

# Sports

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## Panthers take care of business against overmatched Social Circle

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Union County improved to 6-3 overall and 3-3 in Region 8-AA as the Panther defense smothered Social Circle for 48 minutes in a 31-0 Senior Night victory.

The swarming Panther defense held the Redskins without a first down until the final minute of the game. With Greene County's win over Rabun County on Friday, the Panthers remain alive for the final State Playoff spot.

Union County has also clinched its second winning season in 11 years and finish with a 4-1 mark at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium – the best home record in 11 years.

T Bentley led the offense with 106 yards rushing on 13 carries and a score. Jonathan Hughes finished with two scores and 55 yards on 12 carries and Clay Burnette finished with 80 yards of total offense.

The Panthers seized control early after the defense forced the first of many three-and-outs and took over at midfield following a Redskins' punt. Bentley and Burnette each moved the chains on the ground before the drive stalled at the Social Circle 23-yard line.

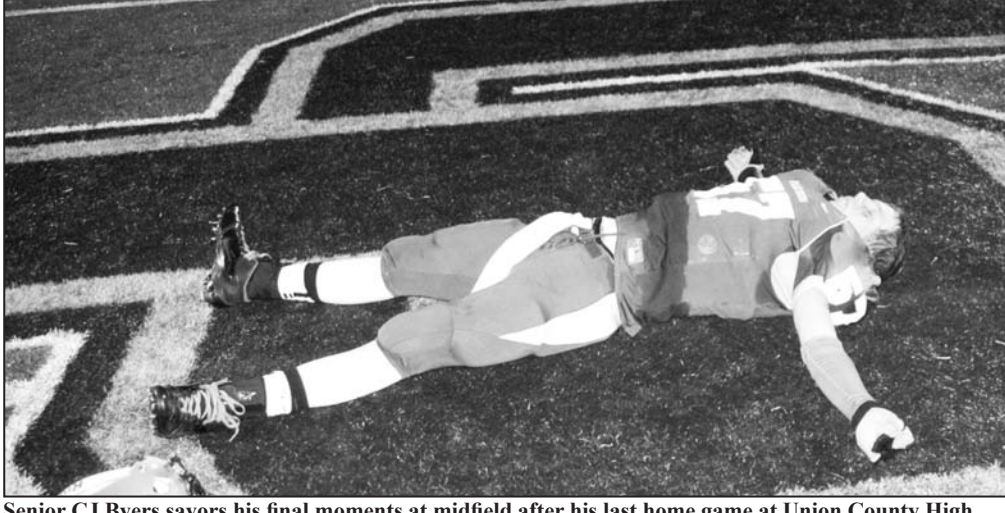
Then a risky call by the Panther staff ended up working to perfection. A 40-yard field goal by Eric Hougrand was taken off the books by his own coaches when Social Circle jumped off sides, giving the Panthers a more manageable 4th-and-3. Instead of taking the points, Coach Allison sent his offense back on the field. Facing a fourth-and-short, Bentley unloaded and hit Burnette on a quick screen pass that was taken to the house from 18-yards out, giving Union a 7-0 lead with 6:43 left in the first quarter.

After a Redskins' three-and-out, Union took over at the 35-yard line but Bentley was picked off on 3rd-and-10. Social Circle fumbled into the arms of Chase Barnett on its second play and the Union offense was back on the move.

A first down run by Bentley was followed by an



Panther senior football players and cheerleaders celebrate Senior Night. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior CJ Byers savors his final moments at midfield after his last home game at Union County High School. Photo/Todd Forrest

unsportsmanlike conduct flag on the visitors, which allowed Burnette to break off another big gain down to the Redskins' 4-yard line. Hughes would take it from there and find paydirt for a 14-0 Panther lead with 7:57 to play until halftime.

Social Circle nearly fumbled Hougrand's pooch-kick on the ensuing kick off but Craig Jones finished the job on the next play when he recovered another Redskins' fumble.

Facing a 4th-and-2 from the 19-yard line, Hougrand came on to attempt another field goal. This time the senior kicker was kicking into a strong headwind and the kick bounced off the left upright to keep it a 14-0 game.

Hougrand would get his chance at redemption.

A Social Circle punt was returned to the Redskins' 41-yard line by Josh Kim with

1:26 on the clock. Bentley then hooked up with Kim for a Panther first down. A quick strike to Lalo Rivera put Union back into field goal range at the 18-yard line. This time Hougrand muscled it through the gusty winds and the uprights for a 35-yard field goal as time expired in the half for a 17-0 lead.

Another solid kick return by Kim put the Panthers in business to open the second half when the senior returned the kickoff to the Redskins' 45-yard line.

Facing a 3rd-and-5, Hughes rumbled his way to the 29-yard line, where a perfectly executed quarterback option was perfected by Bentley. The senior signal caller play-faked to Hughes then broke free down the far sideline for a 29-yard score. Hougrand's PAT was money and Union found itself in complete control, lead-

ing 24-0 with 10:20 left in the third quarter.

A personal foul on the extra-point forced Union to kick from its own 25-yard line and the return was almost taken the distance until senior Jacob Vick saved a would be score by chasing down the returner deep in Panther territory. The defense would force Social Circle into a turnover on downs.

"After we got that penalty, I kept saying to myself, don't get as deep as you usually do, but I did," Vick said. "I expected him to cut back my way but he came up the middle and I just ran him down. Once I caught him I tried to strip the ball but I yanked him down too quick before I could strip it."

