

Sports

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Panthers climb atop Class AA rankings after 7-0 win at Banks

Crawford returns with four goals in Lady Panthers' 9-0 victory at Banks

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Homer - There's a new No. 1 boys' team in Class AA: The Union County Panthers.

The Panthers took over the top spot following then-No. 1 Toombs County's loss to Vidalia. The top-ranked Panthers are followed by No. 2 Model and No. 3 Walker School with Toombs and Tattall County rounding out the top five.

Union County soccer picked up two blowout wins at Banks County on Friday, March 15, setting up two all-important Region 8-AA showdowns Tuesday night vs. East Jackson.

Tuesday's matchup features a must-win girls' contest that will determine the final playoff spot from Region 8-AA, while the boys' game is a meeting of the only unbeaten teams in region play. Additionally, the Tuesday, March 19 matchup vs. East Jackson is Union County's Senior Night.

No. 2 Panthers 7, Banks County 0 - Union County scored seven goals over the first 40 minutes, resulting in a 20-minute second half on Friday night in Homer.

Antonio Solorio opened the scoring in the second minute off a feed from Zack Depalma. In the ninth, Solorio found Benton Gregory for a 2-0 edge, and then Zuriel Mancillas hit Solorio in the 11th.

Mancillas' second assist came in the 18th, this time finding Evan Bohms. Kooper Ashcraft made it 5-0 in the 27th courtesy of a Wes Seiler helper.



Senior Zoe Crawford scores the first of her four goals Friday at Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Depalma got in on the scoring in the 30th off a feed from Joel Mendoza. The final score came on Gregory's header via Ashcraft during the 40th.

Lady Panthers 9, Banks County 0 - After a knee injury looked like it would cost Zoe Crawford her senior year, she returned to the pitch and collected four goals in Union County's rout at Banks County.

Crawford put the Lady Panthers on the board in the 12th off an Ariel McCarter as-

ist. McCarter earned a penalty kick in the 14th that was later converted by Kiella Strand; McCarter got on the board in the 15th via a Taylor Reese assist.

Crawford turned McCarter's feed into a 4-0 Union lead in the 23rd; McCarter added a PK in the 27th. Strand sent the Lady Panthers into the break ahead 6-0 when she found Reese in the 40th minute.

Lily Brookshire made it 7-0 in the 48th courtesy of Ma-

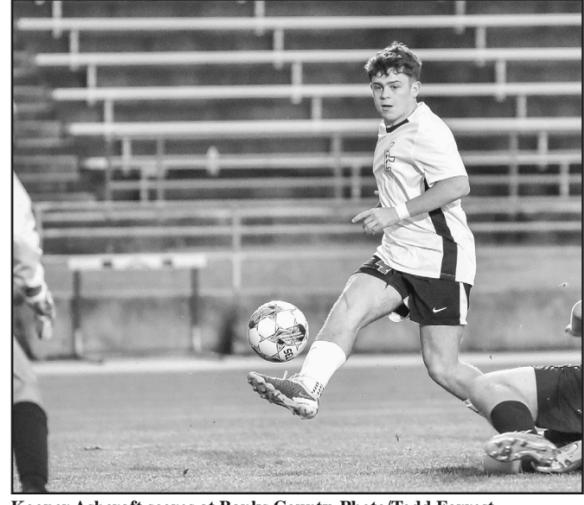
rina Stepps. Crawford scored the last two goals, coming on assists by Khloe Ashcraft and Brookshire.

Up next - Union County hosts East Jackson Tuesday for Senior Night, but it won't be an easy task for either squad after the Eagles pulled off a sweep of Providence Christian on Friday night. The East Jackson men defeated Providence 4-1, and the Lady Eagles prevailed 5-1.

Union visits Fellowship Christian on Friday.



Seth Rutan (5) returned from injury at Banks. Photo/Todd Forrest



Kooper Ashcraft scores at Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Panthers open region play by taking 2 of 3 from Fellowship Christian

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Union County took two of three from the defending region champs, Fellowship Christian, behind a pair of stellar pitching performances by sophomores Eli Gwynn and Gunnar Akins.

