

# Sports

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## Softball: Burnette goes the distance as Lady Panthers outlast Banks

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It wasn't the most efficient start of Sierra Burnette's young varsity career, but the Union County sophomore left Homer with a 'W' next to her name, and that's what matters this time of year.

Making just her second-ever region start, Burnette kept the Banks County bats in check long enough for the Lady Panthers to eke out a 6-4 victory to open 8-AA play with a statement win over the two-time defending region champions.

The Leopards tested Burnette early and often, threatening to blow things open in the bottom of the first, but time after time, the sophomore refused to wilt, solidifying her status as the team's ace.

"[Burnette] didn't have her best stuff, but that's going to happen," Union County head coach Stephen Mitchell said. "She stayed in it and grinded. I was proud of her and the team for just staying with it. We didn't play our best but we hung in there and got the job done against a good region opponent."

With one run already in and two runners in scoring position following Banks' fourth hit of the first frame, the Union right-hander induced an inning-ending groundout to keep her within a run.

The Lady Panthers stranded a runner at second in the top-half of the first, then moved two into scoring position during the second before loading the bags with one away in the third - all ending with nothing to show on the scoreboard.

A Union error in the Leopards' half of the second kept the inning alive, but a two-down, two-on fly out to right field kept the home team from padding hits 1-0 advantage. Later, Banks placed runners at first and second during the third frame, but Burnette escaped another jam via consecutive ground-ball outs.

"There is no doubt [Burnette] is growing up right in front of our eyes," Mitchell said. "She's been put in some tough situations over the last two or three weeks while we were very thin on pitching. So she's really had to tote the mail for us lately and she's done a very good job."

### Local Racing Report: Tri-County

By Blake Lynch  
North Georgia News  
Racing Reporter

**Brasstown, NC** - On Sept. 6, Tri-County hosted its Labor Day race. And along with the excitement of the race, there were a few somber moments.

Thirteen cars lined up in front of the flag stand to honor the recent fallen soldiers. It also marked a sad day for the Tri-County racing family as they mourned the loss of Clarence Barnett. Barnett attended the first race in 1967 and missed less than 20 races over the years. He still has family that races at the track today. The Clarence Barnett Memorial race featured a \$3,437 top-prize, 38-laps event - the combination of his son and grandson's car numbers that still race.

The day also included a Faster Pastor race, featuring FWD cars instead of lawn mowers.

Street Stock: No. 7 Lynn Burchfield took home the win. No. 95 Alex Vance was second. No. 73CB CB McKinnon was third. No. J69 Jim Weller was fourth. No. 01 Jacob Lynch rounded out the top five.

Faster Pastor Winner: Chis Rumpfelt of First Free Will.



Senior Caley Davis leads the Lady Panthers with 8 RBIs while sporting a .333/.400/.429 slash line. Photo/Todd Forrest

The Lady Panthers broke through in the fourth when Aubrie Banton doubled with one down. Later in the inning, Caley Davis delivered a full-count base knock to even the score. In the circle, Burnette kept the momentum in the visitor's dug-out by hurling the game's only clean inning before scoring the go-ahead run in the top-half of the fifth.

With two down, Burnette stepped to the plate and worked a four-pitch walk then came around to score on Chloe Potts' base hit to left field. Banks County quickly capitalized on a leadoff error, however, tying the contest on a pair of grounders.

Pinch-hitter Gracie Gladding opened the sixth inning of a 2-2 game with an opposite-field two-bagger -- eventually resulting in the go-ahead run via a passed ball. Davis battled her way aboard with a full-count walk in the ensuing at-bat, bringing a 1-for-3 Emma Roxbury to the dish with two down. And after going nearly a month (Aug. 13) without a two-out RBI, the senior shortstop broke out in a big way, lacing an RBI triple down the right-field line to build

a 4-2 Union lead.

Burnette recovered from an early error and a one-out single to limit the Leopards to just one run in the bottom of the sixth. Her timely pitching opened the door for the offense to supply a couple insurance runs in the seventh, beginning with consecutive singles from Potts and Jones.

