the paint, most were layups.

Despite the best efforts by Kyle Hamby, Hunter Hughes, and Tyler Odom to keep the Panthers in the game, each Hokes Bluff layup was like a body blow in the boxing ring.

As Union hit seven treys in the second half, and had a foot on the line on the eighth, it wasn't enough as the Eagles went inside delivered blow after blow, right to the gut.

Then when it came time to

play keep away and hit their free

throws, Hokes Bluff didn't turn

the ball over and hit four straight