

Sports

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No. 2 Panthers crush Athens Academy, host No. 10 Providence Friday No. 4 Athens Academy girls shutout Lady Panthers 5-0

By Todd Forrest
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The second-ranked Union County men (5-1-1, 1-0) dismantled Athens Academy last week in an 8-2 region victory behind junior Antonio Solario's second hat trick of 2024 and a pair of assists from senior Zurriel Mancillas on Feb. 29.

Earlier, the Lady Panthers welcomed back three key players, juniors Katelyn Brown, Ariel McCarter and freshman Ragan McCarter, from basketball but suffered a 5-0 loss to the No. 4 Spartans.

No. 2 Panthers 8, Athens Academy 2 - Senior Eli Decker's penalty kick during the 5th minute sparked Union's four-goal first half after Solario earned the penalty by getting tripped from behind inside the box. Moments later, Decker stepped to the line and put the Panthers on top for good.

Senior Benton Gregory made it a 2-0 game 96 seconds later when Georgia State-commit Evan Bohms' shot ricocheted off the keeper and Gregory tapped the deflection into an open goal.

Solario went to work in the 23rd, knocking in Wes Seiler's well-placed lob pass over the back line. Then, Seiler closed the first 40 minutes in style with a goal from 10 yards with one second on the clock courtesy of Kooper Ashcraft's throw-in.

Solario added two goals in the second half, the first coming in the 63rd minute off a feed from junior Noah Sommer. Athens answered a minute later, but Solario grew the lead to 6-1



Benton Gregory (9) celebrates his goal vs. Athens Academy alongside Evan Bohms (2). Photo/Todd Forrest

in the 66th when Mancillas' cross pass led to a sliding score from point blank.

Sommer scored in the 76th on a mishandling by the Athens keeper, then the junior struck again 69 seconds later via another Mancillas cross into the box.

Down 8-1, the Spartans added a goal in the 79th minute.

The Panthers will host No. 10 Providence Christian on Friday, March 8, where the winner will gain an inside track to the Region 8-AA title.

Lady Panthers 0, No. 2 Athens Academy 5 - The Spartans scored three first-half goals, then tacked on two more over the final 7:27 during a 5-0 shutout.

Union County (1-5, 0-1) kept Athens off the board until the 14th minute, dodging a bullet in the 2nd minute when the Lady Panthers were tagged with a handball on a Spartans corner kick. Fortunately, the penalty shot sailed over the crossbar, keeping the game scoreless.

Union answered with two scoring opportunities but Ariel McCarter and Lily Brookshire's shots were turned away before Athens went on top in the 14th minute.

The Spartans recorded two more goals before halftime, scoring in the 28th and 32nd. Athens Academy added two for good measure during the 73rd and 75th.

Union County and Providence Christian girls get underway at 6 p.m. on Friday, March 8 with the guys to follow.



Eli Decker converts a penalty to spot Union County a 1-0 lead during the opening minutes vs. Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest

Class AA Boys Top 10

1. Tattnall County
2. Union County
3. Toombs County
4. Model
5. Walker
6. Callaway
7. Drew Charter
8. North Murray
9. Appling County
10. Providence Christian



Senior Alanna Franklin during last week's region matchup with Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest



Juniors Ariel McCarter (L) and Katelyn Brown (R) returned to the pitch last week following basketball season. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Zurriel Mancillas dished out two helpers in Union County's 8-2 win over Athens Academy last week. Photo/Todd Forrest



Wes Seiler celebrates after scoring vs. Athens with one second remaining in the first half. Photo/Todd Forrest



Antonio Solario draws a foul during the first half, resulting in Eli Decker's penalty kick vs. Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Marina Stepps during the first half of last week's contest vs. No. 4 Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest

Baseball: Panthers' bats remain cold vs. No. 5 Towns County

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The Panthers (1-3) were limited to three hits in a 5-1 loss to Class A's fifth-ranked Towns County on Tuesday, Feb. 27.