With two outs, the bags juiced and her team clinging to a shaky 4-3 margin on the road, Davis found herself quickly behind in the count at one ball, two strikes - her fourth two-strike count of the contest.

Unfortunately for Banks County, Davis had them right where she wanted as the senior infielder yanked a two-run double into left -- plating two for a 6-3 score.

"Caley is a four-year starter for us, but the offense hasn't always been super-kind to her and she's had some tough luck," Mitchell said. "But she's worked hard and is playing really well for us right now. She's been one of our leading hitters all year and does a really good job working the count in the 9-hole."

For the third straight inning, the Leopards took advantage of a leadoff error and a one-out single, bringing the tying run to the plate in the bottom of the seventh. But as she'd done all game, Burnette turned away the home team by pounding the strike zone -- recording the final two outs on seven pitches (five strikes).

Burnette didn't issue a walk over seven innings while striking out three and allowing eight hits. And despite giving up four runs, only the first run was earned.

Caley Davis drove in a career-best 3 RBIs during a 2-for-3 game that included a walk, a stolen base and a run. Roxbury ended her evening 2 for 4 with an RBI.

Chloe Potts turned in her first three-hit varsity game, going 3 for 4 with a run and an RBI. Aubrie Banton doubled, scored and swiped a base during a 1-for-2 performance. Kaelyn Jones went 1 for 3.

Gladding, a newcomer, doubled in her first plate appearance as a Lady Panther. Ansley Collins walked, was hit by a pitch and stole a bag. Lexi Sisum and Banton were also plunked.

Emily Byers, Katie Byers,



Sierra Burnette defeated the defending Region 8-AA champion Banks County in just the second region start of her career. Through 36 innings this fall, Burnette is inducing ground balls at a near-65% clip. Photo/Todd Forrest

Jewell Massey and Georgia Patton all scored as courtesy-pinch runners. Katie Byers stole two bases.

On Tuesday, Union County visited Class 4A's third-ranked Madison County but were unable to protect an early 2-0 lead, falling 7-2 to the powerhouse Red Raiders program.

Jones spotted Union a 2-0 lead with a two-out single in the first - capping off four-straight singles - that scored Sisum and courtesy runner Katie Byers.

Burnette took a 2-0 advantage into the third when Madison took advantage of consecutive dropped third strikes to even the score at 2-2.

Madison County broke the game open with five in the fifth following a leadoff walk, two doubles and a one-out error.

Still a 4-2 game, the Red Raiders used a run-scoring fielder's choice, a wild pitch and a sacrifice fly to build its 7-2 advantage.

Union's only base-runner over the final two innings came by way of a two-out walk to Banton in the sixth.

The Lady Panthers out-hit Madison County 6-5, led by a 2-for-3 game from Sisum.

Burnette, Jones, Potts and Roxbury finished with one hit apiece.

Burnette allowed four earned over 4 1/3 innings while fanning five and allowing five hits. Senior Tori Tracy tossed 1 2/3 perfect innings in relief.

**Looking ahead:** After hosting Fannin in a Monday makeup game, Union resumes region play hosting Elbert County on Tuesday and Rabun County on Thursday.

"Elbert is playing really well and Rabun County can put some runs on the board, so we'll have our hands full all week," Mitchell said.

Elbert County is currently 8-5 with an 8-2 loss to common opponent Madison County.

The other four losses were courtesy of Commerce (No. 8 in Class A-Public), Franklin County (No. 8 in AAA), Oglethorpe County (9-4 record in AA) and East Jackson (4-4 in AAA).

Elbert also owns a 10-2 win over Rabun County, making Tuesday's showdown a battle between the only unbeaten teams in 8-AA.

The Lady Cats, meanwhile, sport a 3-7 mark following

an 0-3 start. Rabun suffered two losses to White County (who beat Union last month) as well as one loss apiece to Cherokee Bluff, Clarke Central, Habersham Central and Oglethorpe. Tuesday's contest gets underway at 5:30 p.m. following the annual Cancer Awareness ceremony. Thursday will mark Union softball's Senior Night contest with festivities to take place after the 5:30 p.m. contest.



