

Union County baseball underway with Bradburn at the helm

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nganews.com

Last May their was a changing of the guard for Union County baseball.

The resignation of Union Head Coach C.T. Hussion caught many of his players off guard. Although, the news became much easier to digest when it was announced that his successor would be Assistant Coach Brandon Bradburn.

The Panthers have been preparing for the upcoming season and have high hopes under the tutelage of a familiar face. But don't feel sorry for the Panthers' new skipper, Hussion left his former assistant with plenty of weapons at his disposal for the 2013 season.

Following a 12-10 season in 2012, one area that Bradburn views as the deepest will be the pitching staff. Ace Daniel Coyne has graduated, but the Panthers return plenty of young arms to compliment seasoned vets, Cody Davenport and Jared Croskey.

Davenport is still recovering from a football injury, however Bradburn expects him to be fully recovered and when he does, he will only add to wealth of lively arms atop the Panther rotation.

"I do not know about some of the teams in the region, but I would guess our pitching staff is completely capable of going toe to toe with any staff in our region," Coach Bradburn said.

"Cody Davenport is actually recovering from a football shoulder injury, but he is still



Cody Davenport, Wes Aulet, and Luther Jones during a conference on the mound at Elbert County last season. Photo/Todd Forrest

pitching but not at 100 percent. Senior Jared Croskey and juniors Lane Everett and Kalvin Duckworth will carry most of the load."

Other hurlers that should see action this year are junior Garrett Nix along with plenty of sophomores and freshman that will give Bradburn a wealth of options on the mound.

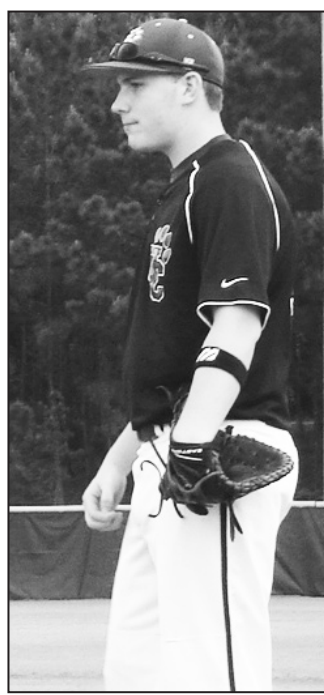
"A pitcher that didn't pitch much last year, but could see plenty of time on the mound is Garrett Nix," Bradburn said. "The freshmen and sophomore talent pool is so deep we already have a couple of guys who could be ready to see varsity time on the mound."

In the infield, Union returns two college commits,

shortstop Zach Odom, and first baseman Wes Aulet.

Odom will be dealing with an injury to his non-throwing shoulder suffered on the hardwood and the coach is waiting to hear from the doctor on his status and if the four-year starter and All-Region team selection will require surgery. Another infielder battling the injury bug is junior third baseman Luther Jones. Jones suffered what appeared to be a season ending shoulder injury in the fall and has battled his way back, but during his road to recovery, suffered a minor setback with a knee injury, but should be back in action by early-March.

"Our infield should be as solid as ever," Coach Bradburn



Wes Aulet

said. "Lane Everett, Odom, Kalvin Duckworth, Cooper Patton, and Aulet will anchor an experienced lineup."

The outfield will once again be patrolled by Croskey. The center fielder will provide Union County with one of the best combinations of speed and arm strength and should continue to cover more grass than any other player in the Region.

Meanwhile, two more seniors round out the Panther outfield with Davenport in left and T Bentley in right.

Although no starting job is safe, Bradburn pointed out that there is plenty of youth behind them who could push for playing time.

"Some up and comers to



Coach Brandon Bradburn

look out for are this year are sophomores Jackson Burks, Chase Barnett, Tyler Odom, as well as many other freshman and sophomores," Bradburn said.

At the plate, Bradburn is expecting the Panthers to throw a very balanced lineup at the opposition this season. Union should be able to put runs on the board in a variety of ways. The Panthers have plenty of power, speed, and won't be afraid to play small ball either.

"We have guys who can drive the ball into the gaps and over the fence," he said. "We have contact guys, and we also have those speedsters who can get the bunt down."

