

# Sports

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## Lady Panthers bash Burke County, advance to Elite Eight

### Union County faces Sonoraville in Columbus on Wednesday

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**Waynesboro** - Union County blasted its way into the third Class AA Elite Eight in four years, outscoring Region 4-AA champion Sonoraville 22-1 over two games in the best-of-three second-round series.

During the two games, Union County out-hit the home team 21-1 while playing error-free over consecutive outings for the first time since early August.

"We went down there and took care of business," Union County head coach Robby Roxbury said. "This is the most focused I've seen our girls all season. [Burke County] wasn't a bad team, they won their region, they just weren't anything like what we faced in our own region. I knew [Region 7-AA] would be tough this year, tougher than what we'd faced in the past, but I had no idea it would be this tough."

The Lady Panthers travel to Columbus for the Class AA State Championship tournament, opening with Region 7-AA champion Sonoraville on Wednesday, Oct. 30.

Sonoraville defeated Union County 10-1 in each of the two meetings this year.

"We got into a stretch in early-September where we just couldn't hit or do anything right at the plate," Roxbury said. "That went on for about a week, then we started hitting the ball hard, but it was right at somebody. Then we had a stretch where we were getting hits, but couldn't come up with a clutch hit. But about late-September, early October, things started falling into place."

**GM 1: Lady Panthers 9, Burke County 0 (5 inn) -**



The Lady Panthers celebrate their Elite-Eight clinching victory at Burke County on Oct. 22. Union faces Region 7-AA Champion Sonoraville on Wednesday seeking to end a 7-game losing streak in the Elite Eight. Photo/UCHS Softball

Izzy Anthros struck out nine during a 5-inning no-hitter to open the Sweet 16 series at Burke County. At the plate, Anthros went 2 for 3 with a walk and a run.

Jordane Mullanack scored twice and doubled during a 2-for-4 game; Sloane Dyer drove in two and walked while going 1 for 1; Jules Dyer knocked in two more, finishing 1 for 3.

Jules Dyer put Union County on the board during the first via a two-run, two-out single that scored Anthros and Mullanack. The Lady Panthers tacked on two more in the fourth when Mikala Souther walked and came around on an error, and then Sloane Dyer's

sacrifice fly brought home Ayla Jamison.

Union County broke things open with a 5-run fifth by sending 10 batters to the plate, beginning with a Mullanack double and Sloane Dyer's RBI single. Lily Helton reached on an error and Reese Kelley's one-out double made it 6-0.

Souther's bunt single resulted in a two-run error; she eventually scored on Delaney Moses' groundout.

Anthros retired Burke County in order during the bottom half to end the game after five.

Kelley finished 1 for 3 with a run and an RBI; Souther scored twice and drove in a run

while going 1 for 2; Moses added an RBI and Stella Collins swiped a bag.

**GM 2: Union County 13, Burke County 1 (4 inn)** - Union County's 7-run first delivered an early knockout blow in the series clincher on Tuesday, Oct. 22.

The Lady Panthers, who belted six extra-base hits, added a run in the third, then walked it off via the mercy rule courtesy of a 4-run fourth.

Anthros finished 3 for 3 with a double and 2 RBIs. She went 4 innings in the circle, allowing one hit, one run and striking out nine.

Mullanack doubled, tripled, knocked in a pair and scored twice during a 2 for 3 game; Sloane Dyer scored twice and tripled while going 2 for 3; Souther doubled, scored twice and drove in two runs to finish 1 for 1.

After Anthros fanned the side in the first, she opened Union's 7-run game with a base hit, followed by con-

secutive doubles from Addison Whitener and Mullanack. Helton's bunt single made it 2-0 and Jules Dyer's groundout spotted the Lady Panthers a 3-0 edge.

Kelley worked a two-out walk and Souther's double broke things open at 5-0. Moses' base hit scored Souther and Anthros' double made it 7-0.

Kelley walked and scored on a wild pitch in the third, but Burke County got the run back when a leadoff hit-by-pitch came around to score in the fourth.

Union's game-ending 5-run fifth opened with triples from Mullanack and Sloane Dyer, who later scored on a wild pitch.

With two away, Souther drew a walk and Collins' single made it 11-1 -- scoring Helton, who reached on an error. Anthros' base knock brought home Souther and an error off the bat of Jaslyn Roberts resulted in the final run of the

game. Whitener finished 1 for 2; Helton finished 1 for 2 with a run and an RBI; Jules Dyer drove in one; Moses finished 1 for 1 with a run and an RBI; Collins knocked in a run and scored during a 1 for 2 game; Kelley drew a pair of walks and scored two runs; Jamison and Peyton Grisham added one run each.

