

# Sports

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## Baseball: Panthers return eight starters; gunning for Region title

By Todd Forreast  
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With eight returning starters from last season's Region 8-AA Runner Up squad, Union County Head Coach Brandon Bradburn has an array of experience at his disposal in 2015.

Since taking over the head coaching duties before the 2013 season, Union County baseball has reached the State Tournament in consecutive seasons. Prior to his first year at the helm, the Panthers had only one State Tournament appearance since 1995.

In year one under Bradburn, the 2013 squad reached the Sweet 16 for the first time since '95. However, this year's team features as much experience as 2013, and with two-time defending Region Champ Jefferson gone, this current crop of Panthers have the potential to win Region 8-AA and advance in the State Tournament.

Six seniors will lead the way for Coach Bradburn this spring. Among them is right-handed pitcher Tyler Odom.

Replacing ace Lane Everett and his 2.15 ERA in 70 innings will be no easy task, but Coach Bradburn believes that there are two potential aces on this year's pitching staff in Odom and Mancuso.

Joining Odom and Mancuso in the rotation are senior Hunter Hughes and junior Josh Daniel, who hope to give the Panthers four viable starting pitchers.

"I don't really know who our ace is yet," Coach Bradburn said. "Right now, with Tyler (Odom) coming back from basketball, Joe (Mancuso) is the guy. When Tyler is back to full strength, either one could be the ace."

Among the returning pitchers, Odom is by far the most experienced and his 35 innings in 2014 was second only to Everett. He also compiled a 5-2 record with a 3.14 earned run average to go along with 38 strikeouts and 23 walks.

Meanwhile, Mancuso scored 29.1 innings last season with 36 strikeouts to 27 walks. Despite a 6.47 ERA, he finished the season with a 3-1 record.

Daniel doesn't have the experience of Odom or Mancuso but put up some impressive numbers in the five games he appeared in.

"He pitched a few games last year, but this year, his role on the mound will be significantly increased," Coach Bradburn said.

In 10.2 innings of work, Daniel fanned 15 batters and surrendered four free passes. He won two games with one save and had a microscopic ERA of 0.94.

Offensively, the Panthers return what is arguably the most explosive lineup in 8-AA and the pitching staff will benefit from a lineup that scored 8.3 runs-per-game last year, but Coach Brad-



Senior Jake Sisum returns after leading the Panthers in batting average, OPS, and tied for first in on base percentage. Photo/Todd Forreast



Junior Joseph Mancuso will see more action on the mound this season. At the plate he led the team in homers and RBIs. Photo/Todd Forreast



Junior Josh Daniel



Senior Jackson Burks will anchor the infield as a three-year starter at third base. He also hit .347 with a homer last year. Photo/Todd Forreast



Senior Tyler Odom will see more innings this season to make up for the loss of Lane Everett to graduation. Photo/Todd Forreast



Senior Hunter Hughes



Senior Chase Barnett  
Photos/Todd Forreast

burn is hoping his squad won't have to score a lot of runs to win ball games.

"Last year we had to out-score teams and that's a tough way to live," Coach Bradburn said. "This year we're focusing more on defense in practice, and hopefully that will make life easier for our pitchers and we won't have to score as many runs as we did last year."

"Defensively we made great plays all over the field but we couldn't make the routine plays, and that got us into some trouble. The highlight plays will be there, but we're not worried about that. We're worried about making the routine plays."

With the exception of Everett (.361 average, 16 RBIs, and 23 runs) Coach Bradburn won't have to make many changes to his lineup card.

Senior infielder/DH Jake Sisum returns after an impressive junior season that saw the first

year starter lead the team with a .415 batting average, a 1.085 OPS (on base percentage + slugging percentage), and tied for the team lead with a .500 on base percentage (OBP).

Hughes hit near the top of the order and continuously set the table for Sisum and the power hitters in the middle of the lineup. The senior saw action at shortstop, second base, and outfield and is one of the most versatile players on the roster.

He completed the 2014 season with a .303 average, 20 runs scored, 12 RBIs, and 10 stolen bases.

Senior third baseman Jackson Burks has been solid at the hot corner for two years, but last year, his bat caught up to his defensive prowess. As a junior, Burks hit .347 with a homer, 13 RBIs, and 21 runs scored. He added another dimension to his game with 10 steals in 11 tries.

Behind the plate, catcher

Chase Barnett returns as a three-year starter. The senior is one of the top defensive catchers in the region and strikes fear in the heart of would-be base stealers.

Offensively, Barnett has become a tough out. Last year he hit .314 and drew 14 base-on-balls.

Rounding out the senior class is centerfielder Robert Prunier who hit .322 and did a nice job in the field replacing Jared Croskey. He stole six bases and was tied for second on the team with eight doubles.

At the plate, Mancuso was tops on the team with 4 homers and a .608 slugging percentage. The junior also drew 14 walks to go with a .311 batting average.

Daniel, another junior, led the team with 30 runs, 22 walks, and 20 stolen bases. He finished with a .346 batting average, a .500 OBP, and a homer.

According to Coach Bradburn, junior Andrew Brown and

sophomore Slade Thompson will also play an important role in the Union County outfield.

The region schedule is a bit more favorable without Jefferson - the only team to finish ahead of Union in 8-AA over the past two seasons.

