

# Sports

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## Softball: Lady Panthers outlast Gilmer in preseason scrimmage

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**Ellijay** - Union County softball and second-year head coach Carissa Owenby received a sneak preview of the Lady Panthers 2023 campaign during a scrimmage game at Gilmer on Monday, July 17.

"This gave us a chance just to kind of see what we have," Owenby said. "We lost three key players from last year and we needed to see who would fill those gaps and give us a look at some of our freshmen that we haven't seen before."

On a brutally hot afternoon in Ellijay, Union came away with a 15-9 victory after racing out to a 5-0 lead behind two innings from senior ace Sierra Burnette and first-inning RBI singles from senior Georgia Patton and junior Sloane Dyer.

The Lady Panthers turned it over to the younger girls during the late innings and needed a rally after Gilmer's five-run third put Union in a 7-5 deficit entering the fourth.

"We saw a lot of things that we need to work on, and we also saw a lot of good things," Owenby said. "Early on we were popping it up, but later, we starting hitting the ball."

Freshman Zady Diaz opened the fourth with a triple, then came around via a base knock from senior Katie Byers, who swiped two bags and came home to knot the score at 7-7.

Later in the frame, McKenna Hood singled, stole a bag and scored the go-ahead run on Lilly Hilton's RBI.

Ayla Jamison replaced pitcher Jaslyn Roberts in the fourth, striking out the side following a leadoff walk.

Following a scoreless fifth from Union, Gilmer tied the score with a two-out single in the bottom half.



Freshman Zady Diaz nailed down the win at Gilmer with two innings in the circle. Meanwhile, she helped herself out with a triple, a walk, two runs and two stolen bases. Photo/Todd Forrest

All square at 8-8 through five innings, the Lady Panthers broke things open with five runs in the sixth and two in the seventh.

Jamison doubled to start the sixth and Byers drew a free pass. Two stolen bases moved both runners into scoring position for freshman Jules Dyer's two-out, two-run single.

Dyer swiped second and McKenna Hood made it an 11-7 game by bringing her around with another two-out knock.

Diaz stepped into the circle in the sixth and fanned two batters after a leadoff single came home - trimming the mar-

gin to 13-8.

Jamison's three-bagger kickstarted the Union County seventh ahead of Byers' RBI single. Patton returned to the game, scoring Byers on a sacrifice fly.

Diaz closed things out by limiting the damage after a leadoff double, fanning a pair and holding the Bobcats to a lone run.

"Zady Diaz did a fabulous job," Owenby said. "I didn't expect too much because she's a freshman, and she had some errors behind her, but she was unfazed."

"Ayla [Jamison] did a

fantastic job too and she is only a sophomore," Owenby added.

The scrimmage was originally scheduled as a varsity/JV doubleheader, but due to players missing from both squads, the two coaches agreed to a single game.

The Lady Panthers played the scrimmage shorthanded -- missing senior starter Jewell Massey, incoming Towns County transfer Delaney Moses (sophomore), sophomore Peyton Grisham, rising-freshman Izzy Anthros and others.

Union County will host its annual Parents vs Players game, cookout and lock-in on



Junior Sloane Dyer spots Union County a 2-0 lead in the first inning with a two-out RBI single. Photo/Todd Forrest

Thursday night.

The Lady Panthers will also host an opening day event on Tuesday, Aug. 8 during the home opener vs. Lumpkin County.

The game will feature a meet-and-greet with the players afterward.