Chloe Potts bounced back with three hits at Banks. Photo/Todd Forrest

## BLOOD DRIVE

### Derrick Whittle Memorial Blood Drive

Derrick began working for the Union County Sheriff's Office in April 2011. On September 15, 2011, Derrick was responding to a call and had an automobile accident. He succumbed to his injuries 3 days later on September 18th.

Because of Derrick's love for helping others and his love for Union County, his family would like to remember him by helping His County. For every one blood donation, up to 3 lives will potentially benefit from the legacy of Derrick Whittle. Please give.

In memory of Derrick, there will be free cake and hotdogs!

**Haralson Memorial Civic Center**  
365 Welborn St Blairsville GA  
**Saturday September 18th**  
**11:00 am - 5:00 pm**

Schedule an appointment 1 of 2 ways:

- Go to: [www.bloodassurance.org/dwhittle](http://www.bloodassurance.org/dwhittle)
- Call 800-962-0628

All donors will receive a "Derrick Whittle" t-shirt and donors who give twice in 2021 are entered to win a Side-by-Side!

Over 500 units of blood have been collected in memory of Derrick!

Thank you for honoring Derrick and saving lives through blood donation!

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#balifesaver
@bloodassurance

# Union volleyball opens Area with straight-set wins over Rabun, WW

Senior Night interview: The Final Four was humbling, but 'we saw what it takes to be great'

By Todd Forrest  
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Don't look now, but Union County has won three straight matches as fall settles in and Area 8 action swings into high gear.

With a full roster and two weeks of practice under their belt, the Panthers are peaking at exactly the right moment. And while Union County remains one of the favorites to take home the Area 8 championship, the Panthers' Tuesday showdown at No. 3 Gordon Lee, the defending Class AA/A runner-up, will measure the program's proximity to a state title.

Yes, Union will certainly have its hands full on Tuesday regardless of the circumstances, but the Panthers have to like their chances a whole lot more than they would have a month ago.

The recent turnaround took a significant leap forward last Wednesday, Sept. 8 when Union County turned in a dominating Senior Night performance over Fannin County, taking apart the Rebels 3-0. The Panthers led wire-to-wire during the first two sets - cruising to a 25-9 victory in set one, followed by a 25-13 score in set-two.

Fannin held a brief 4-1 advantage in set three before Union flipped the script with an 11-2 outburst, en route to a 25-11 win.

Junior Saylor Noe recorded a season-high nine kills in the win as sophomore Sofia McNabb (18) and senior Emma Whicker (13) combined for 31 assists.

Senior Morgan Fussell and junior Sofia Swartz each notched eight kills. Junior Kaylee Ashcraft picked up seven.

Fussell and Ashcraft proved just as dangerous away from the net, finishing with five and four aces, respectively. Swartz turned in a three-ace performance while



(L-R) Union County volleyball seniors Emma Whicker and Morgan Fussell during last week's Senior Night ceremony. Photo/Todd Forrest

McNabb, Noe and Whicker added two each.

Sophomore Addison Cross led the way with 12 digs. Ashcraft and Noe recorded 10 digs apiece; Whicker chipped in nine.

Union County traveled to Washington-Wilkes on Thursday and quickly took care of the host team 25-3 and 25-13. Facing rival Rabun County, Union came out on top 25-20 and 25-18.

On Monday, Sept. 6 Union dropped both contests in a home tri-match vs. Lumpkin County and Murray County. Against Lumpkin, the Panthers fell 25-19, 25-18. In the nightcap, Union dropped a 2-1 match to Murray despite taking the first set 25-16. Murray rebounded to take the next two sets, 25-22 and 15-13.

"We did so many good things [vs. Murray and Lumpkin] but then we just crumbled," Union head coach Anna Chapman said. "I think

it came down to teamwork and trusting your teammates, so we had, let's call it a 'conversation' in the locker room after that, and I believe the fruits of that showed up [the rest of the week]. It was also helpful that we had Senior Night and I think that really helped the camaraderie and it showed on the court."

