

# Soccer: Region 8-AA heats up this week with Union's visit to Rabun

**Panthers, Lady Panthers overwhelm Banks and Elbert, improve to 2-0 in region**

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Both Union County soccer teams opened Region 8-AA action with a perfect week, scoring a pair of shutout victories at Banks County and Elbert County.

With only five teams in Region 8-AA (four on the girls' side), the 2021 schedule includes two matches against each region foe. And after taking down Banks and Elbert County, the Lady Panthers (2-1, 2-0) are a Tuesday win at Rabun County away from completing the first half of the 8-AA slate undefeated.

The guys, meanwhile, still have trips to Rabun and Riverside Military Academy around the corner, but the second half of the 8-AA schedule will feature four home games.

Aside from the Panthers and Lady Panthers, both Rabun County squads are the only teams in 8-AA still sporting a perfect region record. But Union and Rabun will square off Tuesday in Tiger, determining who will surge into the Region 8-AA driver's seat.

**Lady Panthers 3, Banks County 0** - Freshman goalkeeper Kyra McKechnie followed a 25-save performance at Lumpkin County with her first varsity shutout in Union's Region 8-AA opener at Banks County last Tuesday.

The Lady Panthers raced ahead with three goals in the first 40 minutes, beginning with sophomore Maggie Payne's first varsity goal, courtesy of an assist from junior Melia Whitener.

Sophomore Kaylee Helton made her presence felt in her return from the hardwood, spotting Union County a 2-0 advantage off a feed by fellow sophomore Haleigh Helcher.



Senior Malachi Patrick picked up the first hat trick of his high school career during Union's 8-0 victory at Elbert County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Whitener closed the scoring thanks to an assist by freshman Zoe Crawford.

McKechnie finished with six saves in the win.

**Panthers 3, Banks County 0** - Junior Kyler Robbins notched his second brace in as many outings as Union County blanked the Leopards for the third-straight meeting, dating back to 2019.

Senior Zach Jackson began the scoring when he found Robbins in the 7th minute. Freshman Benton Gregory gave the Panthers a 2-0 advantage 20 minutes later off a Robbins assist.

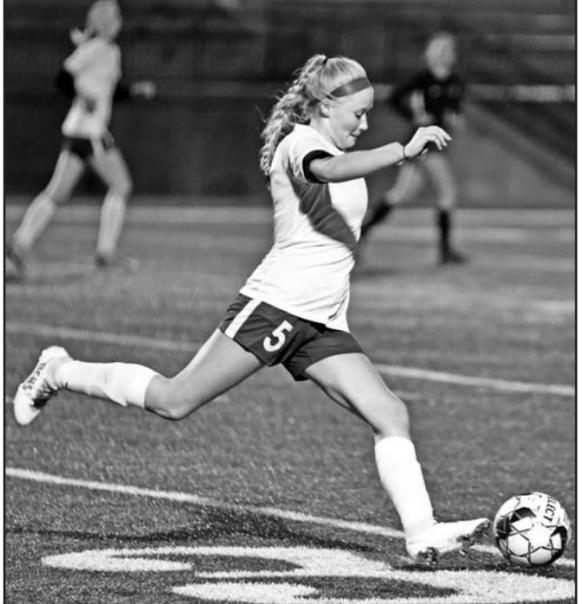
Jackson added his second helper of the night when he fed Robbins in the 62nd minute.

Senior goalkeeper Aaron Helton added three saves in his second shutout of the season.

**Lady Panthers 4, Elbert County 0** - Whitener picked up her first brace of the year, scoring the first and third goal of the match, helping Union County cruise to its second Region 8-AA victory.

Whitener put her team on the board with an unassisted goal in the 16th minute. Less than four minutes later, Crawford recorded her first high school goal off a Payne assist, granting the Lady Panthers a 2-0 halftime advantage.

Whitener made it a 3-0 contest in the 47th minute when freshman Reagan Covington notched her first varsity helper.



Sophomore Haleigh Helcher boots a kick downfield during a recent Union County Lady Panthers match. Photo/Todd Forrest

with one goal and one assist. Gregory, Nolan Bachman and Cort Olver each chipped in one assist. Helton denied three Blue Devils' shot attempts during his 17th high school shutout and his third clean slate of 2021.

