

Sports

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Football: Offense is the focal point during Perry's first spring

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Incoming Panthers coach Michael Perry caught the first glimpse of his new squad in action when Union County hosted two weeks of spring football last month.

Beginning May 10, Perry and the Panthers used the subsequent 10 practices to become acquainted with one another while using the opportunity to install a few new wrinkles on offense. (Incoming defensive coordinator Thomas Nelson was still coaching Murphy, North Carolina during their postseason, so Perry concentrated on offense in the spring. The *North Georgia News* will spotlight Nelson's arrival with a feature interview in next week's edition.)

"I didn't have a complete staff because some of the guys had to fulfill their teaching obligations at their other schools, but just for me, it was about seeing what I have and to be around the kids as much as possible and get our offense implemented," Perry said about the 69 kids that came out for spring practice. "Murphy was still in season so I let Coach Nelson worry about them and we just focused on offense."

Perry noted the similarities between his new offense and the previous system, recognizing that he doesn't expect a steep learning curve as a result.

"I don't think it's going to be a big transition for the



Gage Barnes (35) is all business after dropping the Heard County quarterback for a loss during last year's State Tournament. According to Perry, Barnes could see a larger role, on both sides of the ball, as a junior this fall. Photo/Todd Forrest

guys, so that definitely shows the benefits of the way things were done here in the past," he said.

Additionally, Perry is confident that his squad took a significant step toward addressing two concerns entering 2021: Tight end and quarterback.

Union County graduated do-everything senior Noah Underwood, who stepped into

the tight end role nicely following two stellar seasons at linebacker. Meanwhile, junior quarterback Logan Helcher was in the midst of an up-and-down 2020 campaign when he suffered a pair of late-season injuries, forcing senior safety/wide receiver Kaston Hemp-hill behind center for the final month. But after just two weeks of tinkering, Perry delivered

high praise for his returning signal-caller and Underwood's potential replacement at tight end, but admitted that he still has his work cut out for him on the heels of the program's first losing season in a decade.

"Gage Barnes really stood out to me at our tight end or H-back position," Perry said. "He did a lot of really good things and he's going to be

leaned on heavily on defense, as well. Logan Helcher and Caiden Tanner both did a lot of good things at quarterback. I'm extremely pleased with the starting point but we still have a long way to go. We have to get better at every position."

Rising junior safety/wide receiver Wilson Walker's non-stop motor also caught Perry's attention.

"[He] stood out as a kid that's going to give it his all, no matter what," Perry added.

According to Perry, his staff is nearly complete, minus one additional assistant coach. He is also bringing back a few familiar faces in James Avery, Justin Byers, Parker Daniel and Paul McBride. Former offensive line coach Neil Setzer will handle the middle school coaching duties.

The Panthers will hit the ground running on June 7 with a full summer slate of practices and camps. Union County is scheduled to participate in a pair of 7-on-7 tournaments later in the month. The first is slated for June 24 at Towns County, and the second coming one day later at White County.

"I'm very excited to be here and everyone has been so welcoming to me," he said. "I hope we're able to put a [product on the field] that the community can be proud of."



Michael Perry

Softball preps for busy summer, opens with June 7 youth instructional camp

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Following a disappointing close to the 2020 season, Union County softball is eager to get a jump on its 2021 redemption tour.

Despite spending most of season ranked among the top-five teams in Class AA, and securing the regular season region title a week early, the Lady Panthers struggled down the stretch -- losing its last four contests and stumbling to third place in the Region 8-AA tournament before getting bounced in the first round of State.

However, Union County loses only two senior starters and returns 13 players that recorded a varsity hit in the shorter-than-usual 2020 campaign. And unlike last year, when COVID-19 denied the Lady Panthers their preseason, head coach Stephen Mitchell will have plenty of time to sort through his large crop of returnees in order to uncover a starting-nine.

On the heels of last month's spring tryouts that inserted 10 new freshmen into the program, summer workouts and games will get underway later this month. But before taking the field, UCHS softball is hosting a youth instructional camp next week for ages 6-14.

The three-day camp runs June 7-9 from 9 a.m. to noon at the UCHS softball field.

Instructors will include members of the Union County Lady Panthers softball team, coaching staff and possibly alumni.

The camp will cover various aspects of softball fundamentals including, but not limited to hitting, bunting, fielding, throwing and base



L-R: Assistant Coach Kaitlyn Payne, then-junior Aubrie Banton and head coach Stephen Mitchell during last year's Region 8-AA Tournament at UCHS. Photo/Todd Forrest

running.

