

Sports

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Lady Panthers blank Leopards 4-0, one win shy of 8-AA crown

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The Lady Panthers improved to (8-3-1, 4-0) with a non-region win at Gilmer on Wednesday, March 16, before resuming 8-AA action with a 4-0 shutout at Banks County on Friday night.

Union County has secured at least a first-place tie in 8-AA and home-field advantage in the first round of next month's Class AA State Tournament. The Lady Panthers can clinch its fourth region title in eight years (2015, 2016, 2019) with a win at Elbert County on Friday, March 25.

Union concludes region play with a visit to Rabun County on Monday, March 28, where the Lady Panthers will attempt to lock down their fourth perfect season vs. Region 8-AA competition since 2015.

Lady Panthers 2, Gilmer 0 - Sophomore Lara Turner granted Union County an early lead and senior Lorelei Skinner put the game out of reach in the second half.

Sophomore Kyra McKechnie turned away 10 Bobcats' shot attempts during the first half, assisting freshman Ariel McCarter to feed Turner for the go-ahead goal in the 31st



Freshman Ariel McCarter dished out three assists last week during wins at Gilmer and Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest

minute. Clinging to a late 1-0 advantage, Skinner delivered the dagger via a Union County free kick in the 88th minute. The Lady Panthers did a better job controlling possession in the second half, limiting Gilmer to just three shots on goal.

McKechnie posted her second straight double-digit save total, finishing with 13

Lady Panthers 4, Banks County 0 - McKechnie logged eight saves while recording her 13th career shutout in just her 23rd match as the UCHS girls soccer program remains undefeated vs Banks.

Turner notched her second hat trick vs. Banks County, connecting on two goals in the first half to help Union



Sophomore Zoe Crawford notched an assist during Union's 4-0 win at Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest

County build a 3-0 halftime advantage. Junior Italia Salazar opened the scoring by punching in a corner kick from sophomore Avery Murray in the 14th minute.

Exactly 72 seconds later, McCarter fielded a goal kick from McKechnie and found Turner up ahead for a 2-0 margin. The duo of McCarter

and Turner teamed up again, building a 3-0 advantage when Turner found the net during the 26th minute.

Sophomore Zoe Crawford orchestrated Union's final score of the evening, feeding Turner in the 66th minute and putting the finishing touches on a 4-0 victory.

Up next: The Lady Panthers visit Elbert County at 5:30

p.m. on Friday. The Monday, March 28 trip to Rabun County is scheduled for 5 p.m.

Throw-ins: Union County improves to 20-0 all-time vs. Banks County since the program's inception in 1997.

With a win on Friday, head coach Tim Hunter will claim his sixth girls region title and seventh overall.

Panthers near consecutive 8-AA titles following wins over RMA, Banks

Union County's non-region road trip to Gilmer ends in scoreless tie

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Sixth-ranked Union County can secure its second-straight Region 8-AA title with a Friday night victory at Elbert County, followed by a win at Rabun County on Monday, March 28.

The Panthers improved to 10-2-1 overall and 5-0 in region play with an unbeaten week that included wins over Riverside Military Academy, Banks County and a non-region tie with Gilmer.

Panthers 5, Riverside 0 - Union County's week began with a 5-0 victory over Riverside on Tuesday, March 15, behind sophomore Zuriel Mancillas' two goals and one apiece from senior MJ Delatte, sophomore Nick Depalma and freshman Antonio Solorio.

Delatte broke a scoreless tie in the 12th minute with a 20-yard screamer, then Mancillas used a corner kick to knock in the first a feed to Delatte (7th minute) and the second to sophomore Benton Gregory (20th).

Robbins' first goal of the evening, an unassisted score in the 25th minute, spotted the Panthers a 3-1 halftime advantage. The second half got underway with Mancillas' first score, coming via a hockey assist from sophomore Seth Rutan and Solorio during the 51st. Mancillas fed Robbins in the 53rd to mount a 5-1 advantage before Mancillas capped the scoring with an unassisted goal during the 53rd.

Panthers 0, Gilmer 0 - Union County and the Bobcats played to a scoreless tie on Wednesday, March 16 in Ellijay, despite the Panthers out-shooting the home team 15-4. Union also finished with seven corner kicks and eight free kicks, compared to 10 free kicks and no corners for Gilmer. Junior Wilson Walker



Zuriel Mancillas soars above the traffic vs. RMA to convert a corner kick with a header. Photo/Todd Forrest

attempted a match-high six shots and senior Kyler Robbins had five. Delatte tried two shots, while sophomores Eli Decker and Mancillas attempted one each.



