

# Sports

See the Sports Section at nghanews.com

## No. 7 Panthers run roughshod over North Murray, Rockmart Union opens Region Tournament on Friday at North Murray

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nghanews.com

The 7th-ranked Panthers closed the regular season at 21-4 with a pair of home blow-outs over North Murray and Rockmart and now await the winner of Thursday's Region 7-AA tournament game between Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) and North Murray or Sonorville.

As the No. 2 seed in 7-AA, Union County earned a bye into Friday's region semi-final round but won't know its opponent until Thursday evening. Sixth-seeded North Murray faces 7th-seeded Sonorville in Tuesday's opening round. The winner meets the 3rd-seed LFO on Thursday, with Union County awaiting on Friday at 5:30 p.m. All Region 7-AA tournament games are at North Murray High School.

**No. 7 Panthers 97, Rockmart 36** - Union County showed out for a packed Senior Night gymnasium on Friday, Feb. 7, outscoring the Yellow Jackets 65-18 during the first half.

"I wanted the seniors to go out on a good note," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said. "I wanted them to have fun, but I told them before the game, 'tonight is about getting better. It isn't about Rockmart, it's about us getting better and preparing for what's ahead.'"

The Panthers jumped out to a 32-11 lead after the first quarter, followed by a 33-7 second quarter, which led to two 6-minute quarters in the second half.

Union County finished the night shooting a season-high 52% (39-75) from the floor while hitting a season-best 14 treys on 40% (14-35) from beyond the arc. Defensively, the Panthers logged 20 steals and forced 29 turnovers - both season highs.

Senior Hayden Hughes led the way with 23 points, four rebounds and two steals on 5 of 12 from long range. His final trey marked the 93rd of the



Senior Hayden Hughes broke his own school record on Friday with his 93rd 3-pointer of the season. Photo/Todd Forrest

season, surpassing his previous UCHS record of 92 during his sophomore campaign.

Hughes will depart UCHS with three of the four best 3-point shooting seasons in program history, along with the career mark (266 and counting). Moreover, he will leave with at least a share of the single-game record of nine 3-pointers.

After the game, Hughes was asked if any particular record carries a little more weight.

"I would say the career record means the most to me," he said. "I can still add on to it. I can still add to the single season record but I would say the career record means the most."

Senior Maddox Young had 17 points, eight assists, six rebounds and three steals. Vince Marevka went for 10 points and eight boards; senior Kaden Combs had 10 points, three rebounds and two steals.

Senior Houston Henry had 8 points, six steals, four assists and three rebounds. Ethan Hogsted scored 9 points to go with four rebounds, two assists and two steals.

After expanding its half-

time lead to 78-21 with 2:43 left in the third, Union County went to its bench the rest of the way, opening up an 81-21 lead on Ryland Chambers' trey before taking an 86-26 lead into the fourth.

Hayden Price's triple in the fourth built a 93-32 margin, but the Panthers' largest lead of the night came at 97-34 via a Hogsted putback with 1:20 to play.

Price finished with 7 points, three rebounds, a steal and a block. Holden Payne had 7 points, two boards, an assist and a steal. Chambers scored 6 points and pulled down one rebound; Jackson Nichols had three rebounds and an assist; Jacob Rodriguez added two steals and an assist.

**No. 7 Panthers 77, North Murray 46** - Henry finished one rebound shy of a triple-double, going for 23 points, 11 assists and nine boards while Union County put the game away by halftime courtesy of a 24-5 second quarter.

"North Murray missed some easy shots in the first half, but outside of that, we continued to do what we've



Senior Houston Henry finished one rebound shy of a triple-double during Tuesday's win over North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest

done all season," Garrett said. "We kind of beat them up all over the place, in transition points, points off turnovers and points in the paint. And [North Murray] just didn't shoot it very well."

In all, five Panthers scored in double figures with Payne delivering 13 points and five rebounds; Hughes finished with 11 points, five boards and two steals.

Young and Marevka scored 10 apiece with Young adding five boards and two steals; Marevka chipped in three boards and shot 5 of 5 from the floor.

Leading 19-14 early in the second, Union County shifted into high gear, scoring the next 19 points, beginning with Henry's coast-to-coast layup off a North Murray miss. Moments later, Young went end-to-end, ripping the ball away from a Mountaineer on one end and sinking a floater on the other.

Young scored via an off-bench board and Henry found Combs on the break to build a 27-14 lead at the 5-minute mark of the half. Later, a Young free

throw and two Henry buckets extended the margin to 32-14.

