

Sports

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Allison's legacy at UCHS more than just wins and losses

By Todd Forrest
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To say the Union County football program was in desperate need of an overhaul would be an understatement when Brian Allison returned to his alma mater as a 31-year-old, first-time head coach in 1996.

Between 1990 and 1995, the Panthers totaled just 11 wins, going 1-9 twice over that span, with the high-water mark coming in 1992 with a 3-7 finish.

Nothing went right for the Union County football program following a 6-4 campaign in 1988, which rattled off seven straight losing seasons as the program hit rock bottom on Sept. 24, 1993, in the form of a 27-17 home loss to rival Towns County.

Before that infamous night in 1993, the Panthers were a perfect 11-0 vs. the Indians, only surrendering double digits once in those 11 meetings – a 54-12 rout in 1988.

After wrapping up the 1993 season at 2-8, head coach Terry Rogers stepped down after 14 years at the helm, giving way to former University of Tennessee standout Chip Kell.

A two-time All-American, three-time All-SEC offensive lineman, and later, a 2006 inductee into the College Football Hall of Fame, Kell was the starting center on the Volunteers' 1969 SEC Championship squad.

With an added emphasis on strength training and an NFL pedigree to back it up, Kell's conditioning program administered a brief shot in the arm to the struggling program. But weights didn't translate to wins as the Panthers lost the first six games of the Chip Kell-era by a combined score of 216-30.

UCHS pulled the plug on Kell after a 1-9 record in 1994 and 2-8 mark in 1995, paving the way for Allison.

In 1996, Allison led Union County to its first five-win season since 1988. Most importantly, in the first meeting with Towns County since the 1993 loss, Allison's Panthers avenged the program's only blemish vs. the Indians with a 28-19 victory.

Unable to fully recover from an 0-2 start in 1997, Union County dipped to 4-6 but rebounded to 7-3 in 1998 behind senior quarterback Robbie Brown. The three losses that year came to Buford, GAC and Commerce as the Panthers finally appeared to turn the corner with their first seven-win season in 13 years.

With Brown gone, the 1999 season saw Union County suffer another 4-6 campaign when a heartbreaking 21-16 loss to Banks County in the season finale denied the Panthers a .500 season.

Union made the jump to Class AA in 2000 and opened

the season in style with blowout victories over Towns and Fannin. The Panthers ended at 7-3 for the second time in three years with region wins over Rabun County and Dawson County.

Unfortunately, losses to GAC, Lumpkin and East Hall pinned Union's playoff hopes on a tiebreaker system. Entangled in a four-way tie for third place with Dawson, Rabun and Lumpkin, the Panthers were denied one of the final two playoff spots despite owning wins over two of the three squads involved in the deadlock.

Feeling slighted after the 2000 season, Allison's Panthers entered the 2001 season with a chip on their shoulder and won the first nine games of the year before falling 56-35 at GAC in the de facto Region Championship game. With a 9-1 record, Union County made its first state playoff appearance in 28 years but fell 31-28 to Morgan County on a last-second field goal.

"When [Coach Allison] came here in the late '90s, he changed the culture of the program," said 2002 UCHS graduate and former Panther quarterback Daniel Davenport. "Winning became the expectation, and I think that's a good thing. And since then, I think the program has gained a lot of respect. A lot of that is due to Coach Allison and the staff he has put together over the years."

"Coach Allison is a big believer in working in the off-season and working hard in general to improve yourself," he added. "That mentality and work ethic carries over to everyday life. I am sure a lot of his players have taken that beyond high school."

Allison departed for Winder-Barrow following the 2001 season, and the Union County program fell on hard times under three different coaches. Between 2002 and 2007, the Panthers never finished a season at .500. In 2002, Union County went 4-6 but stumbled to 1-9, 2-8, 2-8, 1-9 and 2-8 over the next five years.

Allison returned in 2008, and the Panthers immediately opened the year at 4-0 before losses to Jefferson and Fannin County proved a roadblock to the early season momentum. Still, at 5-2, Union County was in position for a playoff appearance until a season-ending injury to quarterback Kolt Owenby resulted in three-straight losses to end the year and dash any postseason aspirations.