"The thing I'm most proud about with these girls is, even after losing six straight, they never gave up," Roxbury said. "They kept grinding. And that's what we kept preaching to them. We went over to Murray County and won in 10 innings, then we beat Ringgold at our place and it all just fell into place."

**Up next:** Union County and Sonoraville meet at 1 p.m. on Wednesday. The winner will face either Rockmart or Morgan County on Thursday at 1 p.m.. The losers will face off at 5 p.m. Thursday.

"To be honest, I think Sonoraville has a good shot to win State," Roxbury said. "They are the most solid lineup, 1-9, that I've seen. They have two good pitchers. They don't overwhelm you, but they are really good at moving the ball around the zone."

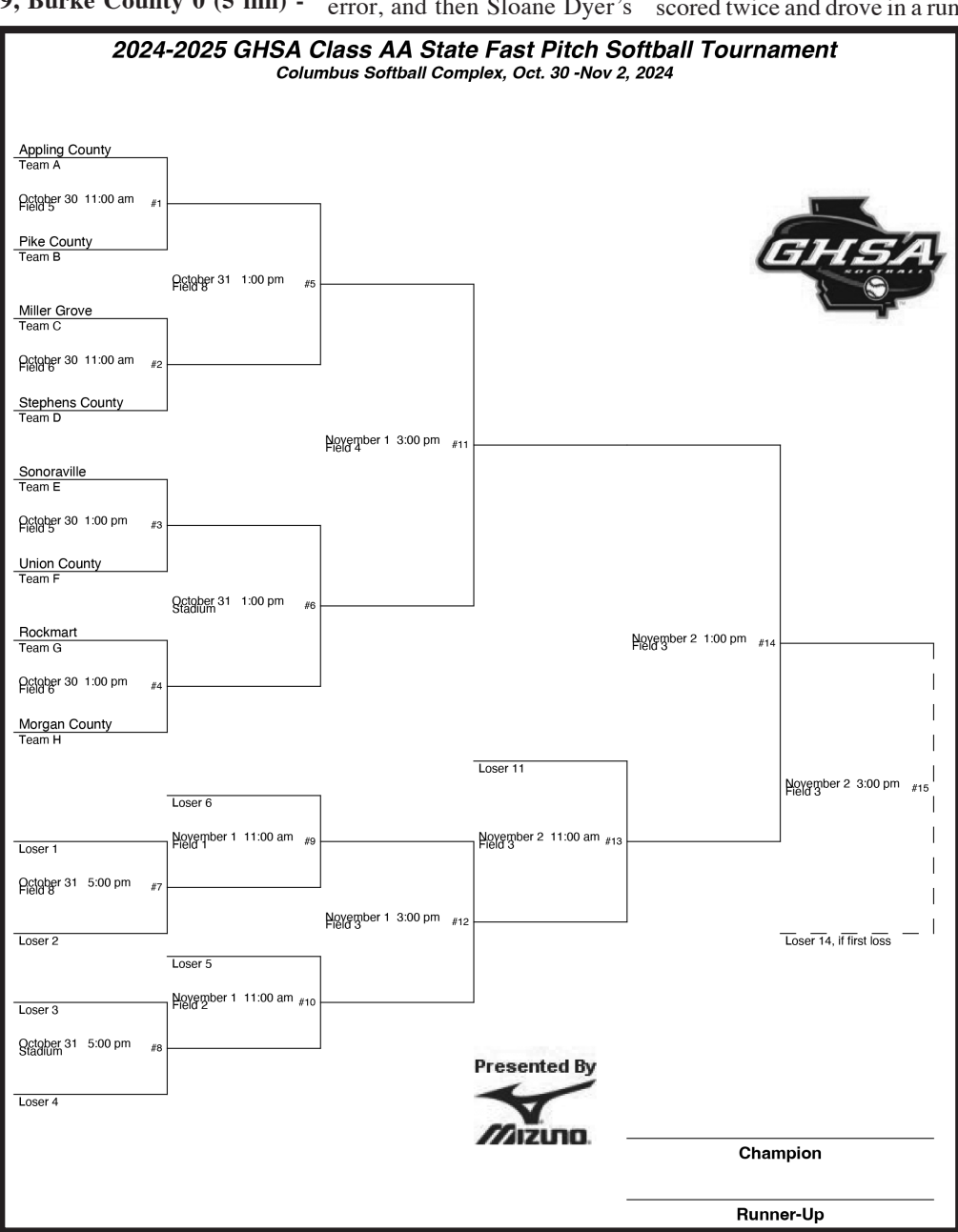
"The funny thing is, we had [Sonoraville] on the ropes at our place, but the wheels fell off in the seventh."

"It's hard to beat a team three times at any level and I like our chances. I challenged the girls to put the [previous two meetings] by the wayside. We're in the playoffs, and if you get hot at the right time, make a play here or there, you'll have an opportunity to make history."

