

Sports

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Softball: UCHS hosts North Hall in season opener Thursday

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Union County begins its quest for nine consecutive state playoff berths this week and right off the bat the Lady Panthers face a formidable region challenge in game one.

Despite reaching state 10 times in 11 years, the Lady Panthers haven't won a region title since 2011. And after overcoming a slow start last season, it was obvious that Union was among the top three teams in 7-AAA by October.

As 2017 approaches, not much has changed among the top three and it appears East Hall, North Hall and Union will be among the favorites once again.

One of those teams, the North Hall Lady Trojans, will visit Blairsville on Thursday at 6 p.m. (JV at 4:30) as Union will get a look at where they stand among Region 7-AAA's upper tier.

Last season North Hall split its two games with the Lady Panthers, but were able to hang on to the region's top spot entering the postseason.

Come playoff time, however, it was No. 3 East Hall that was the last team remaining after knocking off No. 2 Union in the semifinals and top seed North Hall in the championship.

As for the Lady Panthers, it took 8 innings to squeak by No. 4 Lumpkin County, 1-0 in the consolation game to take the third seed entering state.

The season would come to an end in the Sweet 16 at Southeast Bulloch after Union lost both games in extra innings. Coming so close to reaching the Elite 8 in back-to-back seasons, the Lady Panthers enter 2017 with unfinished business.

Unfortunately, four-year ace Laken Chambers is at North Georgia College and three-year leadoff hitter Kendra Tanner is now at Agnes Scott. Union also had to say goodbye to another three-year starter in the versatile, Lydia Arrowood.

Luckily, head coach Jessica Stewart welcomes back the other six starters, returns an All-Region player from injury, and added a senior transfer.

The cornerstone piece for Stewart in 2017 will be senior Jillian Lawn. A First Team All-Region 7-AAA selection last year, Lawn will be called upon to replace Chambers atop the pitching staff while continuing to anchor the heart of the Union lineup.

Leading the team with a .366 batting average and 24 RBIs in 2016, Lawn also worked 62 innings (a career high) in the circle, compiling a 1.57 ERA and striking out 40.



Coach Jessica Stewart and Jillian Lawn (right) during a recent summer league game. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior outfielder Aladriel Arnold raised her batting average by more than 60 points last year. Photo/Todd Forrest



All Region sophomore catcher Mary Wischmeyer. Photo/Todd Forrest

Although, most of Lawn's 62 innings came early in the year while Chambers was unavailable to pitch. But this season, Lawn will be responsible for the majority of the heavy lifting.

Joining Lawn in the middle of the batting order is junior Bailey Rayfield, who missed all of 2016 with an injury.

As a freshman, Rayfield was named all region at Bain-

bridge High School. Prior to her sophomore season she transferred to Union County but suffered an arm injury in the preseason.

The duo of Lawn and Rayfield in the middle of the order should provide the Lady Panthers with plenty of run production if the top of the lineup can set the table for the power at 3 and 4.



Senior Katelynn Hodges

Junior Aladriel Arnold earned Second Team All Region honors last season and returns for her third year as the starting left fielder. After hitting .247 as a freshman, Arnold bumped her average up to .310 last year. She also added the long ball to her arsenal with a homer in 2016. As a two-year starter in left field, Arnold has combined for 32 RBIs, 27 runs, 7 doubles, and a homer.

Another returning starter capable of going deep is sophomore catcher Mary Wischmeyer. As a freshman, she showed she's more than capable of handling a bat, finishing third on the team with a .321 average to go with 13 RBIs and a First Team All Region Team nod.

A year of experience will also help her growth behind the plate as she continues to improve defensively.

Speaking of defense, senior shortstop Braden Poteete returns to the middle infield after bumping Kendra Tanner to second base last year.

One of the toughest strikeouts on the team, Poteete led Union with 7 stolen bases in 2016 and has swiped 19 bases

Date	Location	Opponent	JV	Varsity
AUG. 10	HOME	NORTH HALL	4:30	6:00
AUG. 12	HOME	NORTHWEST(DOUBLEHEADER)	N/A	12:00/2:00
AUG. 15	AWAY	LUMPKIN	4:30	5:55
AUG. 16	HOME	WHITE	4:30	5:55
AUG. 17	AWAY	DAWSON	4:30	5:55
AUG. 22	HOME	EAST HALL	4:00	5:55
AUG. 23	AWAY	WHITE	4:30	5:55
AUG. 24	AWAY	RABUN	N/A	5:00
AUG. 26	HOME	CHESTATEE	N/A	12:00
AUG. 29	HOME	FANNIN	4:30	5:55
AUG. 31	HOME	GAC	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 6	HOME	RABUN	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 7	HOME	LUMPKIN	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 12	AWAY	NORTH HALL	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 14	HOME	DAWSON	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 15/16	AWAY	MORGAN COUNTY TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
SEPT. 19	AWAY	EAST HALL	4:00	5:55
SEPT. 21	AWAY	CHESTATEE	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 26	AWAY	FANNIN	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 28	AWAY	GAC	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 30	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 2	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 4	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 11/12	TBA	1ST ROUND STATE TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 18/19	TBA	2ND ROUND STATE TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 26-28	COLUMBUS	ELITE 8	N/A	TBA

Union County's 2017 schedule opens with a contest between two of the top three teams in Region 7-AAA from last season - North Hall and Union. Chestatee, Rabun County, White County, and a Morgan County Tournament will be the non-region contests.

