

# Sports

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## Allison resigns after 19 years, takes East Forsyth job

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Brian Allison will become the first head football coach at East Forsyth High School this fall following his resignation from Union County on Tuesday, Jan. 12.

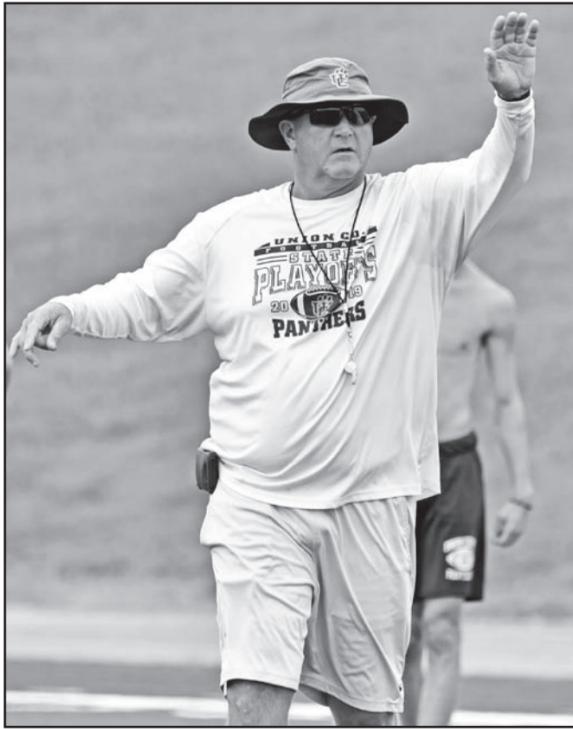
Allison broke the news to the Panther players that same day.

"It was a tough situation," Allison said. "When you've been around these kids as long as I have, it's tough. It was emotional for everyone but I felt like they handled it well."

According to Allison, this move has been in the works since right before Christmas when he learned East Forsyth selected him from among 150-plus applicants.

"This decision was made as a family and we felt like it was the best situation for us moving forward," he said. "In the back of my mind, I've always wanted to start a program and East Forsyth has no uniforms, no pads, nothing, so it will be completely from the ground up."

The search for Union County's next head coach is already underway, with athletic director Mandy Hunter claiming there is no rush to fill the vacancy. However, she acknowledges the program hopes to have a coach in place before spring practice opens in early May.



Brian Allison's program-record 121 wins is more than twice as many as the next closest coach. Photos/Todd Forrest

"We want to make sure we find the best fit for our program," she said. "We want someone who is energetic and is willing to build our program from our youth up to our older kids."

Allison spent 19 years at Union County High School, spanning two separate stints between 1996-2001 and 2008-2020, compiling a 121-77 record and a .611 winning percentage. While at Winder-

Barrow from 2002-2007, Allison finished 25-36, giving him a 146-113 (.564) overall record in 25 seasons between Blairsville and Winder.

In 2012, Allison surpassed his former coach, Terry Rogers, becoming the winningest football coach in Union County history. Seven years later, he led the Panthers to their first-ever State playoff victory and 10-win season.

Since its inception in

### Union County Football Career Coaching Records

Brian Allison	121-77	(1996-2001, 2008-2020)
Terry Rogers	56-83-1	(1980-1993)
Mickey Birchfield	43-25-2	(1973-1979)
Bill Thompson	26-26-1	(1964-1968)
Bill McGraw	12-11-4	(1959-1961)
Bobby Franks	9-7-1	(1962-1963)
Tom Wilson	7-29-1	(1969-1972)
Kent Green	5-15	(2002-2003)
Stan Luttrell	4-16	(2004-2005)
Todd Peugh	3-17	(2006-2007)
Chip Kell	3-17	(1994-1995)
Dave Hardin	3-8	(1957-1958)

1957, Union County Football has appeared in 10 State Tournaments - eight have come under Allison, including seven in the last eight years.

Ten different Panthers have received All-State honors in 19 seasons under Allison -- only a dozen Union County players (including himself) were named All-State in the 44 seasons under a different head coach.

The duo of Allison and longtime offensive coordinator Howard McCombs were responsible for the top-nine season point totals in program history, topping out at 453 points in 2014.

No Union County offense topped 310 points in a season before Allison, but since his arrival, five teams

have scored 400-plus, six totaled 350-plus and nine put up 325-plus.

Seven different Union County football teams have reached nine wins - five came under Allison. To put that into perspective, Allison owns more eight win seasons (6) than any other Panthers coach has winning seasons.

Allison tallied 13 winning seasons at UCHS - the next closest coach had five (Mickey Birchfield).

As a player at Union County, Allison was a standout defensive lineman, earning first-team All-State honors by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in 1983.

"I will always bleed purple and gold, and I have since I was a kid," Allison

said. "It was tough decision to leave my hometown. It wasn't something that happened on a whim. It's something we've been thinking about as a family for a while. But I will always be a Panther, and I greatly appreciate the community, the city of Blairsville and Union County for the support they've given me through thick and thin. I couldn't ask for a higher level of support than what I've gotten from the people here."