But most importantly, Mitchell hopes the campers will develop a love for the game.

"We're going to have a little fun too," said Union County's fourth-year coach. "We're going to play some games with them and have a good time and do some team-building type of activities."

The price for the camp is \$75. Make all checks payable to the UC Lady Diamond Club - 153 Panther Circle, Blairsville, Ga.

Payments may be mailed or dropped off at the front office of your child's school. Payments may also be made through PayPal at the following link: https://paypal.me/UCHSLadyDiamondClub/locale.x=en_US.

For additional details, contact Coach Mitchell at smitchell@ucschools.org or (770) 328-5975.

Assistant coach Kaitlyn Payne may also be contacted at (706) 994-3755.

In case of inclement weather, the camp will be moved to one of the indoor facilities. If there is a possibility for severe weather, all the day's activities will be canceled.

"If you need anything or if there is anything I can do to help, please don't hesitate to call or email me," Mitchell reiterated."

Following the camp, Union County will begin prac-

ticating until the Georgia High School Association dead week that typically coincides with July 4. Then, the Lady Panthers dive right into preseason action with contests vs. Lumpkin County on July 5 and 7.

As in years past, Union will participate in the Franklin County Mountain Summer League starting July 12. The week of July 19, the Lady Panthers travel to Carrollton for a two-day camp before resuming play at Franklin County during the final week of July.

The regular season is expected to begin at home on Thursday Aug. 5. On Saturday, Aug. 7, Union County welcomes Commerce and Dawson County for a three-game slate.

Local Racing Report: Tri-County

By Blake Lynch
Racing Reporter
North Georgia News

Brasstown, NC - Tri-County held its annual Memorial Day race on Thursday May 27 with a \$1000 to win in each class and post-race fireworks.

Street Stock: Alex Vance's No. 95 car took home the win. No. 21 Troy Turner was second. No. 44 Chuck Sims was third. No. 32 Logan Exum was fourth. No. 01 Jacob Lynch rounded out the top five.

FWD: No. 19R Sean Rice took the win. No. 192R Robby Lynch was a very close second. No. 7 Dustin Hooper placed third. No. 05 Glenn Coker was fourth.

No. 05 Shawna Harkins came in fifth.

Crate: No. 14 Danny Ledford was the winner. No. 12 Daniel Wilson came in second. No. 7 Jason Deal was third. No. 30 Dav-enport Dillbeck was fourth. No. 108 Chuck Southard was fifth.

Modified Hobby: No. 27 Mike Davidson took the checkered flag. No. 37 Michael Barnett was second. No. 81 John Howard was third. No. 42 Johnny Guilizi was fourth. No. 88 Ricky Smith came in fifth.

Pony: No. 441 Matt Garrin took home first place. Coming in second was No. 16 Jamie Cross. Third place went to No. P11 Joey Payne. No. 01 Phil Wood was fourth place.

Summer basketball returns to UCHS, games underway June 8

Lady Panthers youth basketball camp scheduled for June 14-15

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Summer camps and workouts are an integral aspect of preparation for any basketball season, and unfortunately, both Union County squads missed out on that phase while attempting to break in several first-year starters in 2020.

This summer, Union County resumes normal pre-season prep with a majority of the Panthers and Lady Panthers' production returning from the previous year. The Union men graduated only one senior following last February's first-round exit from the Class AA State Tournament. The Panthers anticipate seeing 95% of its scoring, 94% of its rebounding and 100% of the team's 3-point shooting back in uniform this winter.

The Union County men hit the court four times last week where Garrett observed an excellent turnout featuring 10 freshmen, along with some older players returning to the program following a one-year hiatus. With an experienced crop, Garrett used last week to leap right into fine-tuning his offense and defense.

"We've put in some new things," he said. "We're not really taking in what we've done in the past, but we're just trying to add a couple of things. We have a big group of freshmen,



UCHS head coach Corey Garrett conducts practice last week with a large underclassmen turnout. Photo/Todd Forrest

around 10 of them coming in, so we're looking for things that work. We have a big returning group and we're just playing around with some things right now and seeing what works."

Next Thursday, June 10 Union will host the Hayesville, NC men for a one-day workout and scrimmage before visiting Fannin County and Towns County the following week. The Panthers will travel to North

Forsyth on June 22 and 24.

