

Sports

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Swartz no-hits North Atlanta, begins 2021 with 19 Ks over 9 scoreless Union County blanks NAHS and Fannin, blows 4-run lead at Lumpkin

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The 2021 Union County baseball season got underway with two shutout victories in three outings last week.

Senior lefthander Zeke Swartz (2-0) proved the catalyst in both victories, tossing a five-inning no-hitter in Saturday's 11-0 win over North Atlanta and working four scoreless in Wednesday's 3-0 victory vs. Fannin County.

So far, Swartz has combined for 19 strikeouts over nine innings while surrendering one walk, one hit and no runs in two starts.

Senior Isaac Mullinack (0-1) took part in the Fannin shutout, replacing Swartz in the fifth and striking out seven over the final three innings. However, most of his damage is coming at the plate, where Mullinack is off to a blistering start through three games.

The senior shortstop is batting .714 with six runs and three walks while sporting a ridiculous 1.943 OPS.

Panthers 11, North Atlanta 0 (5 innings) - In the second game of last Saturday's "Diamond Day" at Lumpkin County High School, the Panthers overpowered Class 6A's North Atlanta in a mercy-rule shortened victory.

Swartz fanned 11 batters without allowing a hit while the offense used a 7-run third inning to put away the Warriors.

Swartz also drove in a career-high 4 runs, adding a 2-for-3, 4-RBI day to an already spectacular stat line.

Up 4-0 in the third, Union County (2-1) exploded for seven runs after singles by Hunter Loyd and Connor



Senior Zeke Swartz winds during Saturday's 11-0 no-hit victory over North Atlanta. Photo/Todd Forrest

Shields, and a Thomas Dyer walk loaded the bases with nobody out.

An error off the bat of Tyler Loyd plated the first run of the inning, then a Brett Ballew walk made it 6-0 game. Consecutive RBI singles by Caleb Towe and Mullinack opened up an 8-0 advantage before Swartz's three-run double cleared the bases.

A leadoff triple by Mullinack and an RBI single by Swartz allowed Union to grab a 1-0 advantage after an inning.

The Panthers tacked on three more in the second after Dyer was plunked to begin the frame and Tyler Loyd reached on an error. With two on and no outs, Ballew stroked a line-drive single to left, scoring

Dyer. Tyler Loyd came around to score on an errant throw.

Ballew recorded the fourth run of the game when a one-out double by Mullinack brought home the junior DH.

North Atlanta's only scoring opportunity came in the third when a hit by a pitcher and a fielding error put two aboard with two down. But Swartz escaped with the shutout intact when senior catcher Damien Chitwood cut down a would-be base stealer at third to end the inning.

Mullinack finished 3 for 3 with 2 runs and a pair of RBIs. Dyer and Tyler Loyd also scored 2 runs each.

Ballew ended his day 1 for 2 with 3 RBIs and 2 runs. Junior Caleb Towe went 1 for



Leadoff hitter Isaac Mullinack lines an opposite-field triple during the first inning vs. North Atlanta. Photo/Todd Forrest

3 with an RBI and a run. Senior Hunter Loyd finished 1 for 3 with a run.

Panthers 3, Fannin County 0 - Swartz and Mullinack combined for a two-hit shutout with 15 strikeouts in Wednesday's opening-day victory over the visiting Rebels.

With Swartz on the hill, Union County relied on small-ball to grab an early lead for its senior southpaw, manufacturing a run in the bottom of the first.

Following an infield single by Mullinack and a sacrifice bunt from Swartz, Chitwood spotted the Panthers a 1-0 advantage with an RBI groundout. That was all the run support Union's pitching would need as only one Fan-

nin County baserunner was allowed to reach second base after the first inning. The Panthers provided another run to Swartz during the third when junior Bailey Brown led off with a walk, and Chitwood scored him via a two-out single.

Union added an insurance run in the fifth after Mullinack singled and stole second, allowing Hunter Loyd to plate him with a base hit up the middle.

A leadoff walk in the top of the seventh cracked the door for Fannin County, but Mullinack nailed down the save opportunity with a strikeout and two ground-ball outs.

Mullinack went 2 for 2

with 3 runs and 2 stolen bases. Hunter Loyd finished 1 for 2 with one ribby; Chitwood drove in two during a 1-for-2 day.

Panthers 4, Lumpkin County 7 - In the first contest of last weekend's Diamond Day, the Indians scored seven unanswered after falling behind 4-0 after in the fourth.

Mullinack suffered the loss despite three near-perfect innings to start the contest. However, he ran into trouble in the fourth, beginning with a dropped third strike that sparked the five-run outburst.

After the passed ball put the leadoff man aboard, Mullinack yielded consecutive singles and a walk. Still clinging to a 4-2 advantage, the Panthers watched their four-run lead disappear for good when a bases-clearing triple put the Indians out front to stay.