Union County begins its hunt for back-to-back Region 8-AA titles when the season opens Saturday, Aug. 5 at Lumpkin County. The Lady Panthers haven't won consecutive region titles since 2010-2011 but enter the fall as the frontrunners in 8-AA after finishing 9-0 in region play last

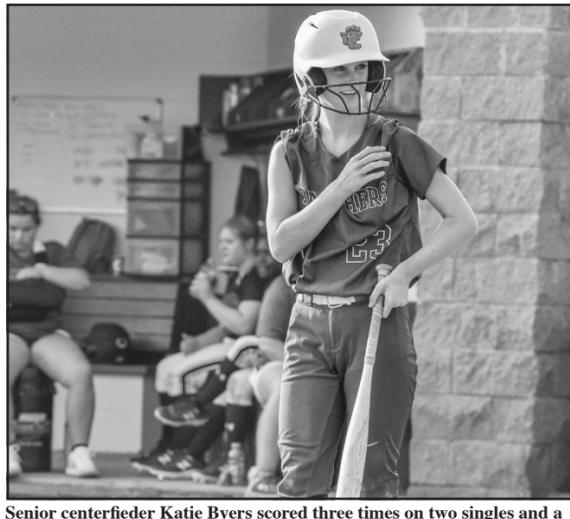
year and returning the bulk of the lineup and their entire pitching staff from a year ago.

The Lady Panthers will add reinforcements from the middle school program, along with Moses, who is coming off a stellar freshman campaign at Towns County in 2022.

Union County outscored its 8-AA opposition by a margin of 110-27 in 2022, then rode that momentum to the program's second-straight Elite Eight appearance. Another trip to Columbus in 2023 would mark the first time Union has appeared in three consecutive Elite Eights.



Coach Carissa Owenby with her team after the win. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior centerfielder Katie Byers scored three times on two singles and a walk. She added five steals and 2 RBIs in the win. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Union County infield greets sophomore pitcher Jaslyn Robsters (No. 3) as she enters in the third inning. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Ayla Jamison limited Gilmer to one run over two innings of work in the circle. At the dish, she doubled, tripled, scored two runs and stole a bag. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Wrestling: Union County closes out busy summer with youth camp

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Union County wrestling capped off an eventful summer with last week's youth camp, which coincided with the Panthers hosting Wrecksville-Broadview Heights High School (Ohio) head coach Ian Brown for three days.

Wrecksville-Broadview is consistently one of the nation's top-20 programs, while Coach Brown, son of UCHS assistant coach Dave Brown, was also a standout wrestler at Ohio-Northwestern University.

"[Ian Brown] put on a 90-minute-to-two-hour basics and fundamentals camp for our [high school] wrestlers and we were very fortunate to have him." UCHS wrestling coach Justin Byers said. "He is a very knowledgeable coach, and it helps since he's a younger coach. We're just very fortunate to have the entire Brown family involved with the high school program."

During June, the Panthers attended a 30-team duals tournament at Archer High and participated in summer matches at Fannin County. The wrestling squad also took a trip to the Buckeye State, attending the prestigious week-long Jeff Jordan State champ wrestling camp.

"The kids got at least six hours of technique [train-



Local youth wrestlers shared the mat with the Union County High School program during last week's three-youth camp. Photo/Todd Forrest

ing] and two hours of live wrestling everyday against kids from all over the nation." Byers said. "We took about 18 wrestlers and got an opportunity to face some really good wrestlers, some multiple-time state champions." Byers said. "It's probably one of the best camps in the nation. This is an amazing group of young men and I want everyone to know they did Union County proud up in Ohio."

The youth wrestling camp took place at the rubber floor gym following the high school's work with coach Ian Brown. Approximately 15-20 youngsters showed up each day to train under the high school players and coaching staff.

Additionally, the staff hopes the event will allow a youth wrestling program to gain a foothold in the area.

"We always have a good time [at the youth camp],"

Byers said. "Wrestling is growing in the community, and one of our biggest goals is getting this youth camp up and running. This year was a little more formal than in years past. Coach [Michael] Smith-Foot is working with the surrounding counties, and I think we have a pretty good plan to have youth wrestling during the winter months."

"But it's always good to see those young kids out on the

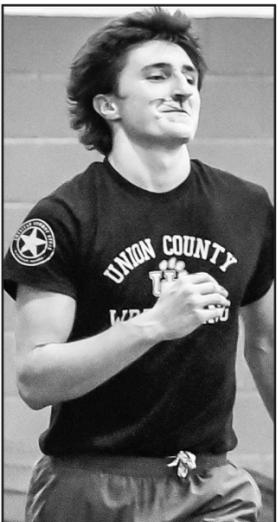
mat, and it's nice to see the high schoolers working with them and giving something back to the community," Byers continued. "But we had a good time. We played some games and helped them learn the basics of wrestling."