Junior Isaiah Ortiz and the Union County defense smothered Riverside during last week's 5-0 victory. Photo/Todd Forrest

Up next: The Panthers visit Elbert County on Friday then travel to Rabun County on Monday, March 28 in a matchup that could determine the Region 8-AA title.



Senior MJ Delatte put Union on the board vs. RMA, blasting a right-footed Howitzer by the Eagles keeper. Photo/Todd Forrest

UCMS wrestlers continue their winning ways during offseason

Union County saw four middle school wrestlers enter, in separate divisions, against the top wrestlers in Georgia at the USAW Georgia State Championships last month in Warner Robins.

Kevin Kilpatrick, a UCMS seventh-grader, wrestled in the 12U / 112-lb. Open Division, placing second after losing a tough finals match, 1-0 - his only loss of the season in USAW. He went undefeated during the middle school season, placing first at the MGML Championships.

Paxon Legatt, a UCMS seventh-grader, wrestled in the 14U / 125-lb. Open Division. Legatt placed third, losing his third match before battling back in the consolation bracket, finishing 4-1. That was his only loss the entire season, including the middle school season. Legatt finished first at the MGML Championships for UCMS.

Eli Flowers, a UCMS seventh-grader, wrestled in the 14U / 80-lb. Open Division. He placed third, losing his first match to the previous State Champion, and then battled back in the consolation bracket, winning the next two matches. Flowers went undefeated

during the middle school season in his second year of wrestling, placing 1st at the MGML Championships for UCMS.

Landen Bell, a Union County seventh-grader, wrestled in the 12U / 95-lb. Novice Division. Bell placed third, losing his third match, and then battled back in the consolation bracket to win his next two. He finished 4-1 for the day. Bell is a first-year wrestler who helped his UCMS team have their most successful season to date.

All four wrestlers will begin training in the Olympic Styles (Freestyle/Greco Roman) of wrestling and hope to return to the top of podiums in their age / weight brackets.

Kilpatrick is the returning Freestyle & Greco Roman Georgia State Champion.

Legatt is the returning Freestyle State Champion and Greco Roman Finalist.

Flowers is the returning Freestyle State Finalist and Greco Roman Champion.

Bell was a Freestyle State Placer last and looks to improve this season.

Track and field: Union County athletes primed for another successful spring

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Murrayville - Union County track and field was the smallest school in attendance when they participated in the Chestatee meet on March 3, leaving with 12 first-place performances.

Leading the way were the Union men, who took home seven gold medals -- the most among the men's teams in attendance.

Senior Trace Wright placed first in the 200M race with a time of 24.40 seconds, edging junior teammate Wilson Walker (third place) by a half-second.

Fellow senior Kanon Abercrombie took home gold in 110M hurdles and the 300M hurdles. With a time of 45.10 in the 300M, Abercrombie held off second-place Nolan Thompson (47.41).

Along with their 1-2 finish in the 300M hurdles, Abercrombie and Thompson provided Union a pair of top-three finishes in the 110M hurdles with Abercrombie clocking in at 17.52 and the third-place Thompson at 21.79.

Sophomore Zander Rotko set the pace in the 400M event, crossing the finish line in 52.54.

In relay competition, Union placed first in three of four races with a runner-up finish



Union at Chestatee earlier this month. (L-R) Senior Hana Gregory. Relay runners senior Trace Wright and junior Wilson Walker. Photos courtesy of UCHS

in the 4x100 event. The 4x200 team of senior Eli Peugh, Rotko, Walker and Wright came in first at 1-minute, 35.85 seconds.

The relay team of senior Hunter Hartzog, senior Brady Guild, Rotko and Wright were the class of the 4x400 field, crossing the finish line at 3:39.04. The 4x800 team also came in first at 10:26.15.

Union's 4x100 team just missed out on pulling off a relay clean-sweep, coming in second at 46.31 seconds. The team consists of Thompson, junior Sam Page,

junior Griffin Young and sophomore Taylor Whitehead.

On the girls side, senior Lexi Sisum came out on top in the 200M race with a time of 28.51, fending off second-place teammate Katie Byers (29.96).

Fellow senior Hana Gregory took home gold in the 800M and 1600M races, clocking in at 2:41.51 and 6:12.67, respectively.