While at Furman University, Allison was a member of the 1985 Southern Conference Championship squad that reached the 1-AA National title game, losing 44-42 to Georgia Southern.

As a Furman assistant coach in 1988, Allison helped guide the Paladins to a 17-12 victory over Georgia Southern in the 1-AA National Championship Game.

"This is a great opportunity for Coach Allison and his family, and he's done a tremendous job with our student-athletes during his 19 years," Hunter added. "We wish him the best in everything he does and we know he will always be a Panther at heart."

The North Georgia News will continue examining Coach Allison's exit in next week's paper with a deep dive into his 19 seasons at Union County High School. We will also report on any updates from the ongoing UCHS coaching search.

## Hunter's 31 points, 19 boards powers Union past RGN in overtime

### Three Lady Panthers score in double figures as basketball ends five-week layoff

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The Lady Panthers returned to the court for the first time in 34 days, fending off a pesky Rabun Gap-Nachoochee squad, 70-59 in overtime behind a monster performance from junior Ava Hunter.

Union County's junior forward posted a career-best 31 points on 11-for-17 shooting while grabbing a game-high 19 rebounds (one shy of her career high) and hitting 9 of 13 at the foul line. While Hunter led the way most of the evening, sophomore guard Ellie Cook delivered the dagger in crunch time, breaking a 56-56 tie with a corner-trey near the 3-minute mark of overtime - Union's first and only 3 of the game.

Cook's jumper sparked a 10-0 Lady Panthers' run that put Rabun Gap away once and for all as the Eagles refused to go away despite facing multiple 10-point deficits in regulation.

Union County built an early 21-11 advantage before Rabun Gap narrowed the gap to 25-19 at the break. Hunter started to impose her will in the second half, scoring 13 in the third, but the Eagles closed the period with six unanswered to pull within 46-45 entering the final frame.

Rabun Gap's first lead of the night came at 54-53 with 3:17 to play, but Hunter answered on the other end, and freshman Lara Turner erased another one-point deficit by splitting a pair of free throws, tying the score at 59-59 with 1:07 to play.

On the ensuing Eagles' possession, Cook came up with



Junior forward Ava Hunter scores during the second half of her 31-point outing vs. Rabun Gap on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

a steal, but the Panthers could not capitalize on a 2-on-1 situation on the other end, missing a runner in the paint and a put-back at the rim.

Rabun Gap raced the other way with a 2-on-1 of its own, but Hunter swatted away the potential game-winning layup with 1.6 seconds remaining.

Inbounding from the baseline, the Eagles' open look from the corner bounced off the rim at the buzzer, sending the game into overtime.

After Cook's 3, both teams clanked the front-end of a 1-and-1 situation, but luckily

for Union, Hunter grabbed the miss and was fouled on the shot, sinking 1 of 2.

Leading 60-56, Hunter was perfect on two consecutive trips to the line, hitting all four shots and stretching the margin to 64-56 with 1:54 on the clock. Seven seconds later, Turner made it a 10-point game with two free throws.

Following Rabun Gap's only field goal of the extra session, Hill scored on a put-back before the Eagles sank 1-of-2 for a 68-59 score. After sparking the scoring in the overtime, Cook put the game away with the final points of the night,



Corinne Hill pushes the action against Rabun Gap on Friday. The sophomore point guard finished with a career-high 11 points in Union's 70-59 overtime victory. Photo/Todd Forrest

a pair of free throws with 35 seconds left.

Hill finished with 11 points, junior Rebekah Chambers added 10, Cook had nine and Turner scored five for Union County.

Hill and Turner helped the Lady Panthers build an 11-3 lead in the early going, with Turner converting a turnover into a fast-break layup and Hill completing an old-fashioned 3-point play. Ahead 13-6, Union County surrendered five straight to close the first for a 13-11 advantage.

The second opened with an 8-0 Lady Panthers' run,

but the Eagles outscored the home team 8-4 over the final four minutes of the half to pull within six.

Clinging to a 25-23 lead in the third, Hunter scored the next eight of the next 10 Union County points to build a 35-27 cushion at the 5-minute mark. However, as was the case all night, Rabun Gap stormed back within a basket at 37-35, but Hunter answered with five-straight points, and Chambers scored on consecutive trips to keep the visitors at bay.

A Cook jumper appeared to give Union a 46-42 lead after three, but the Eagles knocked

down a 3 at the buzzer to pull within a point heading to the fourth.

A floater by Cook and two Chambers free throws gave Union some breathing room early in the fourth, but a 7-2 spurt awarded the Eagles their first lead at 54-53 with 3:17 to play.

Union County will host Rabun County for Senior Night on Friday at 7 p.m. with JV games at 4 and 5:30 p.m.

On Saturday, Union will visit Lumpkin County at 4 p.m. The JV boys will get underway at 2:30 p.m.