

Sports

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Odom named 8-AA POY, Everett selected to 1st Team Aulet, Bentley, Duckworth round out Union's All-Region representatives

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The accolades continue to pour in for Union County baseball.

Senior shortstop Zach Odom was named the Region 8-AA Player of the Year and junior pitcher Lane Everett was selected to the All-Region First Team.

These honors, voted on by the coaches, come on the heels of Union's most successful season in 18 years, validating the amount of respect Panther baseball has regained in 2013 under first year coach Brandon Bradburn.

Odom, a Young Harris College commit has been selected to the All-Region Team four times, and was joined by two fellow seniors in 2013. Right fielder T Bentley and first baseman Wes Aulet received Second Team honors.

The Union County pitching staff was well represented as the junior duo of Everett (First Team) and Calvin Duckworth (Second Team) were also given accolades for their dominance during the 2013 campaign.

While Odom seemed surprised when asked about his selection, his skipper could see it coming a mile away.

I was not surprised at all that Zach won the 8-AA player of the year," Coach Bradburn said. "He was so consistent throughout the year. The things that pushed him over the top for the player of the year was his Batting Average (.426) and especially his on base percentage (.615). Defensively he was one of the best shortstops in Georgia.



Zach Odom during a game with Towns County played at Young Harris College. Odom signed with YHC last fall. Photo/Todd Forrest

Meanwhile, Aulet, a Montreat College commit, was another selection that Bradburn viewed as a lock before the first pitch of the year back in February.

"Wesley was a strong player last year for us, and we knew coming into the season he was going to have a huge impact, and he did," Bradburn said. "He hit .375 with 2 homeruns and 26 RBIs. He also played wonderfully at first base and saved our infielders on several occasions. Wesley has a quiet confidence that spread throughout the entire team and he will be missed next year."

Meanwhile, the third senior selection, Bentley is no stranger to the spotlight, and while the valedictorian has worn many hats throughout his high school career, baseball was one area where he had shown signs of weakness.

However, once Bentley set his mind to it, he excelled on the diamond, only adding



T Bentley

baseball to his already impressive resume.

"T was the big question mark the season," Bradburn said. "He has always had a beautiful swing, but I think he focused on too many aspects of hitting before coming into



Junior pitcher Lane Everett finished the 2013 season with a 7-2 record to lead the Panthers in wins. Photo/Todd Forrest



Kalvin Duckworth

this season. I just told him in practice number one, 'see the ball, hit the ball, and hit line drives.' He started to realize that was the key to hitting was to simplify. He seemed to always be the guy who was putting the ball in play when



Wes Aulet

we needed it, and both of his homeruns this year came at just the right time with two runners on base. His season stats were .270 BA, 15 RBI, and .405 On Base Percentage, and 2 homers.

As for the Union pitch-

ing staff, Bradburn benefited from having a pair of aces at his disposal. Unfortunately for the rest of Class AA, they'll be back.

Entering the season, not many outside of Union County had heard of Everett and Duckworth. And after the rest of 8-AA realized that Bradburn had not one, but two aces up his sleeve, it didn't matter as the Panthers rode the duo's dominance, and a 1.75 combined ERA, into the Sweet 16.

"Lane and Kalvin pitched this season like seasoned veterans, but in reality they hadn't had much big game experience heading into this season," Bradburn said. "They worked their tails off in the off season, got most of their mechanics straightened out, worked on the mental side of pitching and understood their possible roles coming into the season."

Duckworth, who won six games, led the team with a microscopic 1.46 ERA while posting a team-high 82 strikeouts.

Everett finished with a team-high seven wins, had an ERA of 2.06 with 52 Strikeouts.

When it was all said and done, the Union County senior class, with the help of juniors, sophomores, and even freshmen, accomplished exactly what they set out to do, build a solid foundation for the future while setting a fine example in the process.

I would like to add that more so than just these awesome stats, these are great kids," Bradburn said. "Their impact as human beings will far outweigh anything baseball could ever hold."

With big shoes to fill, youth steps up

By Todd Forrest
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Another Spring Football season is in the books for Union County and Head Coach Brian Allison is beginning to get a feel for what Panther fans can expect this fall.

The Panthers lost a lot of depth at the skill positions and in the secondary, however, Allison was very pleased with the youngsters who will be filling the void left by the graduating seniors.

"We had a great spring," Allison said. "The bright spots were at quarterback, wide receiver, and both lines."

The defensive line and the linebacker spot are expected to be the strength of the 2013 edition with multiple All-Region selections, including senior Luther Jones and junior Chase Barnett.

On offense the Panthers must replace three-year starter T Bentley at quarterback, along with starters in the backfield and at wide out. Although, two capable signal callers return to run the Panthers spread-option offense, and having junior Ralston Drake and sophomore Joseph Mancuso coming back, Offensive Coordinator Howard McCombs hasn't gotten any gray hairs as of yet.

"I was very pleased with the effort and attitude of the kids," McCombs said. "We worked very heavily on the basic fundamentals and techniques that will be necessary for our players to be successful at their individual positions. We also began introducing our base run game concepts. The biggest change from these first two days to next week will be decreasing some of our individual practice time and increasing our group and team practice time."

Just as the defensive line is expected to be an anchor, the coaching staff has high hopes for offensive line as well.