"One of the things we must do this year is have timely hitting. Being able to cash in with runners in scoring position could possibly be the theme of the season, in which case it is for most teams."

With all of these tools at his disposal, Bradburn hopes

to harness it all so his guys are competing for the top spot in Region 8-AA at season's end.

"I like our chances to win Region this year, however there are some very strong opponents that will put us to the test," he said. "We will have to bring our A-game day in and day out if we want that number one spot, but I believe our guys are up for the challenge."

The key to success in 2013 will be coming together and playing as a team, he added.

"We have an abundance of individual talent, but that can only get you so far," he said. "If we play as a team and maintain focus by taking it one day at a time, we will be in good shape."

Union County traveled to Class AAAA's Chestatee on Friday for a scrimmage game before hosting Towns County in the season opener on Monday. Afterwards came visiting Class AAA North Murray on Tuesday.

"The main goal of the scrimmage Friday was to get the rust off, see some live pitching and situations, and a chance to just watch our boys have fun and play some baseball," he said. "The weather has not been very good of late, so it will be nice to just see them out there playing."

"Something we can't allow is scoreboard watching. Our team will play with a sense of urgency, no matter what the scoreboard says. Getting the best out of our guys every single inning will mean good things this year."

Soccer opens Friday with familiar face in charge

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nganews.com

Both Union County Soccer teams will be faced with a coaching change in 2013.

Don't worry, it's a familiar face. Tim Hunter takes the reins for the 2013 season.

The Panthers return four starters from last year's 7-8 squad, but those four players are solid.

Jair Gonzalez, Eric Hougrand, T.J. Smith, and Tim McKenna should lead a hardworking team that Coach Hunter believes will make Union County proud.

"The effort is there and this team wants to win," Hunter said. "We are a completely different team and we are rebuilding. Talentwise, we don't put as much talent on the field, but the thing about these kids is, we put effort on the field."

"These kids are so coachable. They don't care who scores and we don't have any kind of ego issues and they are out here to win. Nobody outside of this team believes it, but our goal is to compete for a Region Title and reach the State Tournament."

Union opened with Pickens County on Tuesday before playing host to Towns County



Union County soccer practice is underway. Photo/Todd Forrest at 4:30 p.m. on Friday.

Coach Hunter feels that Riverside Military Academy and Rabun County will be the teams to beat in 8-AA but with Union's work ethic, his Panthers can overcome just about anything.

"This team has had a lot of adversity and has lost a lot of players, and a lot of things go against us, but the thing that we have is, kids who want to win."

Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers are coming off an 11-3

season but are hoping to turn a disappointing home-field loss to North Oconee in the Region Tournament into postseason success this spring.

The Lady Panthers, on the other hand, will be facing a tougher Region 8-AA schedule than the boys with Jefferson and Oglethorpe being perennial powers in 8-AA.

The girls have a little more to replace than the boys, but Hunter still has faith in his Lady Panthers, who he coached to more than 130 wins between

2000-2010.

"We lost a lot of girls due to graduation that can't be replaced," Hunter said.

Union County will only have three seniors in 2013 but Hunter feels there is an abundance of talent in the sophomore class.

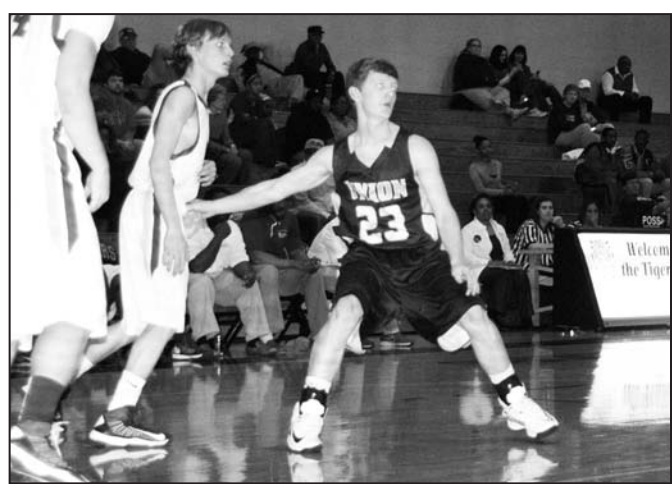
"I think we're going to have enough skill to come out and compete and get after it," Hunter said. "The rules haven't changed. We're still gunning for a Region Title and expect to reach State."