Upon advancing to the quarterfinals, the remaining eight teams face off in a double-elimination tournament.

The other four teams involved in this week's Elite Eight are Appling County, Miller Grove, Pike County and Stephens County.

Union County will host a send-off for the softball team on Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. Everyone is encouraged to cheer on the girls as they depart for Columbus.



**UCHS SOFTBALL**

**ELITE 8**

**All Panther Fans join us at the**  
**Send off to Columbus**  
**Tuesday @ 6:30**  
**Glenn Gooch Bypass**



# XC: Hunter torches the competition at Region 7-AA Championship meet

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Dalton - Union County junior Lola Hunter claimed the Region 7-AA title on Tuesday, Oct. 22, leading the Panthers (65 points) to a first-place finish among public schools and second overall to North Cobb Christian (42 points).

The Union men placed second overall (75 points) to North Cobb Christian (66 points) and first among public schools.

Hunter finished with a time of 19 minutes, 50 seconds -- more than 90 seconds better than second-place Paxton Kirby of Rockmart, who crossed the line at 21:22.

Union's Macy Payne placed 13th at 24:48.39; Averie Tanner was 14th at 24:48.72; Avery Hussion came in 18th at 25:42; Kate Barrett finished 19th with a time of 25:49 and Katie Payne was 20th with a time of 25:56.

Coahulla Creek placed third overall with 72 points on their home course. Rockmart was fourth at 112 points, Sonoraville placed fifth at 130, North Murray's 138 was good enough for sixth, Ringgold was seventh with 140 and Murray was eighth at 202 points.

In the men's race, Union County's Oliver Hillman came in sixth at 18:12; Andrew Nush-tayev was 11th at 19:12; Ander



Junior Lola Hunter took home Union County's first cross country region title since 2019. Photo/UCHS

Faulkner placed 15th with a time of 19:22; Bryson Brooks was 18th at 19:29; Noah James Payne came in 25th at 19:43; Cole Brown placed 26th at 19:44 and Trey Hawley was 34th with a time of 20:44.

Rockmart finished third with 78 points -- three back of Union County. North Murray was fourth at 95 points;

Sonoraville came in fifth with 122; Coahulla Creek was sixth at 138; Murray County placed seventh with 155 and Ringgold was eighth with 183.

Both Union County teams advance to Saturday's Class AA State Sectionals at East Jackson. The State Championships are on Saturday, Nov. 9 at Carrollton High School.

# Volleyball: Ringgold eliminates Union County 3-0 in quarterfinals

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Ringgold - Union County volleyball's postseason run came to an end during the Elite Eight following a 3-0 (13-25, 22-25, 12-25) loss at Region 7-AA's Ringgold High School.

The Tigers ran away with the first set after Katelyn Brown and Sofia Foster had the contest all square at 4-4. Lily Brookshire and Reese Jones kept the Panthers (18-19) within three at 9-6 before Ringgold built a 16-8 margin.

A service error and a Charlei Robinson kill kept Union within six at 18-12 but Ringgold outscored the visitors 7-1 down the stretch.

During the second set, the two teams battled down to the wire but Ringgold scored the final two points of a 25-22 victory.

Despite trailing most of the set, Foster put Union on top 12-11 and Mallory Rouse kept her team within a point at 16-15. Robinson and Brookshire pushed the Panthers ahead 18-17 for their final lead of the night.

With their team trailing by two, Robinson, Foster and Brookshire moved Union within a point at 20-19, 21-20, 22-21 and 23-22, but they couldn't get over the hump as Ringgold finished things off.

The third set was all



Senior Katelyn Brown in action during the Oct. 22 loss at Ringgold. Brown was named First Team All Region in 7-AA. Senior Lily Brookshire earned a second-team nod. Photo/Todd Forrest

Tigers, who built leads of 4-1, 12-4 and 17-8, en route to a 25-12 victory. No individual stats were available for the Ringgold match at press time.

# Football: Sonoraville stuns Panthers in 3 OTs; Senior Night up next

Regular season finale vs. North Cobb Christian moved to Thursday

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Union County (4-5, 4-3) dropped a 32-30 triple-overtime heartbreaker to Sonoraville (3-7, 3-5) on Friday night after the Panthers appeared to win the game in regulation. Unfortunately, Tyler Parker's Hail Mary reception in the endzone was ruled out of bounds.

"We had chances in the second half and overtime, but the first half cost us the game," Union County head coach Michael Perry said. "We had too many mistakes and were 1 for 3 with a turnover in the red zone."

In overtime, sophomore Grant Smith connected on the first field goal attempt of his career, hitting from 34 yards, before Sonoraville sent the game to a second OT by knocking home a 32-yard kick.