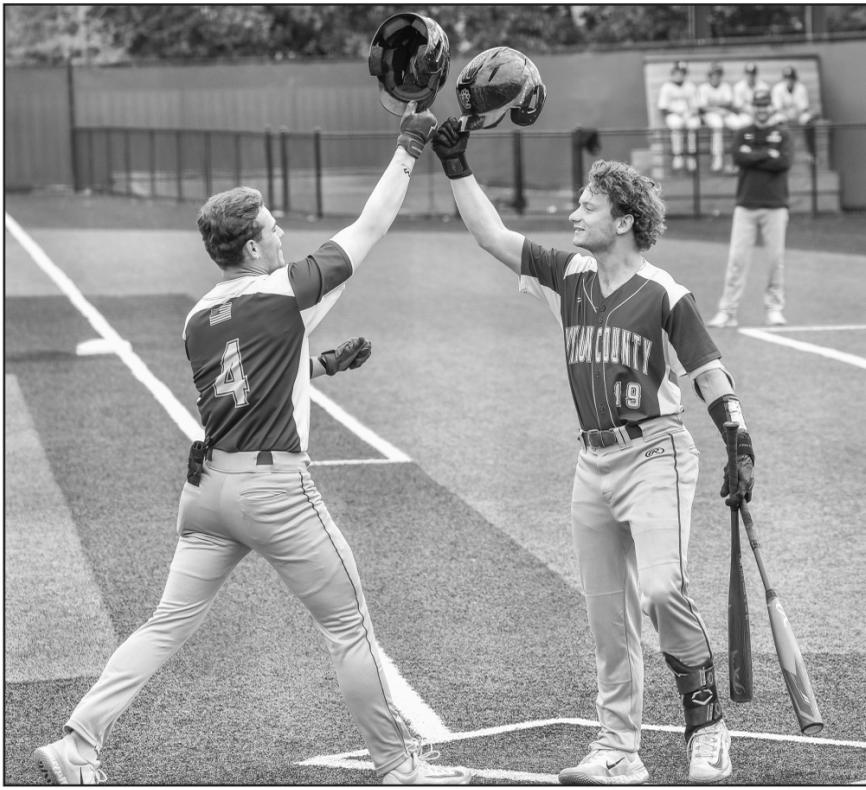
Gwynn came within one strike of notching the program's first complete-game shutout in five years in a 5-3 win over Fellowship on Tuesday, March 12 in Blairsville. On Saturday, Akins went 6 1/3 during a 3-0 victory at Fellowship. The Paladins avoided the sweep with a 9-3 win during the second game of Saturday's doubleheader in Roswell.

Panthers 5, Fellowship 3 (Gm 1) - Union County scored three in the second and two in the third to grab a 5-0 lead on Tuesday evening at UCHS.

Gwynn didn't allow an earned run over 6 2/3, allowing three hits and striking out six. Two errors and a double in the seventh kept the sophomore from finishing his outing after 106 pitches. Hayden Hughes recorded the last out after giving up a two-run double that brought the tying run to the plate.

Hughes and Maddox Patton each went 2 for 3 at the plate with an RBI and a run. Travis Tracy finished 1 for 3 with 2 RBIs and a walk; Gwynn went 1 for 4; Will Doyle added two runs.

Union County did all of its damage with two outs during the three-run second, beginning with a Doyle hit-by-pitch and a Patton single. Hughes reached on an error



Junior Travis Tracy (L) and sophomore Lane Haney (R) celebrate Tracy's solo HR during the third inning of Saturday's 3-0 victory at Fellowship Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest

to load the bases and Moses Stevens was plunked on a 2-2 pitch to plate the first run.

The Panthers made it 3-0 when Tracy singled to left center, scoring Hughes and Patton.

Walks to Bo Brown and Doyle sparked the two-run third, allowing Patton to plate courtesy-runner Eli Sosensky with a base hit left. Hughes bumped the lead to 5-0 on a sacrifice fly.

Panthers 3, Fellowship 0 - Akins tossed 6 1/3 scoreless innings, and Tracy went deep during Saturday's victory.