In both of Gregory's wins, UCHS took home each of the top-three spots with Ellie Adams (2:46.77) and Allie Brey (2:51.44)



finishing second and third, respectively, in the 800M event.

In the 1600M race, Brey was second at 6:27.65, barely edging Ashley Shipes' time of 6:27.88.

Mattie Brookshire distanced herself from the field in the discus, posting a throw of 82-feet, 4.5 inches. The Union County junior went on to record a runner-up performance in the shot put at 26-2.

The 4x200 relay team of Adams, Byers, Gregory and Sisum came in first with a time

of 1:55.22.

Hannah Long's 18:34 was good enough for second in the 100M hurdles. Linley Jones came in second in the 300M hurdles at 52.83. Meanwhile, Long placed third in the 300M hurdles and Jones was third in the 100M hurdles.

Noel Hyatt just missed a gold medal in the 400M with a second-place time of 1:08.03. Katelynn Rash came in sixth at 1:15.84. The 4x400M relay team of Adams, Brey, Gregory and Long finished second. Brey and

Byers also placed third and fourth in the high jump at 4-8 and 4-6, respectively.

Senior Mia McCombs turned in pair of third-place distances in the long jump (15-0) and the triple jump (29-5.25). Brooklyn Brown was fourth in the discus at 62-2.5. Natalie Payne (6:34.47) and Lydia Wagner (6:40.64) were fourth and fifth, respectively in the 1600M race.

Other boys results from Chestatee included a runner-up performance (4:35.84) from Hartzog in the 1600M and Gage Barnes in the shot put (40-4).

Daniel Snow placed third in the high jump at 5-4. Fellow senior Hayden Payne was third in the long jump at 17-6. Benton Gregory came in third at 800M, clocking in at 2:06.69. Alec Wilder was fourth in the 3200M race with a time of 13:17.76.

Abercrombie was fourth in the triple jump at 35-2. Young and Payne tied for fourth in the high jump at 5-feet. Brady Mull placed fifth in the 3200M, crossing the finish line at 13:29.11. Page was fifth (12.44) in the 100M race and Whitehead added a top-five in the 200M event at 25.32.

Guild came in fifth in the 400M race at 57.89. Noah Payne placed sixth in the 800M (2:33.10) and 1600M (5:49.38) events. Tyler Grasty was sixth in the discus at 81-8.5.

Baseball: No. 8 Elbert County takes three from Panthers in 8-AA series

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Eighth-ranked Elbert County (10-3, 5-0) swept the Panthers in last week's Region 8-AA series, taking game two by an 8-1 score while narrowly escaping a pair of Union County (2-11, 0-3) upset bids to bookend the three-game set.

The Blue Devils survived Tuesday's 4-2 pitcher's duel in Elberton before fending off a furious Panthers' rally during an 11-10 victory to punctuate a Saturday doubleheader in Blairsville.

Panthers 2, Elbert County 4 (game one) - Parker Grisham and Lake Hughes were burned by five fielding errors during Tuesday's road loss despite limiting the Blue Devils to one extra-base hit and three earned runs.

Trailing 1-0 in the third inning, Union County tied things up when Hughes came around to score on Thomas Dyer's two-out, RBI single. Hughes reached via a one-out walk, then stole second, allowing Dyer to bring him home with a base hit to center on the very next pitch.

Grisham surrendered a three-spot in the fifth after the Panthers stranded two in the top of the frame. Three consecutive one-out singles made it a 3-1 score, bringing Hughes to the mound with two aboard and one away. After fanning the first hitter and going 3-2 on the second, Hughes allowed an infield single that pushed the margin to 4-1 before retiring the side with a four-pitch strikeout.

Senior Tyler Loyd answered with a solo homer with one down in the sixth, yanking a 1-1 pitch over the left-field fence for his first career homer and the team's first big fly of 2022.

Hughes kept the Blue Devils off the board during the sixth after the leadoff man reached via a fielding error, and Brayden Sweat led off the Union seventh with a four-pitch walk, bringing the tying run to the plate. Following a pop-up and a strikeout, Bailey Brown kept hope alive with an opposite-field single, then he advanced to second on a wild pitch. With two Panthers in scoring position, Elbert County pulled the plug on



Chris Fletcher's eight RBIs currently leads the Union County batting lineup through 13 games. Photo/Todd Forrest

the Union County threat with a strikeout.