Triples by Henry and Hughes capped the 19-0 stretch with Union County up 38-14, and following another Henry bucket, Payne knocked down a trey that sent Union to the break up 43-17.

Henry scored his team's first 5 points of the third, and Young slashed to the basket for two more, mounting a 50-19 lead less than three minutes into the second half.

The Panthers refused to let off the gas as Hughes followed with a 3-pointer and Marevka and Young scored on consecutive trips to build a 57-19 advantage at the frame's 3:22 mark.

The Panthers took a 66-30 lead into the fourth but North Murray outscored them 16-11 during a 6-minute final frame.

Hogsted finished with 6 points, a rebound and an assist; Combs had 4 points, six boards, three steals and two assists; Chambers ended with two rebounds.

Nichols had a rebound, an assist and a steal; Price and Rodriguez had one board

apiece.

**Up next:** The Region 7-AA tournament opened with Monday's play-in game between 8th-seeded Murray County and 9th-seeded Rockmart. The winner faces fifth-seeded Ringgold on Tuesday with 4th-seeded Coahulla Creek awaiting on Thursday.

On Friday, top-seeded North Cobb Christian will meet whichever team survives the Monday-Tuesday-Thursday contests.

The Region 7-AA Championship will be on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. The consolation game is at 4:30 p.m.

"The guys have bought in and have been playing their best basketball," Garrett said. "They all know how important it is as we get toward the end of the year. I feel like we're in a good spot."

"That's a testament to our four seniors. They do a good job of learning every day [at practice]. You never have to re-teach anything, you just have to fine tune, and I think the younger guys have done a good job of falling in line behind them."

With one more win, Union County can equal the 2006-07 squad for the second-most wins (22) since 2000. A pair of wins this week would match 2000-01 for the most wins (23) by a Union team in the last 25 years.

The Panthers have reached the region championship game in each of the past three seasons, but have yet to secure the program's first region crown since 1981.

When asked why he thinks this team could be the one to finally get it done, Hughes summed it up with one word.

"Chemistry," he said. "We all know who can do what, we all share the ball and this is probably the best team out of my four years here."

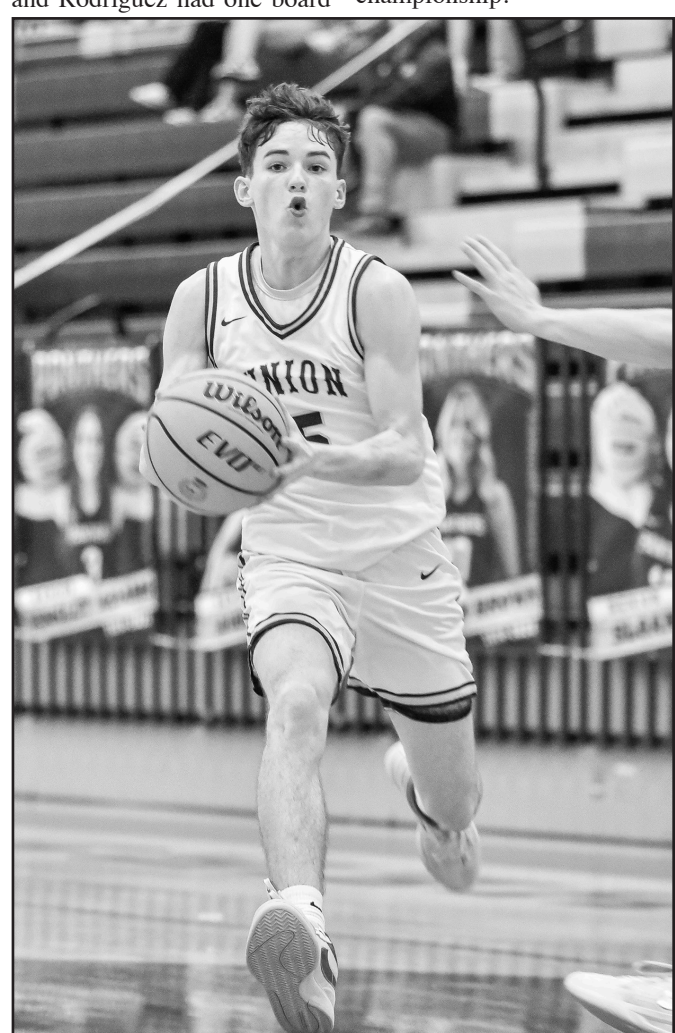
And losing to North Cobb twice, and LFO once during the regular season gives us a chip on our shoulder. We're going to do everything possible to beat them and win a region championship."