Akins fanned five hit-

ters and allowed 4 hits during his start. Gwynn nailed down the save by getting out of a two-on, one-out jam in the seventh. The final out came via the rare 9-8-9 putout when Tracy bobbled the fly ball in right-center, which bounced off the head of the centerfielder Patton and back to Tracy for a barehanded grab.

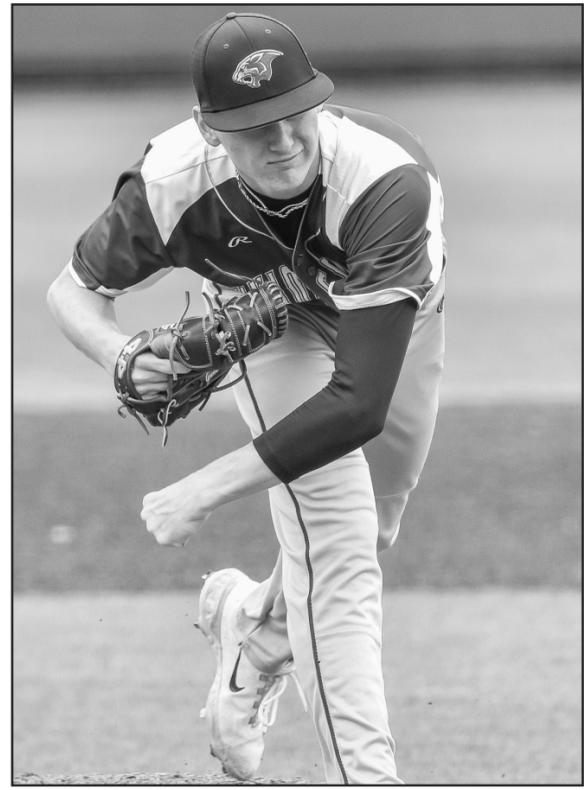
Tracy finished 1 for 2 with 2 RBIs, a homer and a walk. Kaden Combs went 2 for 3; Stevens ended his day 2 for 4 with a run. Hughes walked twice and scored; Lane Haney walked and drove in one during

a 1-for-2 afternoon; freshman Junior Davis went 1 for 3.

Union scored in the first when Hughes walked to start the game and Tracy brought him home via a sac fly. Tracy's solo shot in the third made it 2-0, and then Haney singled home Stevens in the fifth.

Panthers 3, Fellowship 9 - Union County couldn't protect a 3-0 lead in the series finale, surrendering four in the second, three in the third and two in the fourth.

Hughes got the starting nod and lasted 1 2/3, running into trouble during the bottom



Sophomore Gunnar Akins deals during Union's 3-0 win at Fellowship Christian on Saturday. Photo/Todd Forrest

of the second. The photo allowed six hits, four runs (two earned) and struck out two.

Davis gave up three hits and three unearned runs over 1 1/3. Brown went 3 innings, allowing three hits and two unearned runs.

The Panthers were limited to three hits in the loss while committing five errors.

Haney accounted for two of Union's hits, going 2 for 4 with a double and 2 RBIs. Sosensky finished 1 for 3. Combs, Hughes and Tracy scored the three Panther runs.

Union got two in the first

off Haney's double, then added another in the second courtesy of Combs' sac fly.

Six hits and a Union error contributed to Fellowship's four-run bottom half. Two errors and two doubles helped the Paladins extend their lead to 7-3 in the third.

Up next: Union County visits Providence Christian on Tuesday at 6 p.m. and Hayesville, NC on Wednesday at 4:30 p.m.

The region series with Providence wraps up Friday night in Blairsville with a 5 p.m. doubleheader.

UCHS hosts first track-and-field event in more than 30 years

Panthers break records at Habersham Central's Battle of the Blue Ridge

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Union County track and field hosted its first meet since the early 1990s on Tuesday, March 12 at the new UCHS facility. Later in the week, both Union squads delivered impressive performances at Habersham Central's Battle of the Blue Ridge on March 15.

At Habersham, the Union County ladies placed first with 15 top-three finishes. The men placed third in the team standings with 11 top threes, including a Habersham track record in the boys' 4x100 relay that was also a UCHS school record.

