

Sports

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Ava Hunter scores 1,000th point, joins mother and grandmother



Ava Hunter scores one of her 1,000 points at the free throw line earlier this season. Photo/Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
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Three generations of Union County basketball stars became united by more than family ties on Friday night when junior Ava Hunter joined the UCHS 1,000-point club, following in the footsteps of her mother, Mandy (Bradley) Hunter (Class of 1994) and grandmother Kay (Rogers) Bradley (1969).
Ava Hunter entered the season with just over 850 career points and was on pace to reach 1,000 points before Christ-

the next time down the court I scored. After I scored, they stopped the game, and I knew right away it was probably because I had gotten my 1,000th.”
After accomplishing the feat just nine games into her junior season, Ava Hunter becomes one of the youngest players in UCHS history to surpass 1,000 points – a feat usually reserved for seniors. But as the most experienced member of a Lady Panthers squad that doesn’t feature a 12th grader, Ava Hunter has taken on a senior-like leadership role during a roller-coaster season that was in doubt as recently as three weeks ago.
“This has been a really difficult season, especially right before Christmas, when all of our games started getting canceled,” she said. “Then, coming back after Christmas, it got even more difficult, and it was tough to stay focused at times. I don’t think we could have done it without such great teammates and coaches.
“Individually, don’t think I would have been able to [reach 1,000] without the help of my teammates and coaches, including my AAU coaches Ken Huffman and Jerry Wright. I often think my teammates are overlooked for the part they play in getting me to 1,000. But right now, we’re just focused on getting ready for the region tournament and trying to be the best team that we can be.”
The pandemic has also impacted the coaching staff, as assistant Mandy Hunter has filled in for head coach Crystal Beach since Union County basketball resumed last month.
“I am so proud of the girls for pushing through these hard times and working on get-

ting better every day,” Mandy Hunter said. “Times are hard on everyone right now, and their attitude and effort have been great day in and day out.
“My mom always taught me that there are reasons for everything, and as long as you do your best and try to do the right thing each and every day, everything else will take care of itself.”
Despite the topsy-turvy season, Kay Bradley has cherished watching her daughter coach her granddaughter and even sees some similarities between the two as players. She is also confident with her daughter at the helm and knows the basketball program is in good hands.
“Mandy and Ava have always hustled and enjoyed playing basketball; you can see by their efforts how much they love the game,” Kay Bradley said. “I trust Mandy’s coaching. She has played ball for some good coaches and has learned from each of them. Therefore, I watch with pride and patience [because I know] basketball can be very challenging.”
When asked what it’s like to coach her daughter, Mandy Hunter agreed with her mom, saying she, too, sees a bit of herself in Ava.
“I notice [myself] in her drive and work ethic and in the way she is always trying to better herself and her team,” Mandy Hunter said.
Mandy and Ava Hunter might have played in different eras, but Coach Hunter believes her daughter would have excelled in the 1990s. Mandy Hunter also admits that she would love an opportunity to play in today’s game with the added emphasis on the 3-point

shot.
“To be honest, I don’t think I ever took a 3-point shot until my junior year of high school,” Coach Hunter said. “So yeah, it would be interesting to play today with the way shooting 3s has become such an essential part of the game, more so than it was in the ‘90s.
“I think Ava would fit in just fine back in the ‘90s,” she said. “It seems everyone had a big post player back then, and that was the focus of the offense. I think she would love banging around in the paint back in those days.”
The sport has changed in the 50 years since Kay Rogers was lighting up scorebooks in an era where girls basketball was played 3-on-3. However, the path to hardwood excellence begins from the same starting point it always has, stemming

from a love of the game, which is the common denominator linking Ava Hunter to the previous two generations.
“My mom and grandmother have influenced my game more than anyone,” Ava Hunter said. “I would not be able to accomplish everything that I have without them. They were great players, and both scored 1,000 points, but they never pushed me or put any pressure on me to be the same kind of player they were. They allowed me to develop my own style and become my own player.”
The Lady Panthers are in action four times this week, beginning with Banks County at home on Tuesday and at Rabun Gap on Thursday. The regular season concludes this weekend with Elbert County at home on Friday and at Rabun County on Saturday.