Tuesday's tri-match with Fannin and Gordon Lee is scheduled for 6 p.m. Area play resumes Thursday at Oglethorpe County where Union will face Commerce and the host Patriots beginning at 5 p.m.

**Senior Night** - Ahead of last week's Fannin County match, Union County honored its two seniors: Morgan Fussell and Emma Whicker. In addition to the festivities, the *North Georgia News* caught up with the two seniors that have proven vital to the program's rise in recent years. Here is Part One of that in-

terview.

**NGN:** Without a middle school or rec program, do you remember how you first became attracted to volleyball?

**EW:** I thought volleyball sounded really fun, so I quit softball and actually started playing [volleyball] at the White County rec department because [Union County didn't have a youth program].

**MF:** My cousins played volleyball so I [attended] a youth camp in Florida in the fourth grade. When I came up here, I tried to start a volleyball program at the middle school but they said it would have to wait a couple years. So when the time came, I ended up just trying out for the high school team.

**NGN:** During your early years in high school, was there a certain upperclassman that you looked up to? And now that you're seniors, what ways do you think that player's influence has molded

you?

**EW:** When I was a freshman, the seniors that stood out to me were Delanie Skinner and Morgan Garrison. They welcomed me from the beginning and Delanie Skinner taught us so much. She showed us a lot. As a sophomore, I think it was Kait McCarter and Kaitlyn King. They were so nice and Kait was obviously a beast at the net.

**MF:** I was on JV as a freshman, but even then it was still Delanie for me. She didn't care which team you were on, she would help you with anything. Then I have to say Madelyn Hood, even though she got injured [early in the year]. She was the nicest person and I even coached her younger sister this past summer. But they both shaped who we are as players.

**EW:** They taught us how to take care of the younger players and showed us how

they should be treated. They treated us really well and we want our freshman to feel the same way that we did.

**MF:** We don't want the freshmen to be afraid of us or to think that if they do something wrong we'll yell at them. We didn't want that environment on our team because we've seen other teams that treat their younger players [poorly]. So we decided very early on, we do not want that environment on our team. Not at all.

**NGN:** Was there a moment in the past when everything clicked? A moment you realized that this team is good enough to win an Area title and make a final four run?

**MF:** I think when we beat Rabun [last year] was the turning point.

**EW:** Yeah, beating Rabun changed everything.

**MF:** We were like, 'okay, we can do this. We got this.'

**EW:** Then going to the final four and playing the team [Pace Academy] that won state, it really humbled us. We saw what it takes to be great, but I think our program [is capable of reaching that level]. That's something else we strive for as seniors is to make this a great program for the future.

**MF:** We want to leave a lasting legacy so girls in the future will look at us and say, 'we want to do that too.' But definitely beating Rabun changed our entire mindset. Our goal is to always win [Area] and make state, but when we beat Rabun, we realized that those goals could become reality [because] that we win put us in first place. Then Banks beat Rabun [in the area tournament] and we didn't get to play [Rabun] again, but we still accomplished what we set out to do: Beat Rabun and win Area.