"We're just trying to play as much as possible and get back into the rhythm of having a summer," Garrett said. "We have a good set-up this summer with Hayesville, Towns and Fannin. We'll see some good teams at all of our stops, but that North Forsyth camp will really test us."

Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers fielded a senior-free roster last year, and interim



Returning all-region point guard Caleb John glides to the hoop between a pair of defenders last Thursday afternoon. Photo/Todd Forrest

coach Mandy Hunter expects the bulk of her returners to suit up again this November. She also anticipates a boost from another gifted crop of rising freshmen moving up from the middle school ranks.

The ladies were in the gymnasium bright and early at 6:30 a.m. last week, holding four practices each day to return to form before camps get underway later this month.

"We were up early, getting back into the swing of things and just trying to get better each day," Hunter said after guiding Union to a fourth-place finish in 8-AA and a state play-off appearance as interim coach in 2020-21. "We had roughly 20 kids last week, about half of them freshmen and four seniors. We're super excited to get back to normal and get back to work. But we're going to have to rely

on some of those freshmen to come in and really help us. We're also hoping that [rising-sophomores] Lara Turner and Sophia McNabb, along with a few others, step up and take on a larger role for us."

The Union County women tip-off summer camps next week with a two-day visit to the University of North Georgia on June 8-9. UCHS expects to host a couple of scrimmages the following week.

"Starting next week, we'll be going strong for three solid weeks," Hunter said. "We're trying to gain as much experience as possible since we didn't get a summer and didn't get many games last season."

On the coaching front, Hunter said parents and fans should expect an official statement in the coming weeks concerning the future head coach.

Hunter has served in an interim role since January when second-year head coach Crystal Beach temporarily stepped away. In April, she officially tendered her resignation to the Union County Board of Education. (The article discussing Beach's resignation is available online via the NGN's April 21 Facebook post.)

The Lady Panthers are hosting a youth basketball camp June 14-15 from 9-11:30 a.m. at the UCHS gymnasium. For further details, contact Coach Hunter at mhunter@ucschools.org.

Benton Mackaye Trail Association hikes for June 7-14

The following hikes are sponsored by the Benton Mackaye Trail Association. The current social distancing and health rules are used by Hike Leaders.

June 7 (Monday) - The Benton Mackaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 4.7 mile hike on the Quartz loop at the Whitewater Center in Ducktown, TN. Hike Leader Evelin Yarns. For more information contact HikeleaderEY@bmtmail.org

June 9 (Wednesday) - The Benton Mackaye Trail Association sponsors an easy 5-6 mile hike on the Bolling Park trails Canton, GA, a great preserve. Hike Leader Howard Baggett. For more information, contact the HikeleaderHB@bmtmail.org

June 13 (Sunday) - The Benton Mackaye Trail Association sponsors an easy to moderate, 4 miles hike from

Ocoee Whitewater Center and see the water release arrive from two miles upriver. Hike leader: Clare Sullivan. For more information, contact HikeleaderCS2@bmtmail.org

June 14 (Monday) - The Benton Mackaye Trail Association sponsors a 6 mile

easy hike on the Lost Creek section of the Benton Mackaye Trail. Dog-Friendly Hike (adult humans may bring a leashed dog). Beautiful walk along Big Lost Creek. Hike Leader: Ken Cissna. For more information, contact hikeleaderKC@bmtmail.org.



Trout stocking sites week of May 24-28, 2021

Fannin: Sugar Creek, Big Creek, Hemptown Creek, Hot-house Creek, Rock Creek, Toccoa River and Toccoa River Tailwaters (below Lake Blue Ridge Dam)

Gilmer: Boardtown Creek and Rock Creek Lumpkin: Etowah River, Nimbwill Creek, Cane Creek, Clay Creek, Ward Creek and Dockery Lake

Union: Canada Creek, Suches Creek, Toccoa River and Winfield Scott Lake

Note: Information is subject to change. Please call the hatchery at 706-838-4723 for questions. Stay up-to-date with stocking and events through Facebook www.facebook.com/chattahoocheeforestnfh. The hatchery also provides trout for the state. Please contact Georgia DNR for information on sites stocked by the state. NTJum2Z14CA

The 2021 golf season for the Old Union Ladies' Golf Association began Monday, May 10th



The Old Union Ladies' Golf Association members

The 2021 golf season for the Old Union Ladies' Golf Association started with a bang on May 10th with a champagne breakfast. Old Union Golf Course is in excellent condition, and the golfers really enjoyed seeing their golfing buddies again. League members still pay \$20 for 18 holes on league day. During the morning meeting, Karen Mussoline introduced five new members: Lee Cromwell, Vickie Hudson, Vicki Hough, Melanie Reed and Katie Fariss. Also, Jinna Wheeler was recognized as the Most Improved Golfer in 2020. Congratulations to all!