The Panthers would give the ball right back after a fake punt was stopped at their own 39-yard line. Another Red-



Senior Robert Prunier tries to cut back inside. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Clay Burnette had three catches. Photo/Todd Forrest

skins' punt would bounce into the end zone giving Union possession at the 20-yard line.

This time the Panther offense would go 80 yards in just under five minutes for the final score of the game. Bentley, Rivera, and Burnette would carry the load and move the Panthers to the Redskins' 28-yard line. Nick Whittle got into the action with a first down run before Burnette moved the ball inside the 5-yard line. The

final play of the third quarter saw Hughes cross the goal line for the second time, this time from three yards out.

Once again, Social Circle would go three-and-out and with a running clock, Union continued pounding the Redskins with Whittle. The freshman would rush for two first downs before the Panther drive stalled at the Social Circle 14-yard line.

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## Webb and Garrison: too fast for Region 8-AA to handle

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**LEXINGTON** - On a windy Thursday afternoon at Oglethorpe County High, Emma Garrison and Jeremy Webb breezed past the competition at the Region 8-AA Championship Meet and helped punch both of their team's tickets to the State Meet in Carrollton on Saturday.

Garrison cruised to a time of 19:22, matching her personal best, nearly 90 seconds ahead of second place finisher, Reese Bowles of Jefferson. The freshman runner led by 40 seconds at the halfway point and continued to separate herself from the field, leading by just over a minute at the two-mile mark.

Webb left little doubt as to who is the best in 8-AA during the boys meet. The senior opened up a 10-second lead after the first lap, and continued to pull away for a time of 17:09 – 35 seconds ahead of Oglethorpe County's Sid Wightman.

"Emma just took off and left them and then Jeremy did the same thing," Union Head Coach Jackie Hughes said. "Those two have gone out and taken control early and then continued to pull away in the last several meets, so I wasn't worried about those two."

The Lady Panthers finished second overall in 8-AA, seven points behind first place Jefferson. The girls meet was clearly a two-horse race with Union and Jefferson taking eight of the Top-10 spots.

The Lady Panthers were led by Garrison's first place finish, while sophomore Rachel Todd came in sixth at 21:57, freshman Rachel Vester finished seventh at 22:31.

However it wasn't enough to overtake the Lady Dragons who claimed the second, third, fourth, fifth and ninth positions.



Lady Panthers Cross Country team finished second in Region 8-AA and is headed to state. Photo/Todd Forrest

Also earning State Playoff spots were third place Rabun County and fourth place Oglethorpe County.

Rounding out the Lady Panther Top-Five were freshman Alyssa Arnold, who came in 11th at 23:09, and freshman Stephanie Busse in 13th at 23:13.

Freshman Ansley Garrison finished 16th and senior Kenna Bauman in 29th for Union County.

"We as a team have worked really hard to get to this spot," Emma Garrison said. "I'm so happy for this entire team and we will continue working hard to get ready for State."

The Panthers finished third in 8-AA to also earn the team a trip to the State Meet on Saturday.

Paced by Webb's time of 17:09, the Panthers came in behind Riverside Military Academy and Oglethorpe County but finished 17 points ahead of fourth place Jefferson.

Rabun County's Charlie Garcia earned an individual spot in State Meet with his fourth place finish.



Jeremy Webb crosses the finish line. Photo/Todd Forrest

Coming in 14th was Union County's Christian Garcia at 18:57, taking the 17th spot was sophomore Andrew Nelson at 19:02, finishing 18th was sophomore Will Stone at 19:04, and 24th place Ryan Rogers at 19:14.

Sophomore Aaron Stafford came in 32nd and senior Jacob Cook in 33rd.

"It feels great," Webb said after the meet. "I wanted to beat Chris Jones' time from when he ran here during the same year he won state. That was my goal and I beat his time by a few seconds. Now I want to turn my 26th place finish in State last season into a Top-10."

In Chris Jones' State Championship season of 2008, Jones also won the Region Meet at Oglethorpe County with a time of 17:16, seven seconds behind Webb's 2012 pace.

"Jeremy's goal this season has been to beat Chris' school record of 16:43," Coach Hughes added.

One luxury that Webb will have in 2012 that Jones didn't have in 2008 is his team-

mates in his corner at State. Only Jones qualified for State that season and was left to run the course without any of his fellow Panthers. Coach Hughes sees this as a tremendous asset that will only work in Webb's favor.

"That will really help him," Coach Hughes said. "He went down last year by himself and it was tough. It's much better when you have the whole team there with you. You've got people to warm up with and other little things like that. Jeremy ran a 17:49 at State last year and he's almost a minute faster this year."

Perhaps the toughest competition at the State Meet will come from Region 6-AA where three of the Top-Five ranked teams in Class AA reside at Westminster, Wesleyan, and Lovett.

"Westminster is the top-ranked team in Class AA and their top-runner ran their Region Meet in 17:26, their were two kids from Wesleyan at 17:28 and 17:37 so Jeremy is comparable with them," Coach Hughes said. "Westminster's girls are also ranked No. 1 in



Emma Garrison at the halfway point. Photo/Todd Forrest



Region 8-AA Champion Jeremy Webb. Photo/Todd Forrest



Region 8-AA Champion Emma Garrison and Sixth Place finisher Rachel Todd at Oglethorpe County. Photo/Todd Forrest

The boys' State Meet will begin at Carrollton High School on Saturday at 10 a.m. The girls race will follow at 10:45 a.m.