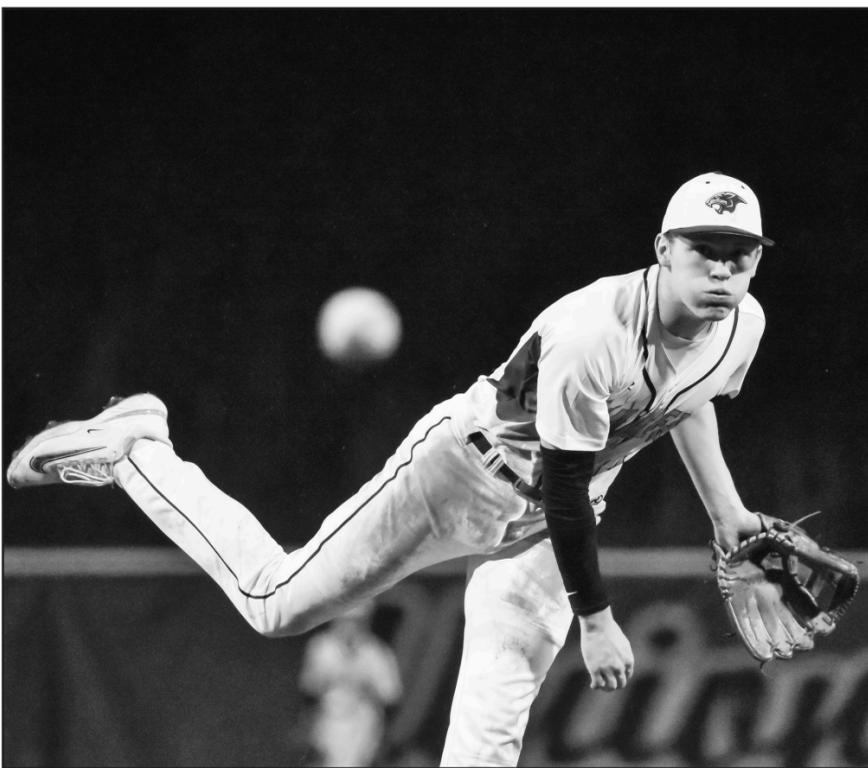
Sophomore Gunnar Akins took the bump for Union County, allowing three hits and two unearned runs over 4 innings while taking the loss. With his team leading 1-0 in the top of the fourth, Akins nearly pitched himself out of a self-induced two-on, no-out jam after issuing a pair of walks to start the frame. However, a two-run error allowed Towns County to seize the lead for good.

Junior Tyler Richards replaced Akins in the fifth and allowed a run before junior Hayden Hughes shut the door and kept the Panthers within 3-1.

Union's best scoring opportunity of the night came in the bottom of the fifth, loading the bases with one away. Sophomore Eli Gwynn opened the inning with a hit-by-pitch and Bo Brown worked a five-pitch walk.

Freshman Junior Davis' one-out single loaded the bags but a strikeout and groundout ended the Union County threat without a run.

A walk and two singles grew the Indians' advantage to 4-1 in the sixth, then a walk, a double, and an RBI groundout added another Towns County run in the seventh.



Junior Hayden Hughes made his first appearance of 2024 vs. Towns County, working 2 2/3 innings with 4 Ks and three walks on Tuesday, Feb. 27. Photo/Todd Forrest

The Panthers grabbed a brief lead in the third when Davis reached on an error and quickly swiped two bags, resulting in a run-scoring throwing error on his steal of third.

Davis finished 1 for 3 with a run and two stolen bases; Gwynn finished 1 for 2 and Hughes went 1 for 3. Brown and senior Connor Swanson

each drew a walk.

On the mound, Hughes went 2 2/3 innings in his 2024 debut, allowing three hits, two earned, and three walks while striking out four.

Richards gave up a hit, a run and two walks in 1/3 of an inning. Akins struck out three and walked five in the start.