However, Coach Bradburn knows that the rest of the region isn't going to roll over and give the Panthers the top spot by default. If anything, Union has a bulls-eye on their back.

"I believe the Region will be a dog fight between us, Rabun, and Oglethorpe," Coach Bradburn said. "We split with both of them last year and Oglethorpe is returning eight seniors. We're going to have our hands full with both of those teams."

As the calendar turns to March, the Panthers have yet to play a game. Winter weather canceled the scrimmage game with Chestatee and a pair of games with Towns County that

were scheduled for Feb. 20th and Feb. 24th.

A trip to Lumpkin was called off on Feb. 25th and games with Fannin and Gilmer on Feb. 28th were also canceled. On Saturday, Union is scheduled to play at Washington Wilkes for an 8-AA doubleheader at noon.

## Brooke Maddox named 8-AA Player of the Year; Hunter Hughes named First Team All Region

By Todd Forreast  
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For the second time in three years, the Lady Panthers basketball squad have featured the Region 8-AA Player of the Year.

Senior Brooke Maddox was selected POY by the Region's coaches at last month's Region Meeting on the Sunday before the Region Tournament began.

Maddox led the Lady Panthers in assists, steals, and was second in scoring. Two years ago, Lauren Zollinger received POY honors following her junior season.

Senior Lisa Nalasci was named First Team All Region, senior Kaitlyn Day was selected to the Second Team. Nalasci led her team in scoring, rebounding, and blocked shots.

Day was third in scoring and second in rebounds.

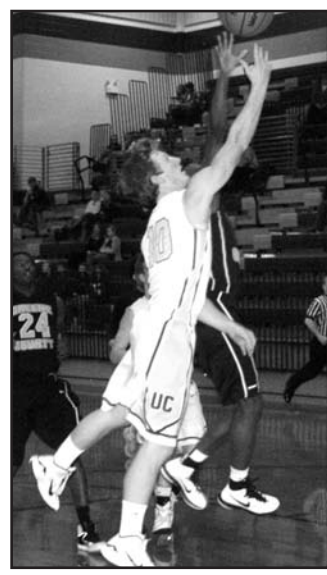
The Panthers received one First Team All Region selection with senior Hunter Hughes getting the nod.

For the season, Hughes averaged a team-best 18.6 points-per-game (PPG). He was also tops in assists and tied for first in steals.

Senior Tyler Odom received a Second Team All-Region selection after averaging



Brooke Maddox



Hunter Hughes



Lisa Nalasci

ing 16 PPG. He led the team in rebounding and tied for first in steals.

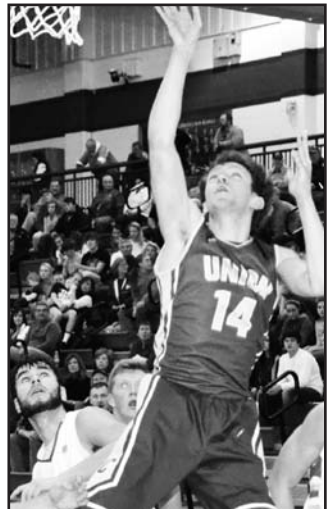
Other All Region selections were junior Layne Colwell and sophomore Holly Stroman for the Lady Panthers. Colwell was second on the team in rebounds and Stroman was second in assists.

Senior Kyle Hamby and junior Chase Shook were named All Region for the guys. Hamby was third in assists and tied for first in steals. Shook was third in points, second in rebounds, and first in blocked shots.

Senior Tyler Odom received a Second Team All-Region selection after averaging



Kaitlyn Day



Tyler Odom

### 2015 Union County Soccer Schedule

Friday, February 06, 2015	at Pickens Scrimm	VG 5:00	VB 7:00
Monday, February 23, 2015	at Lumpkin	JVG 5:00	JVB 6:30
Thursday, February 19, 2015	at Pickens	JVG 5:00	JVB 6:30
Tuesday, February 24, 2015	at Rabun	VG 5:00	VB 7:00
Wednesday, February 25, 2015	at Fannin	JVG 5:00	JVB 6:30
Thursday, February 26, 2015	Pickens	JVG 5:00	JVB 6:30
Tuesday, March 03, 2015	Fannin	VG 5:00	VB 7:00
Friday, March 06, 2015	at Washington W	VG 5:30	VB 7:30
Monday, March 09, 2015	Lumpkin	JVG 5:00	JVB 6:30
Tuesday, March 10, 2015	Pickens	VG 5:00	VB 7:00
Wednesday, March 11, 2015	Fannin	JVG 5:00	JVB 6:30
Friday, March 13, 2015	Greene	VG 5:30	VB 7:30
Monday, March 16, 2015	at Swain	VG 4:30	
Friday, March 20, 2015	at Social Circle	VG 5:30	VB 7:30
Monday, March 23, 2015	Towns	VG 5:00	VB 7:00
Friday, March 27, 2015	Rabun	VG 5:00	VB 7:00
Tuesday, March 31, 2015	Gilmer		VB 5:00
Thursday, April 02, 2015	Lumpkin	VG 5:30	VB 7:30
Tuesday, April 14, 2015	at Towns	VG 5:00	VB 7:00
Friday, April 17, 2015	Oglethorpe	VG 5:30	VB 7:30
Monday, April 20, 2015	at Riverside	JVB 4:30	VB 6:00
Wednesday, April 22, 2015	Swain	VG 4:30	