AAAAA South Effingham, who fell to Buford in the Sweet 16 last season.

Like Union County, South Effingham has reached three straight State Tournaments with Hodges starting on the last two. As a freshman, Hodges was a contributor on the 27-7 Region Championship squad.

Three different players could see action at third base this year: senior Megan Lockaby, junior Aubree Pack, and sophomore Kristen Poteete.

Meanwhile, junior Skyler Ludlum could see time at first base and in the outfield.

Other than Lawn, the only pitchers that have appeared in a varsity game are junior Madeline Tanner and sophomore Megan Bright. However, Pack and freshman Trineer Queen also saw work in the circle during summer league play.

Following North Hall, the Lady Panthers will host a high noon doubleheader on Saturday with Northwest Whitefield. The first road game will be Tuesday, Aug. 15th at Lumpkin, who split with Union last season then went extra innings during the playoffs.

After the top three of East Hall, North Hall, and Union, don't be surprised if Lumpkin, GAC, Dawson County, and even Fannin County narrow the gap between the top three and bottom four.

Lumpkin returns its top pitcher while GAC was extremely young in 2016. Unfortunately, the youngest team in 7-AAA last season was Region champ East Hall.

The Region Pitcher of the Year, Macy Banks, was an East Hall freshman. Meanwhile, each of East Hall's four all-region selections were underclassmen.

Top-to-bottom, 7-AAA looks to be one of the most competitive regions in North Georgia and a win over North Hall this Thursday will get the season off on the right foot for the Lady Panthers.

First pitch is at 6 p.m. and Union County softball needs support on Thursday as they open the season with one of the biggest games of the year.



Senior Braden Poteete

and scored 40 runs over the last two seasons.

Speed and contact are Poteete's strengths offensively, but as the only returning starter in the infield, her defense and senior leadership could be her most important role in 2017.

Patrolling centerfield will fall on Ellie Garrison for the second straight year. Over the past two seasons the junior has combined for 12 stolen bases but 2016 was her first year as a full-time player.

Garrison would finish her sophomore campaign with a team-leading 2 triples, 8 RBIs, and 14 runs.

Returning to right field is junior Maddie Sutton, who led the team with 14 stolen bases as a courtesy runner during her freshman year.

Like Garrison, Sutton became a fixture in the outfield last season and hit .260 with 8 RBIs, 2 doubles, and 14 runs. Sutton, Garrison, and Arnold should give Union one of the top defensive outfields in the region.

At second base this season is Katelynn Hodges, a senior transfer from Class

Blairsville PTO, INC.

5th Annual S.O.S. Glow Golf Tournament
(Support Our Schools) 4 Person Scramble

Saturday, August 26, 2017

Butternut Creek Golf Course
Blairsville, GA

\$75 per player • \$300 per foursome
Registration starts at 4 p.m.
Tee Off @ 5:00 p.m. • Dinner @ 8 p.m.
Awards at Conclusion of Play!

Player 1: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____
 Player 2: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____
 Player 3: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____
 Player 4: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Mail form & payment (check/money order) to
Blairsville PTO • P.O. Box 1476 • Blairsville, GA 30514
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For more information on the tournament and/or Sponsorship information call
706-835-5322 or email ptoglowgolf@gmail.com

Union County Recreation Senior Autumn WALK-It-OUT Program

2017 Senior
Walking Program
Ages: 55 and over

Fall is coming soon and UCRD is continuing with our walking program! We have two different walking programs designed to fit your individual pace. Our first group will walk at a high intensity level and our second group will be a low intensity level. The Program Director of Union County Parks and Recreation will be leading a free walking session two times a week for 6 weeks in session 2. This is a great time to socialize and exercise with a fun group. We will meet at Meeks Park Walking Trail and walk it out for 60 minutes. (You did not need to be a part of session one in order to participate in the Fall session.)

**Session Two Registration begins on August 7 and ends August 31 at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.) Registration must be done in person due to cap on participants per session! If you have any questions, please call our office at (706) 439-6074.



Tennis scores

USTA Women's 6.5 Doubles, Meeks Park v Blue Ridge, Saturday, July 29: Line 1: Sherry Savage/Linda Johnson v Ellen Grant/Trish Henson 6-1, 6-1 (Meeks Park- w); Line 2: Christine Issa/Karen Matthews v Piper Atwell/Nancy Cantrell 6-2, 6-2 (Meeks Park- w); Line 3: Jane Childers/Dana Nelson v Jennifer Jabaley/Dena Saip 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (Blue Ridge- w).

USTA Mixed 7.0, Sunday, July 30, Meeks Park v Bent Tree: Line 1: Jennifer Jabaley/Mark Williams v Alexander Sturrock/Nancy Cantrell 6-3, 7-5 (Meeks Park- w); Line 2: Holly Williams/Tom Spencer v Randy Rich/Barbara Biello 7-6, 6-2 (Meeks Park- w); Line 3: Christine Issa/Chris Jabaley v Bill Swift/Dena Saip 6-4, 6-2 (Meeks Park- w). N/Aug9/26CA