The team of Cade Dockrey, Jonah Kluth, JT Neal and Tyler Parker crossed the finish line at 43.97 seconds - the fastest time ever recorded at Habersham Central.

Taylor Whitehead and Neal took first and second, respectively, in the 100M and 200M races with Whitehead clocking in at 11.35 in the 100 and 22.31 in the 200. Neal finished at 11.37 in the 100M race and 22.82 in the 200.

Nolan Thompson took home gold in the 300M hurdles with a time of 44.10. Jacob Turner was second at 45.29 and Tyler Grasty placed third at 46.21. The boys' 4x200 relay placed second and the 4x400 came in third.

On the girls' side, Ava Loyd was first in the 100M race (13.27) and second in the 200 (27.92).

Reagan Covington placed second in the 400M, setting a school record at 1:03.27; Ellie Adams finished second at 800M, clocking in at 2:39.84. Lola Hunter was second in the



Union County High School Athletic Director Mandy Hunter during last Tuesday's dedication ceremony for the new UCHS track-and-field facility. Photo/Todd Forrest

1600M race at 5:30.74. She placed third in the 800M race at 2:42.26.

Katie Byers came in second in the 100M hurdles (18.78) and the 300M hurdles (53.27). Katie Payne was third in the 300 hurdles at 56.27.

The girls' 4x800 relay team collected gold with a time of 11:37.79. The 4x400 team placed second at 4:39.38. The 4x100 team was third, finishing in 53.93.

Leslie Rash came in second in the discus at 88 feet, 1 inch. Abby Barrett was third in the triple jump at 29-8.25.

During the Union County meet on March 12, Union County cleaned up with 51 placers among both teams.

Loyd was first in the 100M (13.19) and 200M (28.13); Hunter placed first in the 1600M (5:42.03) and 3200M (12:01.91). Byers took both hurdles events, clocking in at 18.88 in the 100 and 54.98 in the 300.

The girls' 4x100, 4x400 and 4x800 relay teams all took home first with respective times of 53.44, 4:52.25 and 11:53.71.

Giovanna Salazar won

the long jump at 14-5; Nomi Nelson was first in the triple jump at 30-3.

In the boys' action, Whitehead placed first in the 200M (22.20); Zander Rotko was first in the 400M (53.53); Benton Gregory came in first at 800M (2:06.78).

Thompson was first in the 300 hurdles at 43.81; the 4x100, 4x200 and 4x800 relay times all finished first with times of 45.09, 1:35.44 and 10:00. Dockrey was first in the high jump at 5-4; Braden Plott's 20-1 was good enough for gold in the long jump; Grasty's 40-



Senior Katie Byers won both relay events on Tuesday, March 12 at Union County's Mountaintop Invitational. Photo/Todd Forrest

8.5 placed first in the triple jump. Easton Shumaker came in first in the discus at 111-2; Jaxon Totherow was first in the shot put at 41-5.

Second-place girls finishers on Tuesday included Covington (200M, 400M and high jump), Adams (800M), Natalie Payne (1600M and 3200M), Sara Patterson (300 hurdles), 4x200, Byers (long jump), Noel Hyatt (high jump) and Barrett (triple jump).

Boys' runner-up finishes went to Neal (200M), Thompson (110 hurdles), Nickolai Gromowa (high jump) and

Daniel McPhee (triple jump). Bronze medalists included Gromowa (200M), Ty Hogsted (800M), Grasty (300 hurdles), Carter Deal (long jump) and Jack Wilson (shot put).

Girls' third-place performances went to Izzy Anthros (100M and triple jump), Hannah Kazmierzak (200M), Averie Tanner (800M), Jayden Rogers (100 hurdles), Katie Payne (300 hurdles), Rash (discus).

Union County visits Rabun County on Friday, March 22 for the Bo James invitational.