Sights from Panthers' post season

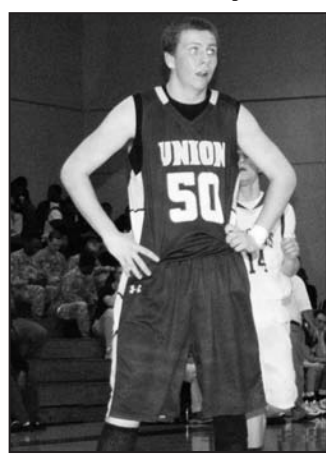
Panther basketball photos by Todd Forrest



Senior James Rowe



Sophomore Hunter Hughes



C.J. Byers



Thomas Danek

Mountain Gymnastics places in Dahlonega and Lawrenceville



Level Three: (Left to right) Kaitlyn Daves, Caymin Thompson, AnnaLyse Kiernan, Jacey Lee, Haley Craig.

The Mountain Gymnastics season got underway last month with the Mountain Madness Meet in Dahlonega and the Snowflake Classic in Lawrenceville.

At Mountain Madness, 10-year old Reagan Ledford picked up a first place overall finish by taking the high score in the Vault, the Bars, and the Floor. She came in third in the Beam.

Nine-year old Addicyn Dockery scored first overall, coming out on top in the Beam, and the Floor. She also came in second in the vault and fourth in the bars.

Evelyn McBride and Jaylen Hogsted picked up second place, All-Around finishes, Mia McCombs and Laura McGaha were third, while Kaylie Kendall and Lexi Stephens were fourth.

In the AAU Level 3, Six-year old Caymin Thompson and eight-year old Jacey Lee took home first place overall.



Prep-Op 1: (Left to right) Emma Patterson, Olivia Blocker, Sierra Louima, Erin Raper, Jordan Swanson

Thompson was first in the Bars, Beam, and Floor, and second in the Vault. Lee was high scorer in every event except the floor, where she came in second. Kaitlyn Daves and Haley Craig had a second place overall finish, while AnnaLyse Kiernan, and Brandy Barlow came in third.

In the AAU Prep-Op, Erin Raper finished first overall with the high score in the Floor and Beam. Olivia Blocker came in second, Emma Patterson third, and Jordan Swanson fourth.

At the Snowflake Classic, Level 3, the team finished fourth with a total score of 104.525.

Lee and Craig each finished third, Daves came in fourth, Kiernan seventh, Thompson eighth, and Barlow 10th.

In the Prep-Op 1, the team came in third with Patterson and Raper picking up fifth, and Swanson in sixth.



Prep-Op 2: (Left to right) Kaylie Kendall, Addicyn Dockery, Jaylen Hogsted, Reagan Ledford, Mia McCombs, Laura McGaha, Evelyn McBride. Not pictured: Madelyn Savage and Lexi Stephens.

Prep-Op 2, resulted in a second place finish with McGaha coming in first. She was first in each event except for a second place finish in the Floor exercise. Stephens was second, coming in first in the Bars and the Floor. Hogsted also came in second following first place finishes in the Vault and the Floor.

Ledford came in first place in the Vault. McBride finished sixth, Dockery in seventh, and Kendall in eighth.

The next event will be this weekend's Championship Cup in Roswell. The team will then compete in the Spring Breakout on March 2nd in Woodstock.

Mountain Cheer All-Star team finishes second in Asheville



The Mountain Gymnastics Center's All-Star Competition Cheer team brought home second place out of more than 100 teams in Asheville, NC during the weekend of Feb. 2nd.

Two weeks ago, the team competed in Dalton at the Northwest Georgia Trade and Convention Center where they finished in fifth place.

NEW! Now being offered... Get in shape this season with the Fitness/Kickboxing class now being offered by the Blairsville School of Dance Thursdays at 6:30

Blairsville School of Dance 706-897-2042