Hughes finished 1 for 2 with two walks, a run and a stolen base. He went 1 2/3 innings on the bump, striking out three and allowing one infield single.

Dyer drove in one during a 1-for-4 evening; Brown was hit by a pitch while going 1 for 3. Loyd ended his day 1 for 3 with a homer as each of the top five batters in the Union lineup recorded a hit.

Grisham lasted 4 1/3 innings, giving up five hits, three earned runs and one walk. However, he received no support from the Panthers' 6-9 hitters, who combined to go 0 for 11 with one walk.

Panthers 1, Elbert County 8 (game two) - After dishing out all the firepower in game one, the top of the Union County lineup struggled in the second meeting as the Blue Devils prevented the first four hitters from reaching base in 12 plate appearances.

Hughes earned the starting nod in game two and labored through a five-run first before settling down to toss three scoreless innings.

Still leading 5-0, Elbert put the game away courtesy of a three-run sixth, chasing se-

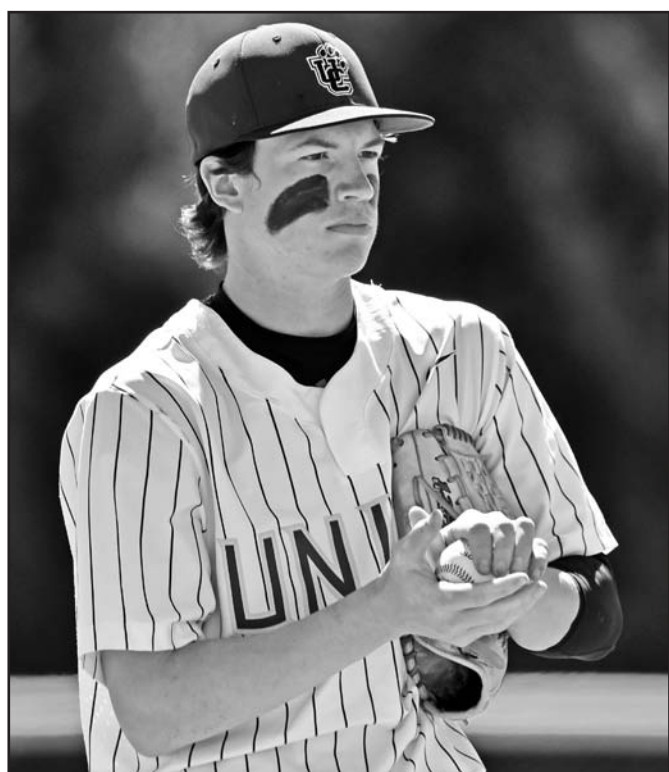
nior Caleb Towe from the game following consecutive one-out walks. The Blue Devils went on to post three singles off junior James McPherson, stretching their margin to 8-0.

McPherson escaped a two-out, one-out jam in the seventh, and the Panthers finally broke through in the bottom half against Elbert's freshman starter Landen Ingram, who allowed just four hits over seven innings.

Ingram plunked Loyd to start the seventh and the Union senior moved up 90 feet on a passed ball. With one away and a runner in scoring position, Hunter Fleming plated Loyd on a base hit to center before Ingram retired the next two Panthers to nail down the complete game victory.

Despite the 8-1 final score, a tough-luck moment in the fifth prevented Union County from changing the complexion of the contest after loading the bases with nobody out.

Loyd and Logan Anderson began the frame with back-to-back singles then Ingram's 1-0 offering clipped Fleming's foot to load the bags. Then, senior Connor Shields stepped to the dish and laced an 0-1 pitch the other way. Unfortunately, the first baseman



Senior Lake Hughes made his first home start of 2022 during a Saturday loss to defending region champion Elbert County. Photo/Todd Forrest

snared the would-be extra-base hit and immediately stepped on first to complete the unassisted double play. With two on and two down following the line-out, Ingram induced an inning-ending ground ball to keep the five-run advantage intact.

The Panthers weren't as fortunate in the early going, allowing three Elbert singles, two stolen bases, a double, a walk and two costly errors. When the dust settled, the Blue Devils had mounted a five-run lead after a half-inning of play.

Meanwhile, Ingram didn't allow a base runner until the third, when Towe reached on a bloop single. The Panthers wouldn't reach base again until the heart-breaking fifth frame.