Taylor Whitehead and Cade Dockrey compete in the 200M race on Tuesday at UCHS. Photo/Todd Forrest



Noel Hyatt placed second in the high jump event at the UCHS meet. Photo/Todd Forrest

Golf: Both Union County teams open with a pair of wins over Fannin



Top: Senior Hope Patton at Old Toccoa Farm. Bottom: Freshman Hayden Price at Old Toccoa Farm. On Thursday, March 14, Union County took both matches from Fannin County at Old Toccoa Farm in Mineral Bluff. Earlier in the week, Union County swept Fannin at Old Union. The boys won 173-216, led by Huston West's 39 and Price's 42. Turner West and Will Henson each fired a 46 in the win. The girls defeated Fannin County 82-87 before the match was ended after 7 holes. Sofia Charboneau had a 40, Lara Turner shot 42 and Patton finished with a 44. Photos/Todd Forrest

The Old Union Women's Golf Association 2024 Season



The Old Union Women's Golf Association members

Attention area lady golfers! The Old Union Women's Golf Association will kick off their 2024 season on May 6. This special day will include Mimosas and light breakfast items. Further plans for opening day will be forthcoming. Anyone interested in joining this great group of ladies is asked to contact Karen Musoline at 352-638-3649 or Cynthia Panter at 706-633-7587.

Cost: Membership fee is still only \$35 which includes the Hole-In-One Fund and the Sunshine Fund. Golf on Mondays for OUWGA members will be \$25. Participation in the weekly games plus chip-ins and birdies, continues to be \$4.

Tournaments: There will be four tournaments during the season: Eclectic (2-week), Flag Day, Member/Member (2-week), League Championship (2-week). The tournament open to the public will be the Sadie Hawkins Tournament. Emails with further details will be sent out at a later date.

Beat The Pro: Coach Matt and Old Union Golf Course will continue to participate in the Beat The Pro once a month. All players whose NET score beats Coach Matt's score will receive a sleeve of golf balls from the pro shop.

Closest To The Pin: Old Union Golf Course will continue to offer a free round of golf or a \$25.00 gift card for closest to the pin each week.

One option for play this year that will begin May 1

is to play a Par 3 round. If a player previously played only 9 holes, this would be a great option for that player. Those playing a Par 3 round will be in the regular pairings and may be in the weekly game. Those players will simply be placed in a "Par 3" flight with others playing that type of round. This will allow those players who prefer a slightly shorter round to interact with all of OUWGA members. All golfers will finish at the same time which will make attending the 'after golf' luncheons easier for all the ladies. Each week, there will be a Par 3 sign up option on the website which will differentiate the flights.

Girls' Golf Trip: This year the annual golf trip will either be Maggie Valley or Gatlinburg depending on the number of participants. A blast email outlining the trip will be sent to all members in plenty of time to make plans.

Weekly Lunches and Newspaper Articles: Cynthia Moorehead has agreed to continue to arrange our lunches after golf, and she will continue to write her weekly informative articles to the newspaper.

Lessons: Jane Childers will continue to chair and coordinate golf lessons. OUWGA is very excited to announce that Mary Rehling Holmes returns to Old Union Golf Course in 2024 to offer private golf lessons on Wednesdays, starting in April through October. Each lesson is 45 minutes and costs

\$35. If you are interested in a lesson or need more information, email jane.childers77@gmail.com or text at 706-633-7868. Mary Holmes played golf at Tuscaloosa High School and then on the University of Alabama team from 1975-1979. She coached the women's golf team at LSU from 1979-1982. Mary started her private teaching in 1979 and has also participated in many golf camps. She served as a Regional Consultant for the National Golf Foundation. Mary is an excellent teacher and makes golf fun - even practice! Lessons may also be arranged with Matt Cook through the Old Union Pro Shop at 706-745-4653.

Thursday Non-Play Days: Something new! Numerous members have inquired about having a second standing tee time at Old Union each week. Cameron has offered the league tee times on Thursday starting at 9 AM. The cost for golf will be \$30. Members will have to sign-up on the website, and the league will do the pairings and cart signs. At this time there will be no game or money collected...just a fun day on the course!

End of Year Banquet: Our end of the year banquet is scheduled for Oct. 10, 2024, and details will be forthcoming toward the end of the season.

Ladies golfers with all levels of skill are invited to join this fun-loving golf league for interaction and camaraderie on and off the course. NMar22/JCA