**Notes:** Union County has not scored 8+ goals in a home match since a 10-0 win on March 15, 2013 - also vs. Greene County. Furthermore, the Panthers would win 10-0 at Washington-Wilkes one week later (March 22, 2013), roughly six weeks before opening the Class AA State Tournament with a 10-1 win at Chatham County on May 3. Ironically, 2013 was the last time Union lost to Banks County, a 1-0 shutout.

At 3.8 goals per match in 2013, that group was the third-highest scoring Panthers' team of the last decade behind 2011's 4.7 goals (80 in 17 matches) and 2010's 4.5 goals (72 in

16 matches). The 2019 State runner-up squad averaged just 2.7 goals a match, but Helton and company yielded only 1.6 per.

**Up next:** Tuesday's region showdown at Rabun County will kick off at 5 p.m. with the guys to follow. Both Rabun squads are currently 2-2-1 on the year, with the Lady Cats owning a 10-0 home win over Banks County and the men defeating Banks 4-0.

In last year's matchup, the Rabun County girls defeated Union for the first time since 2010, capturing an 8-6 shootout win that saw the Lady Panthers rally from deficits of 3-1 and 4-2 to grab a 5-4 second-half advantage. Rabun scored the next four goals in less than eight minutes before Union made it 8-6 in the 78th minute.

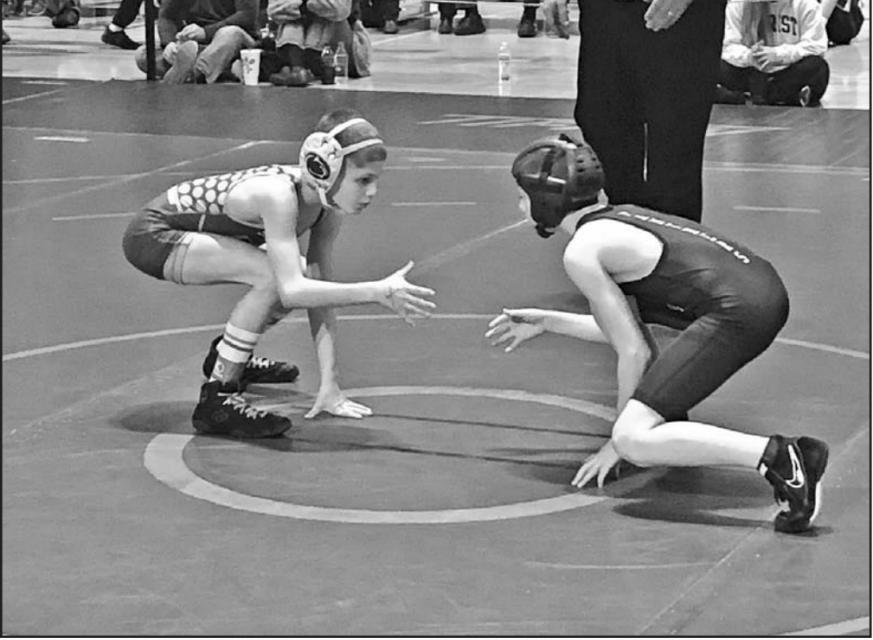
In the 2020 guys meeting, goals by Kobi and Kyler Robbins in the first three minutes allowed the Panthers to jump out front 2-0. Leading 3-0 in the 26th minute following Kyler Robbins' second goal, Rabun's only score made it 3-1 at the break as both teams went scoreless during the second half.

Both Union teams will take a break from Region play on Wednesday when they travel to East Hall. At 5-1-1, the East Hall men are eighth in the latest EuroSport.com rankings. East Hall and Lumpkin County met in a preseason scrimmage that ended in a scoreless tie.

The Lady Vikings currently sit at 2-6 on the year and own a 10-1 scrimmage loss to common-opponent Lumpkin County.

The Panther men will resume region play at Riverside (0-2, 0-1) next Tuesday, March 16. The Lady Panthers will visit Class AAA Sonorville (0-7) on Wednesday, March 17.