"I am very encouraged about our big guys up front on the offensive line," McCombs said. "We can do nothing offensively without those guys up front and we have a good group of young linemen across the board who will do nothing but get better if they keep working like they have been. This group of linemen will be the foundation our offense is built on for the next few years.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle facing the Panther staff is allowing the upcoming freshmen to adapt from being the biggest and fastest in middle school to becoming a small fish in a very



Players, coaches, family, and fans enjoy themselves at the Quarterback Club Spring Cookout. Photo courtesy of UC Quarterback Club



big pond. That was something that Allison and crew wanted to get out of the way early and pound home the fact that they are now a Union County Panther and will battle for playing time, regardless of grade.

"I was very happy with first day of practice," Allison said. "There is a lot of teaching the first day of spring practice. We just talk about expectations from players and coaches. Try to calm freshmen and make them feel comfortable. We covered everything we had planned for first day. I was pleased with our effort and our willingness to learn"

As for the rising freshmen's former team mates, the Middle School Panthers were hard at work in the spring as well.

During the summer months the Panthers will host voluntary camps and workouts.

"Our focus will now shift some during our summer workouts," McCombs said. "We will place more emphasis offensively into the passing game which we can and will work extensively during the summer. I am very excited about the potential our

quarterbacks have as well as the progress our skilled players have made."

The middle school held their Spring Football simultaneously with the high school with Casey Jones remaining at the helm, despite taking over as the Head Boys Basketball Coach.

When asked, Jones didn't hesitate to point out that he's looking forward to working both gigs.

"I am still the middle school football coach and that will not change in 2013," Jones said.

The Union County Quarterback Club and Coosa Creek Embroidery hosted the Spring Cookout for all High School and Middle School football players and families on Friday, May 10 at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

Quarterback Club President Gary Rogers welcomed parents, players and families to the event and thanked Greg Owenby and Coosa Creek Embroidery for sponsoring the event, grilling and helping serve.

Rogers also reminded everyone that volunteers are



always needed for the variety of activities sponsored by the Quarterback Club.

Coach Brian Allison also spoke and indicated to the football players the importance of attending summer football practice.

Players and families were then treated to a complimentary hamburger or hotdog, chips and a drink.

Joe Collins

Tips from the Range

I want to address one of the issues that basically affect everyone who swings a club and attempts to hit a golf shot.

I have found that this is a common denominator of many swing faults that I have worked with even in good players. You will hear people describe this flaw as feeling loose or buried on the downswing. The swing is too fast in places or just too fast as a whole. The arms are out of position and your small muscles are controlling everything. This moves you into the hitter's category instead of the swinger's category. It is more enjoyable to swing the club and strike the ball than it is to hit the ball with your hands and wrist. You must avoid as much hand action as possible, which means you need the big muscles working throughout the swing. The only way to keep the big muscles in control is to "stay connected" from start to finish.

The question you must be asking yourself is: How in the world do you stay connected and hit the ball? Well, one must first understand the definition of staying connected as it relates to golf and the golf swing.

The golf swing is actually a controlled motion. The key is to limit the motion to a controlled action. Meaning, that you can control the club throughout the swing smoothly, not allowing it to go off line during impact. You can only do this through the big muscles so to me "staying connected" is the act of keeping the club in tune to what the big muscles are doing as the swing works its way to the top and back on the downswing.

Only allowing the small muscles in the trailing hand to work just before and right after impact.

The great Ben Hogan said, "I can hit it as hard as I want with my right hand as long as it is in the proper position on the downswing." It is impossible to hit the ball and not use your hands. They do serve a function. You just don't want them to be the dominant force at impact. Limit your hand movement and feel your arms moving more.

You have to use your body's core to turn the big muscles and thereby stay connected. The chest will move the arms into the backswing ahead of the hips and then the hips will lead the arms on the downswing. The first part of your job is to make sure the club stays in front of the chest for as long as it will on the backswing. Make

sure when you do this that you don't allow the center of gravity to move to the front of your feet. Always stay in the position you establish at address. In other words, don't lean into the ball on the take away when trying to keep the club in front of your chest in the backswing.

The second part of your job is to get your arms back in front of the power source that becomes established in your trailing side during the take away. If the arms fail to get back in front of the chest on the downswing then the club will be behind and you will either push the ball or throw the hands at impact and hook it. This is why the lower body must lead the upper body on the downswing. The starting of the weight transfer through the feet and into the hips allows the arms the time they need to drop into the slot on the way down to impact. This transfer of weight allows the arms to get moving before the shoulders start to unwind. Much power is built here.

To learn this takes a very simple drill. Get your favorite club from the bag and hold grip it in your forward hand. Stand erect with your legs straight, your back straight and your feet just inside shoulder width. Hold your arms straight out to your side with the club pointed at your target at shoulder level. You should look like a T with your arms pointed out to your sides.

While keeping your feet planted where they are, bring your arms to the front of your stance and grip the club while keeping your arms at shoulder height. Notice there is now a triangle in front of your chest, formed from your shoulders through the arms to the grip. Turn ninety degrees away from the target so that the triangle is pointing dead away from the target. See how the chest turns the triangle? This is how you stay connected. Simply keeping that triangle in front of your chest during the whole swing.

The difficulty lies in trying to get the arms back in front of the chest as the downswing starts. There are many ways to think of this but the idea is to keep your back to the target for just a split second as the downswing starts. This allows time for the arms to start to move. Remember, all this happens behind the weight transfer.

When you are swinging in a connected manner, you will feel as though you are hitting the ball with your chest on the downswing and your arms will seem to be moving faster. Your shots should fly a little farther when the big muscles are doing their job.

Practice makes it happen so get too it. Good luck and I will see you on the course!