Loyd finished 1 for 2 with his team's only run and Fleming drove him in during a 1-for-2 afternoon. Anderson went 1 for 3, and Towe was 1 for 1 with a walk.

Hughes' day ended after four innings, allowing six hits, four earned runs and four walks. Towe walked three over 1 1/3 while giving up two earned runs. McPherson allowed four hits, a walk and one earned in 1 2/3 innings.

1-2-3 in the bottom of the fifth. Elbert County used a two-out RBI single to build a 10-6 advantage, but Union responded with a three-run sixth, beginning with back-to-back singles by Hughes and Brown.

A two-bagger from Dyer plated Hughes, then Anderson cut the lead to 10-9 when he found his way aboard courtesy of a costly two-out, two-run error.

A timely Blue Devils' sacrifice fly proved vital in the seventh when the Panthers added one run in their final at-bat.

During the bottom of the seventh, Duncan beat out an infield single to bring the tying run to the plate with one down. A groundout moved the courtesy runner, Towe, to second for Brown, who lined a run-scoring base hit to left field.

With the tying run aboard, Elbert County halted the Panthers' threat by inducing a fly-out to end the series.

Grisham allowed five hits and five earned in just 1 2/3 innings, bringing Duncan to the mound in the second. Duncan finished the contest, tossing 5 1/3, allowing seven hits, five runs (two earned) and two walks.

Panthers 10, Elbert County 11 (game three) - Union County rallied from an 8-2 third-inning deficit, trimming the margin to 10-9 in the sixth before eventually coming up one run short in the bottom of the seventh.

The Panthers' comeback bid got underway with two runs in the third, both coming with two away after Dyer was hit by a pitch and advanced to second on a groundout.

With two away and facing a full count, Loyd doubled home Dyer, then Fleming knocked him in after an Anderson infield single. Will Duncan pitched a scoreless fourth and the Panthers moved within two via another two-run frame in the bottom half of the inning.

Once again, Union did all its damage with two down when a Dyer triple scored Hughes, who reached on a one-out double. An error off the bat of Fletcher scored Dyer, trimming the Elbert County lead to 8-6 entering the fifth.

The Blue Devils added an insurance run in the top half of the inning, then sat down the Panthers

UCHS Golf underway with two matches at Old Union



Sofia McNabb looks on as teammate Hope Patton sinks a putt during Thursday's match vs. White Co. at Old Union. Golf photos by Todd Forrest



Senior Kyler Robbins chips onto the green at Old Union during Thursday's tri-match vs. Murphy, NC (169) and White Co. (186). The Union men (185) were third with Braden Gay and Jett Busbee each firing a 45. Robbins shot 47 and Noah Jones shot 55. The girls defeated White by one stroke (7 holes) behind Hope Patton's 34 and Sofia McNabb's 35. Ivie Chapman shot 38 and Saylor Noe shot 40. On Monday, the girls edged Rabun 102-114 with a 50 from Patton and a 52 by McNabb. Huston West (41) and Gay (43) led the guys, who shot a 185 to Rabun's 162 and Murphy's 172. Robbins shot 49, Turner West shot 52 and Jones shot 55.

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While preparing for her senior year at Union County High School, Ava Hunter had a chance encounter with the Lady Panthers' all-time leading scorer and former University of Georgia guard, Candace Williams.

At the time, Hunter had no idea she was in reach of the program record, but after Williams learned that Hunter had already surpassed 1,000 career points during her junior season, the 2009 UCHS graduate gave Hunter her blessing to go get the record.

"I actually saw Ava last year at the rec center, and I was encouraging her to try and pass my record," said Williams, who lives out of town and doesn't catch as many UCHS games as she would like. "But I am so proud of her for all her hard work. I've heard that she's been killing it."

When asked about their conversation, Hunter admitted that she was too young to recall anything significant from Williams' playing days, however, hearing those supportive words from a UCHS legend meant more than anything Williams could teach her on the court.

"I don't remember getting



Ava Hunter passed her mother Mandy (Bradley) Hunter and Candace Williams on her way to the record. Photo/Todd Forrest

to watch her play, but she has [continued to reach out] to encourage me to break the record," Hunter said. "I am just so thankful that God put me in the position to be able to achieve this. I also have to thank my teammates for all the assists, and my coaches for all they have done for me and then some."

Earlier in the school year, Hunter signed a scholarship to play at basketball at the University of North Georgia, following in the footsteps of her mother, who also continued her hardwood career at the Dahlonega school.