Our second round of the season resulted in a record number of participants, 36

golfers. The new superintendent, Brian Sosebee, was on hand to meet the ladies and give a brief demonstration on repairing pitch marks on the green. Brian also arranged flowers on all tee boxes for our opening day to welcome the ladies back. Graciously, Old Union continues to offer a free round of golf each week for the closest to the pin. Thank you, Old Union.

Women's Golf Day will be celebrated on June 1 at Old Union. Women's Golf Day, a global event which began in 2016, gives women and girls the opportunity to experience golf for the first time. It also allows current players to engage with other women who are interested in golf. Old

Union Ladies' Golf Association is pleased to announce that 30 new women are joining them for the event.

The Association has announced their first PAR & BAR to be held on Tuesday, June 8. Two man teams will compete in a scramble and then the group will reconvene at Lucky's Taqueria and Cantina for supper and Trivia. To date, eight teams will compete for bragging rights.

Match Play has been a huge success in the Ladies' Association, and this year is no different. Eight teams have already begun the competition. In Match Play, rather than trying to post the lowest score, the golfers are trying to win more holes than their opponents during a round of golf. As each team wins, they move to the next bracket. The ultimate Match Play winners will be announced later in the season.

Overall, the 2021 season has started out with the fun of renewing friendships and the fun of making new ones.

Learn to play Pickleball

Free Beginners Classes every Saturday at 10 a.m. (weather permitting). All equipment is provided and there is no need to sign-up... just come. Courts are located on Chase Drive behind the Health Department.

For more information contact: blairsvillepickleball@gmail.com. NTJum2Z2CA

NASCAR 2021

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Larson dominates Coca Cola 600

Kyle Larson and his Hendrick Motorsports teammates put on a dominating performance in Sunday's Coca Cola 600, the longest NASCAR race of the season. Larson led 327 laps of the 400 lap race, while his teammates finished second, fourth, and fifth. Only Kyle Busch's third-place finish kept Hendrick from sweeping all four top spots for the second time this season.

"It was not easy," said Larson. "Had to work for it. I feel like I had to fight off William and Chase a lot. It kind of worked out there that last run: The 43 (Erik Jones) had to pit and pulled out in front of me, I just towed with him for awhile and stretched my lead out. We had a good car there that last run. Feels great to be the guy to help Mr. H break that record finally." Larson's win was his second of the season and 269th victory for Hendrick Motorsports, moving them ahead of Richard Petty in overall NASCAR race victories.

"It's overwhelming," said Rick Hendrick. "It's an honor to reach this mark, but Richard Petty is tops with me. All I can think about now is all those drivers that won a race for us. So many people gave so much. We don't have a bunch of separate teams, we are one team."

Larson started from the pole position and swept the three stage wins in the four-stage race. He also became the first to eclipse the 1,000 laps led mark this season.

Chase Elliott, winner of last week's Texas road race finished as runner-up. "Happy for Kyle," said Elliott. "The best car won. We had a good car, and I'm proud of our team, but we just didn't have the winning car today."

Third-place went to Kyle Busch. "We didn't have anything for the Hendrick cars," said Busch. "I didn't want them to finish 1-2-3-4, so I had to break it up."

Two other Hendrick drivers, William Byron and Alex Bowman finished fourth and fifth, respectively, while Austin Dillon, Denny Hamlin, Chris Buescher, Tyler Reddick, and Kevin Harvick rounded out the top 10.

Except for the stage breaks, there were only two cautions: Kurt Busch had engine troubles near the halfway point, while Ryan Newman had the only on-track accident of the day after suffering a tire failure.

Top 10 leaders after 15 of 36: 1. Hamlin-633, 2. Larson-557, 3. Byron-557, 4. Elliott-541, 5. Logano-506, 6. Truex Jr.-486, 7. Blaney-482, 8. Kyle Busch-476, 9. Harvick-468, 10. Keselowski-448.