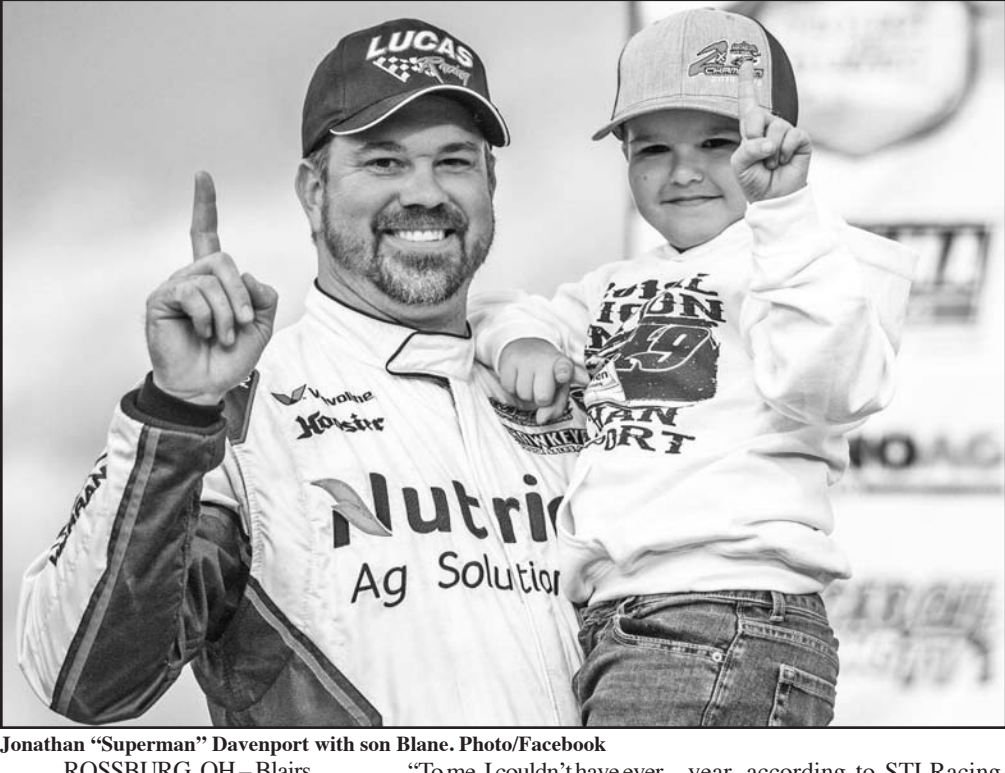
*The senior volleyball interview will continue in next week's edition of the North Georgia News.*

## Cross Country: Union County faces tough test at North Hall Invitational



Union County runners display a birthday sign during the Meeks Park race last month. At North Hall, both Union squads entered without their No. 1 runner, but the guys came away ninth and the ladies finished 10th. Hunter Hartzog paced the men, coming in 22nd at 19:14. Zander Rotko came in 34th with a time of 19:49. Wes Seiler was 38th. Grayden Cobb came in 61st, Ethan Rouse was 62nd, Anderson Clouse finished 67th and Alec Wilder was 68th. For the ladies, Hana Gregory came in 19th at 22:37, Allie Brey was 32nd at 24:01 and Natalie Payne placed 48th with a time of 25:37. Ariel McCarter came in 49th, Ellie Adams was 50th, Campbell Chambers finished 60th and Katelynn Rash 61st. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

## Jonathan Davenport makes hometown proud with fourth World 100 victory



Jonathan "Superman" Davenport with son Blane. Photo/Facebook

ROSSBURG, OH - Blairsville's own Jonathan Davenport has won his fourth career World 100, taking the champion's title and \$53,000 in winnings at the 50th World 100 at Eldora Speedway on Saturday, Sept. 11.

Davenport led the final 45 laps to become just the fourth driver in history to win the World 100 at least four times.

"To me, I couldn't have ever dreamt it up like this," Davenport told stlrracing.com. "We're only as good as our last race - that's the way I always feel. I didn't win the last one, so I feel like I've got to win the next one."

This marked Davenport and the Double L Motorsports team's sixth race with winner's shares of \$20,000 or higher this

year, according to STLRRacing, making Davenport and his Dirt Late Model team "just plain dominant when the money, and prestige, are on the line."

"It's been a hell of a year, for sure," Davenport said. "It's probably been the best I've ever had, if not, the best so far against this competition."

## Benton MacKaye Trail Association seeks Congressional approval to be designated a National Scenic Trail

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) Board of Directors announced they are seeking Congressional approval for the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) to be designated a National Scenic Trail. To date, only 11 long-distance trails have received the prestigious designation. These trails epitomize the splendor, diversity and historical significance found in the wide array of the American landscape.