Union County found itself in business when Chitwood singled to open the fifth but was eventually turned away despite loading the bags with one down. After Chitwood reached to start the inning, a Dyer walk and a base hit by Shields loaded the bases. Unfortunately, a pop-up and a groundout retired the side with the Panthers still trailing.

A two-out RBI single in the bottom half of the inning extended the Lumpkin lead to 6-4 with Shields on the mound. Union County wasted a one-out walk to Mullinack in the sixth and Lumpkin inched ahead 7-4 in its half of the frame.

With two down and runners at the corners, the Indians' runner at first intentionally forced a run-down situation, allowing the runner at third to score moments before Union recorded the final out.

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Lady Panthers fall in 8-AA Consolation Game, visit Callaway on Wednesday

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Homer - Avena Hunter and Ellie Cook combined for 33 points, but it wasn't enough to overtake Banks County during last Wednesday's Region 8-AA Consolation Game.

Hunter scored seven of her team-high 18 points in the fourth quarter as Union County nearly erased a 47-40 deficit over the final 100 seconds of a 49-45 loss.

The Lady Panthers' final lead of the evening came at 32-31 with 3:54 to play in the third. Moments later, the Leopards' All-Region center Kamryn Grier went to the bench with four fouls, opening the door for Union to seize momentum. But with its 6-foot sophomore temporarily out of action, Banks County found a spark outside the paint, draining consecutive 3's -- its first and only treys of the game. And with the aid of seven Union turnovers, the Leopards turned a 32-31 deficit into a 41-36 lead with less than six minutes left.

Baskets by junior Rebekah Chambers and Cook kept Union County within three at 43-40 inside of three minutes to play. After Banks County pushed its margin to 45-40, a Lady Panthers' turnover allowed Banks to open up its largest lead of the game at 47-40 with 1:40 remaining.

Hunter answered with a 3-point play on the other end, and the Leopards missed



Ava Hunter was named Region 8-AA Co-Player of the Year. Ellie Cook and Rebekah Chambers were All-Region selections. Photo/Todd Forrest

the front-end of a 1-and-1 on consecutive trips, keeping hope alive for Union.

Two free throws by Hunter at the 45-second mark cut the difference to 47-45, but Banks County countered with a 2-for-2 trip four seconds later. Neither team scored again as the Leopards scored four consecutive free throws over the final 22 seconds and Union couldn't put the ball in the basket.

With 15 points, Cook finished one-point shy of her career-high (16 - twice: Gilmer, Dec. 2019; at Rabun, Jan. 22). The sophomore guard scored 11 of her 15 in the first half to pace the Lady Panthers to a 26-26 tie at the break.

Union jumped out to a quick 4-0 lead courtesy of Cook and freshman Lara Turner. Cook scored the next two baskets as the teams were all square at 8-8.



All-Region guard Ellie Cook hits a pull-up jumper for two of her 15 points during last Wednesday's consolation loss at Banks. Photo/Todd Forrest

A Sofia McNabb put-back at the three-minute mark pulled Union within one at 11-10, but Banks stretched the margin to 16-10 before a Hunter and-1 made it 16-13 at quarter's end.

Hunter's 3-point play sparked an 11-0 run that provided the Lady Panthers its largest lead of the game at 21-15.

A Hunter free throw and a Turner jumper to begin the second evened the score at 16.

Then, Hunter scored down low for an 18-16 lead, and Cook sank three free throws with 5:15 left in the period after drawing a foul behind the arc.

Banks County answered with a 7-0 run to turn a 21-16 deficit into a 23-21 advantage at the 2:52 mark of the half. Union momentarily regained the lead at 25-23 via a Hunter offensive board and a steal-and-score by Cook.

After knotting the score

at 25 with 1:24 on the clock, the Leopards split a pair of free throws for a 26-25 edge 30 seconds later. However, Union entered the break tied at 26 after Hunter concluded the first-half scoring with a 1-for-2 trip of her own.

The third quarter opened with a scoreless first minute, but a Banks County deuce at 6:50 and a free throw at 6:33 produced a 29-26 advantage.

Another McNabb offensive board and a fast-break pull-up jumper by Cook kept Union within one at 31-30 at the 4:30 mark. Junior Ansley Collins gave the Lady Panthers their final lead of the game with 3:54 left in the third, knocking down a 15-footer from the wing.

Unfortunately, Union's sudden lack of ball security led to a costly cold snap, allowing Banks County to race ahead for good with its impromptu 3-point marksmanship.

After Collins' jumper gave Union a 32-31 lead, the Lady Panthers went more than eight minutes without a field goal while committing seven turnovers over that span. Four Hunter free throws - two coming with one second left in the third - kept Union County within striking distance during the latter stages of the third and early moments of the fourth.

Hunter finished with a team-high eight rebounds, four steals and two blocks while sinking 10 for 13 at the char-

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