Senior Matthew Chas-

tain went the distance for Towns County, punching out nine and walking two over 7 innings.

Rain washed out Friday's game at Towns County.

Up next: Union began a busy week with a home contest vs. Hayesville, North Carolina on Monday, March 4 at 5:30 p.m. The Panthers host Gilmer



Sophomore catcher Bo Brown after picking off a Towns County runner at first base. Photo/Todd Forrest

The week concludes with a Friday, March 8 visit to Gilmer for another 5:30 p.m. first pitch. Wednesday, March 6.

Track: Union County takes home 11 medals at Stephens County meet



The Union County 4x200 relay team shows off their gold medals after taking first place at Stephens County last Thursday, Feb. 29. L-R: Jonah Kluth, Tyler Grasty, Taylor Whitehead, JT Neal. Photo/UCHS

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Toccoa - Union County earned 11 top threes at Stephens County's Currahee Relays, including a pair of first-place performances in the boys' 200M and the boys' 4x200 relay.

Senior Taylor Whitehead took home gold in the 200M race, clocking in at 22.53 seconds. The guys' 4x200 relay team of Tyler Grasty, Jonah Kluth, JT Neal and Whitehead finished first at 1 minute, 33.61 seconds.

On the girls' side, Ava Loyd placed second in the 100M with a time of 13.40. She placed third in the 200M, crossing the line at 28.39.

Lola Hunter's time of 12:12.48 was good enough for silver in the 3200M. The girls'

4x800 relay team placed third with a time of 12:03.39.

Meanwhile, Whitehead came in second in the 100M at 11:09; Neal was third at 11:39. Neal placed second behind Whitehead in the 200M race, clocking in at 23.24.

The boys' 4x400 relay team placed second, and senior Zander Rotko came in second in the 400M with a time of 53.99.

Other top five finishers for Union County: Hannah Kazmierzak (fourth - girls' 800M), Hunter (fifth - girls' 1600M), Katie Byers (fifth - girls' 100M hurdles and 300M hurdles), 4x100 relay (fourth - girls), 4x200 relay (fourth - girls), 4x400 relay (fifth - girls), 4x800 (third - girls), Jacob Turner (third - boys 300M hurdles), 4x100 relay (fourth - boys), 4x800 relay

(fourth - boys).

At Stephens County on Thursday, Feb. 29, Union County competed against Franklin (NC), Habersham Central, North Hall, Oglethorpe County, White County and Stephens.

Union County is back in action on Tuesday, March 5 at Gilmer. Lumpkin County, Pickens and Gilmer will join the Panthers on March 5.

Union visits East Jackson on Saturday, March 9 where the Panthers face Commerce, East Hall, East Jackson, Elbert County, Franklin County, Hart County, Jackson County, Jefferson, Manchester, North Hall, North Oconee, Oconee County, Prince Avenue and Tallulah Falls.

UCHS will host its first meet at the new track and field facility on Tuesday, March 12.

UCRD Basketball: 12U, 10U Girls third at State tourney; 14U Boys fifth



The Union County 10U girls defeated Dooly County 32-5 in the opening round of the GRPA State Tournament last weekend. The Lady Panthers were eliminated by Bacon County, 39-29 in the semis. The 10U girls are coached by Haley Dyer and Ashley Davis. Players: Brylie Davis, Taylor Helton, Sammie Herrera, Taylor Jamison, Ada Jones, Gracie Montgomery, Katherine Queen, Avery Tobert and Gianna Tercero.



Union County's 12U girls placed third at State following a 43-22 loss to eventual champ Brantley County in the semifinals. The Lady Panthers defeated Bowdon 59-15 in pool play. The team is coached by head coach Levi Kendrick, assistant coach Rusty Cox, assistant coach Cody White and assistant coach / bookkeeper CJ Bingham. The players are Hayden Abercrombie, Makaylin Bingham, Laney Cook, Aubrie Cox, Cambrie Cox, Arlene Davis, Cayden Gunter, Piper Hunter, Kinsley Kendrick, Ava Wynn and Olivia White.