A year later, the 5-3 Panthers were battling for the final playoff spot when a stunning 28-27 loss to Riverside Military Academy (Union led 27-7) bumped Union from contention.

After 5-5 and 6-4 seasons opened Allison's second stint at UCHS, the program declined following the graduations of Owenby and Blake Gowder, finishing 4-6 in 2010 and 3-7 in

2011. But things began trending upward in 2012 as the Panthers improved to 6-4 behind All-State defensive tackle Luther Jones.

In 2013, Allison handed the keys to the offense over to sophomore quarterback Joe Mancuso. With linebacker Chase Barnett anchoring the defense, Union County ended a 12-year playoff drought in 2013, then won nine games in 2014 and 2015.

Union made the jump to Class AAA in 2016 but didn't miss a beat behind first-year starting quarterback Cole Wright, who led the Panthers to an 8-2 mark.

Union missed the playoffs in 2017 as Wright battled a foot injury for much of the season, but the Panthers closed on a high note with wins over Fannin and Lumpkin.

Two generations of Allison were at the helm as Union County returned to Class AA in 2018, with junior quarterback Pierson Allison helping guide his father's squad to a 9-1 record. However, the Panthers were bounced by Bremen in the opening round of State, denying Coach Allison and the football program its first playoff victory.

With his son returning behind center in 2019, Coach Allison's Panthers posted another 9-1 regular season, but it would all be for naught if they couldn't get over the hump in the postseason. But Union County prevailed this time, edging South Atlanta 19-15, marking the first playoff win and 10-win season in program history.

Coach Allison's final year in the purple and gold brought nine new starters on offense and plenty of uncertainty surrounding COVID-19. After closing the regular season 4-6, Union County mustered a heroic effort in the playoffs, taking a more-talented Heard County team down to the wire in a 31-28 loss.

Despite the loss, the effort shown at Heard County epitomized Allison's career at Union County. And according to junior quarterback Logan Helcher, the waves created by Allison's departure will ripple well beyond the sidelines of Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

"Finishing my upcoming last year of high school football will most definitely be different," Helcher said. "Coach Allison wasn't only a great coach, but a great mentor and a role model of mine. He always pushed us to not only be a better football player, but a better man in life."

"After hearing the news, it was nothing short of upsetting and disappointing – the disappointment of no longer having the same mentor coaching you. After it's all said and done, Coach Allison will be missed not only by the guys but the community. Thanks for everything, Coach Allison."

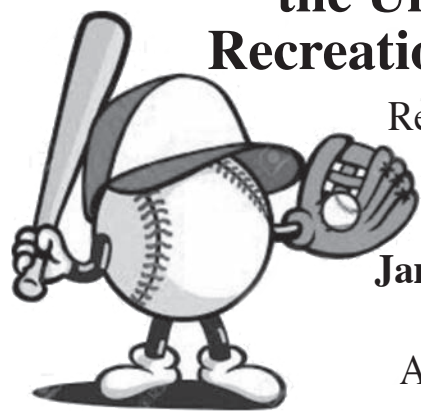


Brian Allison and the Panthers before the 2020 season opener vs. Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Brian Allison: A Coaching Timeline 1996-2020