During July, the wrestling activities have slowed down somewhat, allowing the multi-sport athletes to prep for their upcoming football and cross country seasons.

"We try to go heavy in June, but in July, fall sports are gearing up so we try to allow the kids to transition into fall sports and not ask a whole lot from them," Byers said. "We're still going to hold some open mats to allow the wrestlers to get on the mat. Of course, the 6 a.m. workouts will start up once they get back in school. Really, we're just looking to improve on last year's success."

During the 2022-23 season, Union County finished with four underclassmen in third place at the Class AA State Championships -- Anderson Clouse (132 lbs), David Heredia (165), Payton Leggatt (157) and Asa Smith-Foot (150). The Panthers will also add a talented crop of incoming freshman looking to help the program improve on its fifth place overall finish at State.

"We have a really good group of upperclassmen returning, and a really good group of freshmen coming up, so the next few years for Union County wrestling is going to be big," Byers said. "This group of guys have been wrestling outside of the season and attending national tournaments. The buzz we're getting from other high schools is, they have one, maybe two guys that do that, while we have over half-a-dozen that do those types of things. This is a dedicated group of guys. It's about to be a very special time for our wrestling program."



Zander Rotko suffers a bloody nose while training. Photo/TF



Union County head coach Justin Byers and wrestlers provide instructions to campers ahead of Thursday's activities. Photo/Todd Forrest



Visiting coach Ian Brown (on mat - left) works with junior Asa Smith-Foot as the UCHS team looks on during last Thursday's clinic at the rubber floor gym. Photo/Todd Forrest



UCHS assistant coach Pete Rotko works with youngsters during the third and final day of Union County wrestling's youth camp. Photo/Todd Forrest

## The Old Union Women's Golf Association Games of the Day - "Beat the Pro" and "Birdie Bash"

The Old Union Women's Golf Association was back in full swing as Mother Nature offered the league perfect weather for golf.

On Monday, July 17, the ladies convened at Old Union and enjoyed their round with not-so-high temperatures and no rain. The first game of the day was Beat The Pro. The ladies hoped their net score, (gross score minus their handicap), was better than Coach Matt Cook's gross score. Matt shot a 70, and had five birdies during his round. Unfortunately, for the ladies, even though a few came close, nobody was able to beat Matt's terrific play.

The second game was Birdie Bash. Winners are those who have the most net birdies, (or better), using 100% of their handicap. There were lots of birdies, and the league paid out in five flights. The results are as follows:

Flight A: Jinna Wheeler took first place with 4 NET birdies for a total of \$10.00; There was a 4 way tie for second place with 3 NET birdies: Carol Rousseau, Geni Preece, Nancy Hamilton and Rachelle Cronje. Second place was divided by four, and each winner received \$2.00 each.

Flight B: Kathie McAfee, with seven net birdies, tied with Glenda Geddings. The first place prize money of \$10 and the second place prize money of \$8 were combined for a total of \$18. The \$18 was divided by the ladies with each receiving \$9.

Flight C: There was a three way tie for first place. Pat Westbrook, Kathleen Bolin and Nancy Harvill, each received \$6.

Flight D: Sandy Snyder took first place with five NET birdies for \$10. There was a two way tie for second place between Connie Dockery and Vi Copenhagen who each finished the round with four NET birdies. Each lady won \$4.

Flight E: Kathy James took first place with six NET birdies for \$10. There was a two way tie for second place between Donna Stone and Kay Kirkland who finished their round with five NET birdies. Donna and Kay each won \$4.