Union County's 14U boys won their pool play game 53-46 over Temple before falling 73-37 to eventual-champion Turner County in the first round of State at Bowdon. The team is coached by Greg Wilson, Daniel Shumaker and Jack Wilson. Players are Jacob Brown, Bryson Brooks, Parker Deal, Oliver Hillman, Christian Mullin, Easton Shumaker, Grant Smith, Brayden Torres, Parker Vinez and Charlie Wilson.

Mountain Gymnastics Center collects six first-place finishes at Winter Warm Up meet

Dahlonega - Rosie Tanner, Scarlett Munn, Shaylyne Davis and Emma Schuette took home gold medals at December's Winter Warm-Up meet; Callie Kirkpatrick and Liv Wynn finished tied for first.

In AAU Bronze level competition, Tanner placed first on bars and floor with respective scores of 9.30 and 9.50. She finished with an all-around total of 37.025.

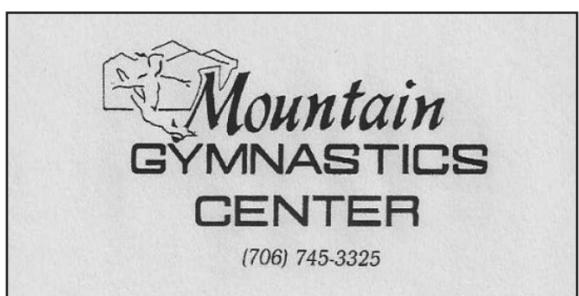
Munn's 36.125 all-around score was good enough for first in AAU Silver. Munn recorded first place finishes on vault (9.025) and floor (9.25).

Davis logged three high scores on vault (8.95), bars (8.95) and floor (9.325) during her 36.225 all-around performance in USA Platinum.

Schuette was first on vault (9.150) and the floor (9.425). She finished with an all-around total of 36.8 in USA Diamond.

Wynn tallied the highest score of the weekend at a 36.925 in AAU Copper competition. Her floor score of 9.65 was good enough for first-place.

Kirkpatrick also finished



tied for first with a 36.925 via a first-place performance on bars at 9.25.

In other AAU Copper action, Autumn Hintze placed third all-around at 36.7, coming in first on beam at 9.05.

Maisie Henderson placed fourth behind a first-place showing (9.25) on vault. Charlotte Smith came in fifth with a pair of second-place finishes on bars and floor. Skylar Hintze was sixth with a fourth on bars.

In AAU Bronze, Lana Kate Williams finished third all-around at 36.3 courtesy of a first-place performance (9.25) on beam.

Charlotte Williams placed seventh all around, Allie Kamber was eighth, Zoe

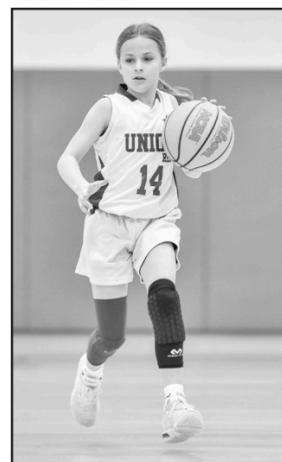
Ramos was ninth, Aniston Kotchenreuther and Khloe Wiggins were 10th.

In AAU Silver, Kenzie Slate was third with runner-ups on beam and floor. Austen Garrett was fourth - placing first on beam at 9.325.

Aria Beaudoin, Sophia Beaver and Lorelei Whitney each came in fifth. Mattie Kate Alexander was sixth; Camilla Duello and Avalynn Urbanowski also competed in AAU Silver competition.

Addison Harkins placed fourth in USA Platinum, coming in second on vault. Addyson Lee came in sixth.

Kylee Coggins and Kim Stock each placed sixth all-around in USA Gold.



Union County 12U girls in action at the State tournament hosted by Rabun County. Photos/Todd Forrest