

Sports

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Panthers blast Rabun; improve to 3-0 in Region play

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With a road trip to Region 8-AA powerhouse Jefferson on deck, Union County (6-1, 3-0) made a statement last Wednesday by run-ruling Rabun County 13-3 in five innings.

The opportunistic Panthers took advantage of five Wildcat errors while pounding out 14 hits, including a 3-run blast by T Bentley in the first inning as Union jumped out to a 4-0 lead in the early going.

Kalvin Duckworth gave up three runs in the second but settled into a groove, allowing just 4 hits in five innings of work.

"It usually takes Kalvin an inning or so to get settled down with his mechanics and figure out what is working for him and what is not working," Union Head Coach Brandon Bradburn said. "We were communicating with each other between innings to see how we wanted to pitch the batters."

The junior pitcher struck out six and walked five for his team-high third win of the season.

Bentley finished 3-for-4, scoring 3 times and driving in 3 runs. Zach Odom went 2-for-3 with 2 walks and 2 RBIs.

Duckworth helped his own cause by knocking in two, while Wes Aulet, Lane Everett, and Luther Jones added 2 hits a piece.

Aulet laced a base hit to left following an infield single by Croskey to bring Bentley to the plate. The senior outfielder blasted the first pitch he saw out of the yard and staked Union to a 3-0 advantage.

The Panthers weren't through as an Everett grounder found a hole. He then stole second, advanced to third on a throwing error, and scored on a passed ball.



Panthers celebrate after senior T Bentley (#12) went deep in the first inning. Photo/Todd Forrest

Leading 4-0, Duckworth walked two Wildcats with one out. Rabun then used 3 hits to bring home 3 runs, making it a 4-3 game.

Despite the Wildcats putting three on the board, Coach Bradburn never lost faith in his Panther squad. Duckworth would settle down and allow just one hit the rest of the way as the Panther bats took care of the rest.

"After Rabun scored three, I asked them how they were going to respond to that," Coach Bradburn said. "I also told Duckworth to stick with

it. We were going to give him some more insurance.

"Saturday at Oglethorpe was very similar, we got out to a good lead, but we kept hammering the baseball and didn't have many scoreless innings. So I wasn't too concerned, I knew our guys would keep battling even though it was so cold," he said.

Union posted two more runs in the bottom of the second thanks to two walks and two Rabun errors.

Odom walked, then Cros-

key and Aulet both reached on an error. All three would score after Everett drew a walk and Jones smacked a single to left-center.

Ahead 6-3, Duckworth worked around a one-out walk in the top of the third while Odom was stranded following a two-out triple in the bottom half.

Rabun used a single, a walk, and a Panther error to load the bases in the fourth.

With the bags full and two outs, Duckworth fell behind in the count 3-0.



Kalvin Duckworth

As ice water coursed through his veins, the right-hander got two strikes looking before sitting down the Wildcat swinging for strike three.

"That strikeout showed what I like to call his 'bulldog' mentality of never giving up," Bradburn said.

That aggressive mind set would carry over to Union's half of the inning as the Panthers blew things open with a three-run fourth to take a commanding 9-3 lead.

Aulet and Bentley kick-started the inning with base hits, then a one-out single from Jones put the Panthers in prime scoring position with another bases loaded scenario.

Duckworth bounced back to the pitcher, but a drop by the Rabun catcher on a force attempt allowed Aulet to score.

With two outs, Chase Barnett smacked a grounder between the third baseman's legs, scoring Bentley. Odom's single to left brought in Jones for the final run of the inning.

Duckworth induced a double play ball to end the top half of the fifth, allowing Union to end the game with four in the bottom half.

According to Coach Bradburn, a pitching change would have been made in the sixth inning, however, Union delivered the knockout blow in the fifth.

"I was not even considering pitching him the whole game, he was on a pitch count, and had pitched to his last batter in the fifth," Bradburn said. "Everett or Croskey were coming into close the game in the last two innings. It just so happens we never went out on defense again."

Aulet reached second on an error and Bentley singled putting runners on the corners for Everett.

The Panther third baseman doubled to center, scoring Aulet.

Duckworth lined a base hit to center, bringing in Bentley. Cooper Patton sent a one-out double off the left-centerfield wall, allowing Everett to cross.

Barnett walked to load the bases and Odom followed suit with a free pass, scoring Everett for Union's 13th run - ending the game in five.

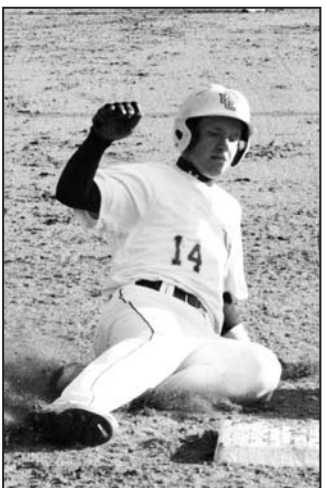
"I am very proud of the way we came out and sustained our intensity at the plate," Coach Bradburn said. "Rabun is a solid team and is one of the favorites in our region, but they didn't play up to their potential on defense."

Now Union County will turn its attention to the Jefferson Dragons who are set to host the Panthers at 5:55 p.m. on Tuesday. Jefferson is also undefeated in Region 8-AA.