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Mandy Hunter watches from the sideline during Union County’s recent win over Rabun Gap. Photo/Todd Forrest

Middle school swimmers wrap season with Hot Chocolate Meet



UCHS Swim Team Front Row (L to R): Jada Taylor, Isabella Moss, Reese Jones, Andrew Nushtayev, Emerson Kight. Middle Row (L to R): Ava Wheeler, Grace Cook, Nicholas Nushtayev, Olivia Loyd, Lilly Collins. Back Row (L to R): Coach Amy Kight, Team Captain Eli Gwynn, Coach Kelly Helton, Team Captain Lily Helton, Coach Emily Stafford. Not pictured: Lily Brookshire, Sophia Gobin, Isabel Hoover, Anniston Howse.

Sports Special
North Georgia News
On Jan. 2, the Union County Middle School Swim Team traveled to Clarkesville for the last meet of the season.
Despite being in the water very little over the break, this group of swimmers excelled

once again, dropping times and swimming their best.
The coaching staff is proud of the team and its members, who had the following finishes for the Hot Chocolate Meet:
200 yd Medley Relay: 3rd place - Lily Brookshire, Reese

Jones, Lily Helton, Grace Cook; 7th place - Lilly Collins, Olivia Loyd, Ava Wheeler, Isabella Moss
100 IM: 2nd place - Eli Gwynn; 3rd place - Lily Helton; 9th place - Reese Jones
50 Free: 2nd place - Nicholas Nushtayev; 3rd place - Andrew Nushtayev; 3rd place - Lily Helton; 11th place - Lily Brookshire; 15th place - Olivia Loyd; 19th place - Lilly Collins; 20th place - Ava Wheeler; 22nd place - Isabella Moss; 23rd place - Emerson Kight; 25th place - Jada Taylor; 28th place - Sophia Gobin
50 Fly: 3rd place - Nicholas Nushtayev; 3rd place - Grace Cook; 5th place - Reese Jones
100 Free: 3rd place - Grace Cook; 6th place - Olivia Loyd
200 Free Relay: 2nd place - Grace Cook, Olivia Loyd, Lily Brookshire, Lily Helton; 8th place - Lilly Collins, Isabella Moss, Ava Wheeler, Reese Jones
50 Back: 8th place - Lily Brookshire; 9th place - Lilly Collins; 11th place - Jada Taylor; 14th place - Isabella Moss; 16th place - Sophia Gobin
50 Breast: 1st place - Andrew Nushtayev; 4th place - Eli Gwynn; 8th place - Ava Wheeler; 9th place - Emerson Kight

UCHS Swim Team finishes Top 10 at Adairsville High Jan. 23



UCHS Swim Team Front Row (L to R): Liam Smith, Preston Perren, Rachel Reid, Grayden Cobb, Blake Caputi. Back Row (L to R): Coach Kelly Helton, Team Captain Hannah Sheffield, Team Captain Hunter White, Coach Emily Stafford. Not pictured: Brooklyn Brown, Will Doyle, Michael Leird.

Sports Special
North Georgia News
The Union County High School Swim Team competed with excellence on Saturday, Jan. 23, at Adairsville High School for the last regular meet of the season.
This meet gave the swimmers a chance to participate in both preliminary and finals events. Out of 21 teams competing at this meet, overall

Union came in ninth.
Rachel Reid broke the school record in 100 breaststroke for the fourth time this season. Hannah Sheffield broke the school record again in both the 50 and 100 free.
Union County had several Top 20 finishes:
200 Medley Relay: 7th place - Preston Perren, Hunter White, Blake Caputi, Michael Leird
50 Free: 3rd place - Han-

nah Sheffield; 5th place - Hunter White
100 Free: 3rd place - Hannah Sheffield; 16th place - Rachel Reid
200 Freestyle Relay: 9th place - Blake Caputi, Preston Perren, Michael Leird, Hunter White
100 Back: 11th place - Preston Perren
100 Breast: 1st place - Hunter White; 6th place - Rachel Reid

Soccer registration at Union County Recreation Department
Soccer registration will open at the Union County Recreation Department
January 5, 2021 - February 19, 2021 for ages 5-14.
Age you are January 1, 2021 determines age group you play in. Copy of birth certificate is required. Fee is \$55.00
Please register online at unioncountytga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center located at 519 Industrial Blvd.
Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

Baseball and Softball Registration at the Union County Recreation Department
Registration for baseball and softball opens at the Union County Recreation Department
January 5, 2021 - February 19, 2021 for ages 5-14.
Age you will be September 1, 2021 is the age group you will play in. Fee is \$55.00
Please register online at unioncountytga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center, 519 Industrial Blvd. **Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.**