With its glorious ridge-line views and the innumerable crossings of mountain streams, the almost 300-mile-long BMT comes by its reputation for beauty honestly. Nestled in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, the BMT has some of the most varied and abundant wildflowers of any temperate climate forest in the world - and - the variety of tree species is second to none. Whether it's the creek-side trilliums in the spring, the reddish orange of the fall sugar maples at the higher elevations or the unmatched 360-degree views in the winter, the BMT is a visual treat any time of the year -- it truly is an awesome hike!

The BMT traverses 82 miles in Georgia and 206 miles in Tennessee/North Carolina. This includes the Chatahoochee-Oconee, Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests as well as 93 miles in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, making it the longest trail in the Smokies. Also known for its remoteness, a third of the trail lies in Wilderness areas where vehicular access and motorized tools are prohibited. Here, the hiker finds true peace and solitude.

The BMT is named for visionary forester, Benton Mac-



Swinging Bridge over the Toccoa River. Richard Parks photographer.

Kaye, who was known for his advocacy for the Appalachian Trail (AT). The route for the BMT closely resembles MacKaye's proposed southern spur route that would extend the AT into north-central Georgia. Currently, the southern termini for both trails reside on Springer Mountain in Georgia.

"This year marks the 100-year anniversary of Benton MacKaye's treatise, 'An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning.' That essay was the initial blueprint for the AT," said BMTA President Ken Cissna. "I think Benton MacKaye would have been pleased with the trail today," Cissna continued. "The striking vistas, rushing waterfalls, the iconic Swinging Bridge and the pleasantly secluded forest pathways that wind through six Wilderness Areas as well as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (which is managed as wilderness), make the Benton MacKaye Trail a perfect candidate for designation as a National Scenic Trail!"

The Benton MacKaye Trail Association was founded in 1980. When the trail crossed the border into Tennessee in 1987, BMTA celebrated the completion of 93 miles of trail. The grand opening for the entire trail was held in 2005. Today, approximately 95% of the route is on public lands managed by

## Benton MacKaye Trail Association September hikes

The following hikes and work days are sponsored by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. The current social distancing and health rules are used by hike Leaders.

September 25 (Saturday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a TN Work Trip on the trail. Youth groups to seniors volunteers are welcomed. For more information contact Rick Harris harrisri@aol.com.

either the US Forest Service or the National Park Service. Only 15 miles currently remain on private land or as short road walks.

"The BMTA's all-volunteer work force first constructed and now maintains the BMT," said Cissna. "In fiscal 2020, BMTA volunteers turned in almost 7,000 hours maintaining the trail. And, for fiscal 2021, in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Zeta, BMTA volunteers removed over 300 blowdowns in just three weeks!"

BMTA's 729 members are active volunteers in other endeavors as well. They are hike leaders for BMTA's hikes that are open to the public. At regional festivals and other events, volunteers staff the BMTA Information Tent to educate the public about hiking, camping and a Wilderness experience in the Southern Appalachian Mountains - and -- to instill a sound conservation ethic.

Fall Branch Falls, the Swinging Bridge, Owen Vista and Long Creek Falls are just a few of the popular hiking destinations on the BMT in the North Georgia Mountains. Backpackers love the loop hikes in the Cohuttas and on Big Frog.

To learn more about the Benton MacKaye Trail Association and/or volunteering, go to the BMTA website, bmta.org or contact BMTA Vice President Joy Forehand, jwfbga@gmail.com. (NT)SP15211JCA

## Learn to play Pickleball

Free Beginners Classes every Thursday at 6 p.m. (weather permitting). All equipment is provided and there is no need to sign-up... just come. Courts are located on Chase Drive behind the Health Department.

For more information contact: blairsvillepickleball@gmail.com.



## Gold Wing Road Riders Association

Chapter J of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRRA) meeting will be September 25, 2021 at Daniels Steakhouse, Hiwassee. Fellowship/food at 11 a.m. with the meeting at noon. We welcome riders of all motorcycle brands located in the north Georgia area. We focus on friends, fun, riding safety, and knowledge. Check our website for ride schedule.

For further information, you may contact Bill and Barbara Schleicher at 706-379-3018. www.chapterj.gwrrra-ga.com.