CASTRONEVES WINS INDY 500

Helio Castroneves claimed his fourth Indy 500 win before an estimated crowd of 135,000 fans. The 46-year-old Brazilian joined A. J. Foyt, Al Unser, and Rick Mears as four-time champions in an Indy car at Indianapolis. Castroneves took over the lead late in the race after Felix Rosenqvist and Takuma Sato opted to pit after their respective strategies did not work. In the final five laps, Castroneves held off a push from Alex Palou and avoided some lapped traffic to cross the finish line in first place.



Kyle Larson And Team Owner Rick Hendrick

Palou was second, followed by Simon Pagenaud, Patricia O. Ward, Ed Carpenter, Santino Ferrucci, Sage Karam, Ryan Hunter-Reay, Rinus Veekey, Juan Pablo Montoya, and Tony Kanaan.

TY GIBBS GETS SECOND INFINITY WIN

Ty Gibbs won his second Xfinity Series victory in the sixth start of his career, recovering from a spin off Turn 4 to take the checkered flag Saturday at Charlotte. The grandson of team owner Joe Gibbs led the final 20 laps, surviving two eventful restarts during that stretch to beat series leader Austin Cindric to the finish line by .437 seconds.

Austin Cindric was second, followed by Harrison Burton, Brandon Brown, Tyler Reddick, Chase Briscoe, Ty Dillon, Brandon Jones, Jeb Burton and Jeremy Clements.

Top 10 leaders after 12 of 33: 1. Cindric-520, 2. H. Burton-436, 3. Allmendinger-412, 4. Hemric-412, 5. Allgaier-387, 6. J. Burton-383, 7. Haley-348, 8. Clements-329, 9. Gragson-323, 10. Snider-309.

NEMECHEK HOLDS ON FOR TRUCK WIN

John Nemechek held off rookie Carson Hocevar over a 10-lap green-flag run after a violent crash at the entrance to the tri-oval stripped the body off Johnny Sauter's No. 13 Toyota.

Ben Rhodes ran third, followed by Stewart Friesen, Todd Gilliland, Chandler Smith, Ty Majeski, Derek Kraus, Austin Hill and Zane Smith completed the top 10.

Top 10 leaders after 10 of 22: 1. Nemechek-445, 2. Rhodes-401, 3. Hill-347, 4. Creed-339, 5. Gilliland-329, 6. Smith-302, 7. Crafton-300, 8. Friesen-293, 9. Enfinger-291, 10. Hocevar-264.

RAINY-RACE OFFICIATING NEEDS TO IMPROVE

In a statement, NASCAR said they need to do better when it comes to officiating races in the rain. The June 30th Cup Series race was called 14 laps short of the scheduled distance, with Chase Elliott being declared the winner, due to rain that led to a several wrecks because of poor visibility.

"I would kind of own the fact that maybe we did let it go a little bit too long before we did something," Scott Miller, NASCAR executive said. "It's a learning experience for all of us. We will learn. We will be better next time. Will we pull the plug earlier? Probably so."

Kevin Harvick, who was eliminated from the race after a wreck on Lap 19, was one of the more vocal drivers.

"All I can say is this is



Helio Castroneves wins Indy 500

the worst decision that we've ever made in our sport that I've been a part of, and I've never felt more unsafe in my whole racing career, period," Harvick said. "It's the most unsafe thing I've ever done in a race car by a lot. You can't see anything down the straightaways. These cars were not built to run in the rain, and when you can't see, my spotter said, 'Check up, check up, check up, because he thought he saw two cars wrecking.'"

The decision to call the race on Lap 54 was met with criticism from fans, as there was still several hours of daylight remaining.

Meanwhile NASCAR has shifted the scheduled Truck Series race, from Ontario, Canada, to Darlington, on Sept. 5, because of travel problems associated with the Covid-19.

Weekend Racing: Two more road course races this weekend. The Cup Series will be at Sonoma, CA, while the Xfinity Series is at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course near Lexington, OH.

Sat., June 5; Xfinity Series race 13 of 33; Starting time: 1 p.m. ET; TV: FoxSports1.

Sun., June 6; cup Series race 16 of 36; Starting time: 4 p.m. ET; TV: FoxSports1.

Racing Trivia Question: Who won the 2020 NASCAR Xfinity Series championship?

Last Week's Question: The first race held at Charlotte was the 1960 World 600. Who was the winner? Answer: It was Joe Lee Johnson.

Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter is a syndicated NASCAR writer and author. You may e-mail him at: hodges@race500.com.

HELP WANTED

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Must have Writing Experience,

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