Senior Maddox Young stuffed the stat sheet on Friday, going for 17 points, eight assists, six boards and three steals. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Kaden Combs runs the break during the first half of Union's Friday blowout of Rockmart. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Holden Payne logged career-highs of 13 points and five rebounds during Tuesday's rout vs. North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest



# No. 10 Lady Panthers enter postseason with back-to-back wins

## Union opens 7-AA tourney on Tuesday vs. North Cobb Christian

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

The 10th-ranked Lady Panthers wrapped up the regular season at 8-8 in region play and 15-10 overall with two easy wins over North Murray and Rockmart.

"I was really proud of how the seniors came out and handled their business last week," Union County head coach Thomas Nelson said. "I'm so proud of them and how hard they've worked to get here."

Sixth-seeded Union County tips off the Region 7-AA tournament on Tuesday at 4 p.m. vs seventh-seeded North Cobb Christian at North Murray; the winner faces third-seeded Coahulla Creek on Thursday.

The region semifinals are Friday at 4 p.m. The region title game is Saturday at 6 p.m.; the consolation game is Saturday at 3 p.m.

**No. 10 Lady Panthers 70, Rockmart 38** - Union County raced out to a 23-2 lead and never looked back in Friday's Senior Night victory over the Yellow Jackets.

"I can't say enough about how far these six seniors have come in the last two years; it's been amazing," Nelson said.

Twelve different Lady Panthers cracked the scoring column in the win, led by 12 points from senior Sloane Dyer on four 3-pointers to go with five rebounds and three assists.

"Sloane is another kid who has worked her tail off," Nelson said. "She does a lot of things that help you win. She's a glue player and made region honorable mention."

Senior Ariel McCarter finished with 11 points, four assists, three boards and a steal. Senior Aubrie Akins had 11 points and four boards. Senior Hope Taylor had 10 points, nine rebounds, two assists and a block.

"Hope has had a great senior season and made second team all-region," Nelson said. "As a sophomore, she sang the



Senior Sloane Dyer went 4-for-4 from 3-point range to lead Union to a win over Rockmart on Senior Night Photo/Todd Forrest

national anthem more than she played. But for her to get to where she's at right now, says a lot about her character."

Following Union's 23-2 start, Rockmart answered with a 13-0 run but Union County closed the half on a 9-0 spurt to take a 32-15 lead into the break. After the Yellow Jackets narrowed the gap to 15 points early in the third, Regan Trlica hit a pull-up jumper, Taylor sank two free throws and Aubrie Akins added a layup.

"Aubrie has improved so much in her physical strength and mental awareness," Nelson said.

Rockmart continued hanging around deep into third, but three Dyer treys, plus a 15-footer and a free throw by Akins grew the lead to 50-22.

Up 50-26 after three, Mady Adams started the fourth

with a layup, Tatum Fisher scored on a putback and Akins scored inside for a 56-31 lead at the 6-minute mark.

After Union County sat its seniors to an ovation from the Senior Night crowd, Adams finished off a fast break and Fisher knocked down a short jumper. Trlica's drive to the hoop and Adams' deuce off an inbound pass made it 64-33 with 3:52 remaining.

Senior Amaria Johnson hit a free throw, Ella Akins cleaned up a miss and Nomi Nelson hit a 3-pointer to bring the final tally to 70-38.

Adams finished with 6 points and two rebounds; Trlica had 4 points and one board; Fisher had 4 points and three rebounds. Senior Katelyn Brown ended with 3 points, seven assists, three rebounds and three steals.



Senior Ariel McCarter at the free throw line during Union's Tuesday night win over North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest

"Katelyn missed 12 games this year but still made second team all-region," Coach Nelson said. "That tells you what type of player she is."

Ella Akins finished with 3 points, a rebound, an assist and a steal. Nomi Nelson had 3 points, two rebounds and a steal. Livia Haney had 2 points, three rebounds and an assist. Johnson added 1 point.

McKenna Hood pulled down five rebounds with one steal. Ragan McCarter had two assists, a steal and a rebound. Samantha Combs grabbed one board.

**No. 10 Lady Panthers 69, North Murray 26** - Regan Trlica scored 17 points with five rebounds and four steals, leading Union County to an easy win over North Murray on Tuesday, Feb. 4.