- 09-06-1996: Coaches first game / win at UCHS – an 18-8 win at White County
- 10-11-1996: First home win – a 20-0 win over North Forstyh
- 10-30-1998: Union's first winning season since 1988 with 30-13 win over Wesleyan
- 11-13-1998: Union's first seven-win season since 1985 with 41-8 win at Banks
- 10-20-2000: 25th career win – a 16-14 victory over White County
- 11-09-2001: First 9-0 start in program history – first nine-win season since 1983
- 11-23-2001: First home State playoff game since 1973
- 08-30-2002: First game/win at Winder – a 34-0 win over Jackson County
- 11-21-2003: First and only playoff game at Winder – a 28-21 loss at Westlake
- 10-15-2004: 50th career win – a 35-21 victory at Franklin County
- 11-09-2007: Final win at Winder – a 17-10 victory at Alcovy (won 25 total games at Winder)
- 08-29-2008: First game back at Union County – a 35-13 win over Hayesville, NC
- 10-22-2010: 50th win at Union County / 75th win overall – a 38-14 win over Rabun County
- 09-14-2012: 57th win - passes Terry Rogers to become program's winningest coach
- 11-15-2013: UC first playoff appearance since 2001 – a 56-21 loss at Lovett
- 11-07-2014: 75th career win at UC / 100th overall with a 35-34 win over Washington Wilkes
- 11-14-2014: First home playoff game since 2001 – a 50-36 loss to Model
- 10-28-2016: Record-setting 63-point performance in 63-39 win at Fannin County
- 08-31-2018: 100th career win / 125th overall – a 45-7 victory at Towns County
- 09-27-2019: Program record 74 points during 74-57 win at Putnam County
- 11-15-2019: Program's first playoff win / first 10-win season – a 19-15 win over South Atlanta
- 11-05-2020: Final game at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium – a 21-6 loss to Rabun Gap
- 11-19-2020: Final win at UC – a 7-0 victory at Gilmer
- 11-28-2020: Final game at UC – a 31-28 playoff loss at Heard County

Baseball and Softball Registration at the Union County Recreation Department



Registration for baseball and softball opens at the Union County Recreation Department
January 5, 2021 - February 19, 2021
for ages 5-14.

Age you will be September 1, 2021 is the age group you will play in.
Fee is \$55.00

Please register online at unioncountyyga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center, 519 Industrial Blvd. Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

Local youth anglers take first place at Lake Eufaula

By Todd Forrest
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EUFULA, Ala. – Towns County seventh-graders Miles Donaldson and River Huffman took home First Place earlier this month at the Georgia Bass Nation High School Fishing tournament at Lake Eufaula.

Competing in the Junior (middle school) division of the

Jan. 16 tournament, Donaldson and Huffman, aka Chatuge Anglers, set out from Lakepoint Resort State Park on the Alabama-Georgia border.

And at the end of the day, their four-fish haul netted a tournament-best 13.44 pounds that included the competition's largest single fish at 5.17 pounds.

At weigh-in, Donaldson and Huffman's 13.44-pound

catch was nearly two pounds heavier than the Second-Place finishers from Temple Middle School (11.76). Additionally, the Chatuge Anglers' biggest fish was more than 1.6 pounds larger than second place (3.54).

The First-Place finish comes on the heels of a fourth-place performance in the previous tournament at Lake Chatuge in November,

where they also pulled in the event's largest fish at 3.81 pounds.

Their win has qualified the fishing team for the State Tournament, to take place in June back at Eufaula, and their goal now is to fish their way to nationals.

Progress for the rest of the season can be followed on the Georgia BASS Nation High School Fishing Facebook page.

Other local fishermen

competing on Lake Eufaula were Union County High School's Will Holloway and Coby Thompson, as well as Towns County High School's Jay and Mitchell Grimsley.

The Union County duo placed eighth in the high school division, reeling in four fish for a total of 10.74 pounds - less than a half-pound back of North Paulding's seventh-place duo.

Holloway and Thompson now sit third in the overall points standings at 569, seven

points back of second-place North Hall and eight behind the top spot that is occupied by Lee County.

Meanwhile, Jay and Mitchell Grimsley placed 33rd at Lake Eufaula with a total weight of 3.04 pounds.

The TCHS duo is now 18th in points with 514 but are within three points of 15th and seven points of 12th.

The next Georgia Bass Nation event is Feb. 6 at Lake Seminole in Donaldsonville.

Soccer registration at Union County Recreation Department

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for ages 5-14.

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Copy of birth certificate is required.

Fee is \$55.00

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Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.



Towns County Indian Anglers River Huffman and Miles Donaldson, both 12, finished First Place at Lake Eufaula recently to qualify for the State Tourney in the Chatuge Anglers, Junior Division. Photo/Submitter