Chip-Ins: There was a plethora of chip-ins on Mon-

day, but Kathleen Bolin was the big winner with three chip-ins winning \$4.50 in prize money. Other players with a chip-in were Kathy James, Sandy Snyder, Kathie McAfee, Carol Rousseau, Nancy Hamilton and Martha Zimmer, each winning \$1.50 each. Way to go, ladies!

Birdies: We had 8 natural birdies, (not including Matt's 5 birdies). Each of the following ladies won \$2 per birdie: Carol Rousseau (2), Marth Zimmer (2), Nancy Outlaw, Sandy Snyder, Vi Copenhagen and Kathy James. Excellent play, ladies!

Closest To The Pin: Connie Dockery bested the field with closet to the pin on number two which is a par three hole. Her tee shot landed about 8 feet from the hole. Connie chose the \$25 gift card at the pro shop, and bought new golf balls. Ohhh... No, she missed her putt, but did secure a par.

Once again, a big thank you to Old Union Golf Course for their generosity in donating prizes each week for the ladies league and to Matt Cook for his five birdies.

"Membership & Weekly Games" Dues for the 2023 season are \$35 which includes \$2 for the Sunshine Fund and \$3 for the Hole-In-One Fund. Players pay \$4 to participate in the game of the day, and the monies collected are used for prize money. Each player must have an active GHIN handicap. Players without a handicap are welcome to play but they will not participate in the game. The payouts are according to flights, and prize money is awarded the following week. Members must have a handicap below 40.

"League Play" The league plays from the red tee boxes. The league has incorporated the USGA Max Score Rule which sets the max score for any hole to 9 except for major tournaments. Old Union Golf Course has designated a "drop zone" on hole #9 across the creek. "The league encourages ladies to play 'ready golf' in order to maintain a pace of play while keeping up with the group in front of them.

"Closest to the Pin" Old Union continues to support the ladies' league by sponsor-

ing the 'Closest to the Pin' winner each week. The winner of 'Closest to the Pin' will receive either a Free Round of Golf or a Pro Shop credit valued at \$25.

Lessons: Jane Childers is the Chair and coordinator for lessons with Mary Holmes. Lessons will be at Old Union on Thursdays. A minimum of 6 students are needed for each lesson. Both 30-minute privates @ \$25 per person or 45-minute semi-private for 2 @ \$25 per person will be available. A player must cancel within 24 hours; if a player does not cancel, the player will still be responsible for the payment to Mary Holmes. To sign up for lessons, please contact Jane at jane.childers77@gmail.com

Coach Matt Cook from Old Union is also available for private or group lessons at Old Union. Coach Cook has proven to be an excellent teacher and can be reached at 706-745-4653.

"Guests" Guest are welcome to come and play with the league twice in one season before deciding if they would like to join the league. Please call one of the numbers below for more information.

For more information about the league or the upcoming events, please visit [www.OldUnionWGA.com](http://www.OldUnionWGA.com).

Any new members will receive an "Email Invite" to register as a member on the ladies' league website which is <http://www.OldUnionWGA.com>. The "Email Invite" includes a link to create a profile. The information provided is only available to registered members and is not available to the public.

Anyone interested in joining this great group of ladies for golf, sunshine and camaraderie are asked to contact Kathleen Bolin at 352-638-3649 or Cynthia Panter at 706-633-7587. NT(Jul26,23)CA

## Learn to play Pickleball

Free classes first and third Tuesdays at 6 PM (weather permitting). Equipment provided and no registration is required. Courts are located on Chase Drive behind Health Department. NJ(Jul26,23)CA

**Get excited Union County! It's that time of year and we all have FOOTBALL FEVER! Come out on August 3rd and show your Panther Spirit in support of our football players, cheerleaders, and band! This year we have Nana & Papa's Ice Cream (\$5), Southern Sips Lemonade (\$5), & Kona Ice (\$4)! There will be free hotdogs for all who attend and inflatable slides for the kids! Featuring performances by the UC cheer squad, UC band, & other events that you do not want to miss! We look forward to seeing our community pack the stadium on August 3rd at 6:00pm at UCHS stadium!**