Union County outscored

the Mountaineers 14-3 in the second quarter, breaking things open following an 11-4 first. Brown began the second with a free throw, and Trlica hit two more for a 14-4 edge. Taylor and Trlica scored in the paint, and then Aubrie Akins split two at the line, making it 19-4 near the quarter's 3-minute mark.

Trlica's jumper a minute later answered a North Murray bucket before both teams traded a free throw and Ariel McCarter's 3-point play beat the halftime horn for a 25-7 score.

"Ariel made all-region for the third time," Coach Nelson said. "She's a great player and we're going to miss all the things that she does for this team."

Four minutes into the third, two Ariel McCarter triples, along with buckets by Brown and Taylor, had Union

out front 35-7. Aubrie Akins, Ariel McCarter and Trlica bumped the margin to 44-12 before Trlica hit from 15 feet with time winding down in the third, opening up a 50-13 score at quarter's end.

Ariel McCarter finished with 14 points, four assists, three rebounds and a steal. Taylor had 9 points, seven boards and two blocks. Aubrie Akins went for 7 points, two assists and a rebound.

Ella Akins ended her night with 6 points, two assists and a steal. Hood had 6 points and four boards; Haney scored 4 points; Nomi Nelson had 3 points and a rebound; Brown finished with 3 points, two rebounds, two steals and two assists.

Combs had a steal and two assists; Johnson chipped in two steals and an assist; Ragan McCarter had one assist.

**Up next:** Ninth-seeded Rockmart and eighth-seeded North Murray opened the 7-AA tourney on Monday in the play-in game. The winner faces fifth-seeded Ringgold on Tuesday with fourth-seeded Lakeview Fort-Oglethorpe awaiting on Thursday.

Whichever team emerges meets top-seeded Murray County in Friday's semifinals.

Meanwhile, No. 2-seeded Sonorville awaits in the Union County bracket, should the Lady Panthers take care of business vs. North Cobb Christian and Coahulla Creek.

Union County split with North Cobb Christian and swept Coahulla Creek during the regular season.

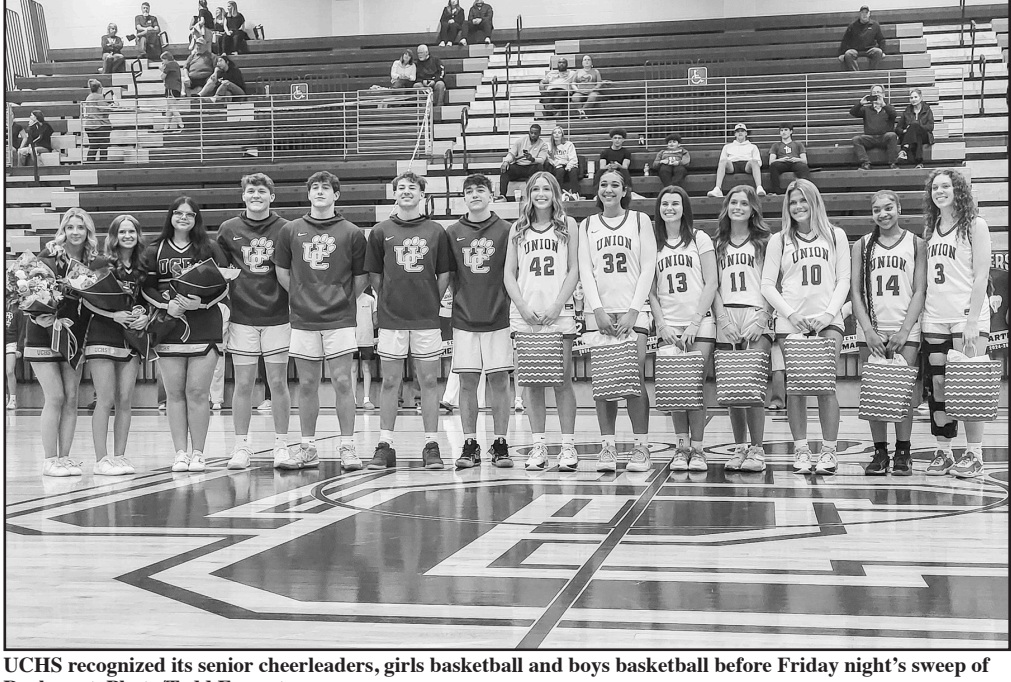
"We went into the last week with a chance to move up to fourth, but we ended up sixth," Coach Nelson said. "But I think we ended up in a pretty good bracket."