# Union places six, wins 112-pound championship at Big Kid State wrestling tourney



**Emerson** - Union County placed all six of its wrestlers on the medal stand during the Big Kid State Wrestling Tournament on Feb. 27.

Union sent two wrestlers to the finals with Paxon Legatt winning the state championship at 112 pounds, and Eli Flowers finishing second at 72 pounds.

Payton Legatt placed fourth at 150 pounds. Keegan Deeds was third at 79 pounds. Asa Smith-Foot came in fifth at 130. Kevin Kilpatrick finished third at 95 pounds and won Georgia's Battle for the Belt.

According to Coach Michael Smith-Foot, the program is always looking for new wrestlers.

"We accept athletes as young as five, as well as boys and girls," he said. "We really need a large class of 5th and 6th graders for next year. We also would like to double our girls program next year. You can contact me through school



e-mail at: msmith-foot@uc-schools.org.

"We will be wrestling and training all over the east coast next year, from Virginia Beach,

Gatlinburg, Myrtle Beach, Birmingham and Orlando. We also take wrestlers to camps in Ohio several times a year to work with the Jordan Family."



Wrestling tournament photos courtesy of coach Michael Smith-Foot

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fourth, but the Tigers put them away with a 7-spot in the home half of the inning.

Mullinack, who also started on the mound, capped off Union's four-run second with the club's first bomb of the year - a 3-run shot to left with one down. Tyler Loyd sparked the scoring with a one-run double, followed by base hits from Brett Ballew and Caleb Towe, setting the table for Mullinack.

Dawson answered with a 3-run blast by pitcher Nick Mullinax, igniting an 8-run second and putting the Tigers out front to stay.

Hughes walked and Connor Shields singled to begin the Panthers' third, but they could only muster one run when Hughes came around on a Tyler Loyd ground out. Hughes spelled Mullinack to start the bottom of the third and nearly escaped without damage until one of three Union County errors allowed the Tigers to push their lead to 9-5.

The flood gates eventually opened in the fourth with seven Dawson County runs coming on seven walks, a double and a dropped third strike.

Tyler Loyd replaced Hughes to start the fourth and went 1/3 of an inning before

sophomore Will Duncan faced one batter and induced a 6-3-2 double play.

Eight different Panthers recorded one hit apiece as Union out-hit Dawson County 8-5. Mullinack did the most damage with his one swing, going 1 for 2 with a 3-run blast and a walk.

Swartz finished 1 for 1 with a run and two walks. Chitwood was 1 for 2; Shields went 1 for 3; sophomore catcher Jace Vinez singled in his first; Hughes walked twice, scored and stole a base.

Tyler Loyd doubled, scored and drove in a run. Ballew scored during a 1-for-3 evening, and Towe scored a run while going 1 for 3 with an RBI single.

Mullinack got the nod and lasted 1 1/3 innings, giving up seven earned on four hits and three walks. Hughes went 1 2/3, walking four and fanning two while surrendering two unearned runs.

Tyler Loyd walked seven and allowed five earned in 1/3 of an inning. Duncan threw five pitches to one batter in the sixth, recording an inning-ending double play.

**Panthers 0, Dawson County 10 (Five innings)**-The Panthers were shutout at home for the first time since

April 2017 (Fannin County), falling victim to a five-inning one-hitter by Dawson's Carter Turckett.

Union's lone hit was an infield single by junior Logan Anderson in the second inning. Coming on the heels of a Tyler Loyd walk, Anderson reached to put two aboard with no outs - the Panthers best scoring opportunity of the evening.

The Tigers jumped on starter Tyler Loyd for three runs in the first before adding two more in the third, bringing Dyer on in relief with two down.

Leading 6-0 after four, Dawson County put Union away with four runs in the fifth.

Dyer pitched 2 1/3 innings, striking out two and allowing three hits, five walks and two earned runs. Tyler Loyd went 2 2/3 innings with eight walks, three hits, four earned and two Ks.

Swartz and Tyler Loyd each drew a walk at the plate. Dyer was hit by a pitch and stole a base. Mullinack had a walk and a steal.

Tuesday's first pitch at Franklin County is slated for 5:55 p.m. Next Monday's contest at Gilmer will get underway at 5:30 p.m.