The Phoenix put six on the board to start the second session but were unsuccessful on the mandatory 2-point try -- which takes effect after the first OT.

Union answered when Kamden Kendrick kept it for 11 yards, and three plays later, Maddox Young punched it in from a yard out. But the Panthers failed to walk it off with an incomplete pass on the 2-point attempt.

Starting in the third overtime, both teams swap 2-point conversions until there is a winner. Union County's 2-point



Senior Kaden Combs (54) gets a finger on Sonoraville's would-be game-winning field goal in the final moments of regulation on Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

attempt resulted in another incomplete pass when Kendrick overshot Connor Schuknecht on a wheel route, and moments later, Sonoraville ended the

game when the QB elected to keep it himself on a rollout to his left.

"I'm proud of our effort, but we had too many opportunities and didn't capitalize," Perry said. "That falls on me as the head coach and I need to do a better job."

The late-game drama was set up by Kaden Combs' blocked field goal with under 90 seconds remaining in regulation. Tied at 21-21 late in the fourth, Combs got a fingertip on Sonoraville's go-ahead 33-yard field goal attempt, setting up one last gasp for Union County.

Starting from the shadow of its own endzone and out of timeouts, Union's final drive came to life when Schuknecht caught a check down and rumbled for 18 on third and 10. A 9-yard throw to Young, a 14-yard QB scramble and a defensive pass interference penalty had Union at the Phoenix 41-yard line with enough time for two shots at the endzone.

Kendrick's first heave was pulled down by Parker, but he was ruled out of bounds on the right side of the endzone. Despite the incompleteness, Sonoraville was flagged for a late hit on the QB, giving Union one more shot from the 26. From there, Kendrick fired incomplete downfield to Young, who drew contact but no flag, sending the game to OT.

Union never trailed during regulation, grabbing an early 7-0 lead when Schuknecht powered his way up the middle from 3 yards, capping a 60-play drive.

After Union's second drive stalled at the Sonoraville 23, the Phoenix answered with a 41-yard touchdown strike -- knotting the score at 7-7 in the second quarter.

The score remained dead-

locked until the third period when Union's 80-yard scoring drive ended with Young climbing the ladder to pull down a 10-yard pass from Kendrick.

Union seized momentum when the defense forced a quick three-and-out, but on the first play of the ensuing Panthers series, Schuknecht was stripped on a carry up the middle, and Sonoraville came out of the pile with the fumble, going 35 yards for the game-tying score.

Tied at 14, Bentley Rich's kick return to midfield set up Union's go-ahead touchdown. On the third play of the series, Kendrick found Young over the middle for 21 yards. Later in the drive, Parker moved the chains with a pair of timely third-down grabs, setting up Young's 1-yard keeper.

Sonoraville's 18-yard touchdown pass knotted the game at 21-21 in the fourth, and this time, the Panthers' offense failed to answer. As a result, the Phoenix moved inside the Union red zone, converting a critical fourth-and-5 from their own 41 along the way. But with their back against the wall, the Panthers' defense denied the TD, resulting in a field goal attempt that was tipped by Combs at the line of scrimmage.

Schuknecht finished with 27 yards and a touchdown on 27 carries. He caught five passes for 57 yards. The senior back is now 53 yards shy of a 1,000-yard rushing season and 125 away from 2,000 for his career.

Young caught six balls for 81 yards and a TD while rushing for two scores. Parker had 4 receptions for 33 yards; Rich and freshman Mikey Davis caught one pass each.

Kendrick ended his night 17 for 32 with 191 yards, one TD and an interception.



Senior Maddox Young snags a Kamden Kendrick touchdown pass for a 14-7 lead during the third quarter of Friday's loss. Photo/Todd Forrest

Defensively, Union County held Sonoraville to 72 yards on the ground and 266 yards of total offense.

Easton Shumaker led the Panthers with 8 tackles, 2 TFLs and half a sack. Brandon Lynch had 7 tackles; Kevin Kilpatrick and Ethan Lester recorded 6 tackles; Alan Godinez added a half sack to go along with 5 tackles and a TFL.

Combs had five stops and Micah Wallace notched 3 tackles and a TFL.

Up next: Union County hosts 8-1 North Cobb Christian for Senior Night on Thursday, Oct. 31 at 7:30 p.m.

deep receiving corps featuring eight players with a TD catch.

Defensive end and Army commit, Ray Dixon, anchors an Eagles' defensive unit that's been susceptible to getting gashed in the run game, allowing 188 yards to Sonoraville, 202 to North Murray and 240 at Rockmart -- North Cobb's only loss of 2024.

"North Cobb is very good, but they only beat Sonoraville by a touchdown," Perry said. "I think they have the most talent at the [skill positions] in the region. We just need to show up and give it our best effort and hopefully send these kids out with a win on Senior Night."