"With North Cobb, you need to contain two really solid players. If we can do that, we have a good shot of moving on."

"Coahulla has a bunch of solid girls that average about 8-9 points a game. We have to run them off the 3-point line and rebound if we want to keep on playing into the weekend."



The Union County Lady Panther seniors depart Friday's win over Rockmart to an ovation from the home crowd. Photo/Todd Forrest



UCHS recognized its senior cheerleaders, girls basketball and boys basketball before Friday night's sweep of Rockmart. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Wrestling: Ten Panthers punch tickets to Class AA State Championships

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

**Columbus** - Union County will send 10 wrestlers to this week's Class AA State Championships in Macon following last weekend's State Sectionals tournament in Columbus.

Three Panthers took home first place at sectionals: Eli Flowers at 113 lbs, Paxton Legatt at 157 lbs and Payton Legatt at 165 lbs. Aiden Hyatt (126 lbs) came in third and Asa Smith-Foot (190) was fifth; Thomas Gary (132) and Ayden Lee (215) both finished seventh; Jackson Arthur (285) placed eighth.

In the girls' sectional tournament, Jada Taylor placed third at 155 lbs and Kristyn Kraft was fourth at 140.

Class AA's No. 1-ranked 113-lb grappler, Flowers, earned a bye into the quarterfinals, where he scored a 17-1 technical fall (TF) over Salem's Darryl Major. He picked up an 11-1 major decision (MD) over Cook's Ja'Shad Wallace in the semis, followed by a 13-1 MD vs. East Jackson's Angel Rodriguez in the finals.

No. 1-ranked Paxton Legatt received a bye into the 157-lb quarters and pinned Redan's Josiah Davis to start his weekend. He pinned Cook's Logan Kennedy during the semis and then scored another pin vs. Columbus' Gabriel Jacobus in his finals bout.

Payton Legatt, also ranked No. 1 in Class AA at 165, had a bye into the quar-



Union County wrestlers during last weekend's trip to Columbus for sectionals. Photo/Jaime Legatt

terfinals, where he pinned Jordan's Dalvin Harris. He logged a 9-0 MD over Lovett's Ian Horan during his semifinal bout and then pinned Columbus' Ryan Miller in the finals.

Hyatt pinned Columbia's Mikal Huerta in the third-place bout after opening his weekend with a pinfall win vs. Prince Beglar (Salem). He lost a 22-5 TF to Columbus' Cedric Montgomery but battled his way into state with wins over Cook and Lovett.

Smith-Foot recorded two pins to punch a ticket to the

semifinals but lost an 18-1 TF to Lovett's Chris Mance. Miller Grove's Desmond Hutchins pinned Smith-Foot in the consolation semis, but the Union senior bounced back with a pin over Columbus' Noah Oliver in the fifth-place match.

Gary escaped his first-round match via an 18-17 decision over Pedro Reyes (Shaw). After a loss to Pierce County in the quarters, Gary pinned Robert Hollett (East Jackson), and following another loss, Gary notched a 23-5 TF over Brilyn Lewis (Salem).

Lee lost his opening bout but rebounded by pinning Kendal Hamilton (Crisp County) and Jayvonte Stuckey (South Atlanta). He lost to Pierce County but pinned Naquan Hill (Kendrick) in the seventh-place match.

Arthur began his weekend with a pin over Javauri Knowlton (Jordan), but a quarterfinal loss vs. Appling County dropped him into the consolation bracket.

In his first consolation bout, Arthur pinned Malik Crawford (Columbia) before a

loss to Sumter County. Bryce Durrett (Hart County) pinned Arthur in the seventh-place match.

Meanwhile, Taylor earned a spot in the girls State championships by scoring a pin over Lila McLendon (Cedartown) during the quarterfinals. She suffered a loss to Bianca Barbarossi (West Forsyth) in the semis but bounced back with a win over Aaliyah Summers (McEachern), followed by a second pin vs. McLendon.

Kraft notched a quarterfinal pin over Layla-Rene

Lomax (McEachern) but lost to Kiera Gilkes (Banks County) in the semis. Following a pinfall win over Jacquelyn Dubose (Campbell), Kraft fell to Amiya Edwards (Jackson County) in the third-place bout.

Other Union County wrestlers included Kevin Kilpatrick (ninth at 175 - State alternate), Michael Raines (120) and Riley Mortensen (138).

The GHSA Class AA State Tournament is from Feb. 13-15 at the Macon Centreplex.