"As far as Jefferson goes, I'm sure they are probably the favorites, but we can't change what we have been doing," Bradburn said. "We want to play our game and not let them change our approach."

After their shellacking of Rabun, the Panthers have likely drawn the attention of the Dragons.

"We probably sent a message to the rest of the region, however we try not to worry about other teams and how they see us," Bradburn said. "We want to stay focused on our goals and what we want to do."



Zach Odom slides into third on a triple. Photo/Todd Forrest



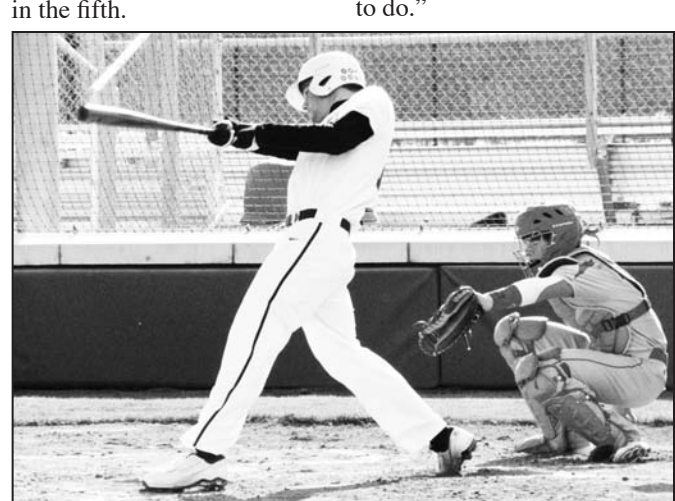
Cooper Patton doubles off the left field wall. Photo/Todd Forrest



Lane Everett connects on an RBI double. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Jared Croskey leads off first base. Photo/Todd Forrest



T Bentley goes yard in the first inning. Photo/Todd Forrest

Soccer: 'Panther-perfect' week Lady Panthers win two at home

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The Panthers set the tone early by scoring two goals in the first 15 minutes, en route to a 3-0 victory over rival Fannin County from Class AAA.

On Friday night, Union took care of business against Region 8-AA foe Greene County in a 10-0 romp.

Brandon Pestana scored his first goal of the season early in the game off a feed from T.J. Smith.

Jair Gonzalez added the second goal with an assist from Eric Hougrand.

Smith scored the third goal on a penalty kick late in the second half putting the Rebels away.

"Fannin was a very good team and had speed all over the field," Union County Head Coach Tim Hunter said.

Colton Stanley and Keaton Dyer added assists for the Panthers.

On Friday, Union County routed Greene 10-0, led by 4 goals from Smith.

Stanley and Gonzalez scored two goals each for the Panthers.

Dyer scored on a header off a corner kick and Phillip Jennings rounded out Union's scoring with the final goal of the contest.

Jesus Mancillas, Gonzalez and Hougrand finished with two assists each, Alex Mancillas added an assist.

During the contest, an unusual event occurred when the Greene County keeper walked off the field, then completely out of the stadium following Smith's fourth goal of the contest.



Senior Eric Hougrand fires a shot attempt. Photo/Todd Forrest



Jair Gonzalez moves the ball up field vs Fannin. Photo/Todd Forrest

"Greene wasn't quite as good as we were, but we were playing very well that night," Coach Hunter said. "Combine that with the drive Greene had to make and it equaled a good game for us."

The Panthers traveled to Towns County on Tuesday for the second meeting of the year

between the two rivals. Union defeated Towns 5-0 in the first meeting.

On Friday, Union will go to Washington-Wilkes where the Panthers look to remain unbeaten in Region 8-AA play.

The Panther J.V. squads will go to Pickens County on Thursday at 5 p.m.

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County Lady Panthers were perfect last week, knocking off Fannin County 1-0 before demolishing Greene County 10-0 on Friday.

During the win over Fannin, Maddy Morlock scored Union's lone goal of the game off an assist from Camryn Carter.

"We beat Fannin all over the field," Union Head Coach Tim Hunter said. "That was a game that wasn't indicative of the final score."

During the win over Greene, Kristena Zeger got the scoring onslaught underway with a goal off a feed from Erin Innis. Marissa Akin scored the second goal off another Innis assist. Morlock punched in goal number three with Innis and Zeger picking up the assists.

Carter scored the fourth goal off another Innis assist. Innis continued to feed her teammates, as she assisted Shelby Brown on the fifth goal of the game.

Freshman Rachel Vester scored goal number six off an assist from Carter. Goal seven came from Ema Herum - Jo-Anna Van Pelt had the assist.

Zeger scored the eighth goal unassisted. After setting up her teammates all evening, Innis scored the ninth goal off an Akin assist.

The 10th and final goal went to Herum, thanks to another Akin assist.

This week, Union traveled to Towns County on Tuesday and on Friday will visit Washington-Wilkes.

The Lady Panthers defeated Towns 2-1 in the first



Left to right: Ansley Garrison (#20), Erin Innis (#7), Mikala Jones (#10). Photo/Todd Forrest



Ema Herum moves the ball during Union's win over Greene County.

meeting and with their roster at full strength now that basketball is over, Coach Hunter expects another battle with rival Towns.

The Lady Panther coach also expects Washington-Wil-

kes to put up a better fight than Greene County. "Washington-Wilkes is better than Greene, but unlike last Friday, we'll be the ones doing the traveling and that makes a big difference," he said.