

# Sports

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## Soccer: Union sweeps Banks, improves postseason position on Senior Night

### Panther men take control of Region 8-AA with 8-0 victory over Riverside Military

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Union County soccer capped a perfect week with a pair of Senior Night shutouts over Banks County on Friday, moving both squads one step closer to hosting the first round of their respective Class AA State Tournaments next month.

The ninth-ranked Union County men (6-1, 5-0) are on the brink of securing home field for at least the first two rounds thanks to an 8-0 dismantling of second-place Riverside Military Academy on Wednesday, March 17.

Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers are a Friday night win over Elbert County away from securing a top-two finish in Region 8-AA. But they'll have to finish the year without the services of leading scorer Melia Whitener, who sustained a severe knee injury at Rabun County on Tuesday, March 9. Originally diagnosed as minor by the Rabun training staff, head coach Tim Hunter and the Lady Panthers learned later in the week their junior striker had suffered a season-ending injury.

**Lady Panthers 4, Banks County 0** - After Wednesday's visit to Sonorville was washed out, Union County's only action of the week was Friday's Senior Night matchup vs. Banks.

Already owning a 3-0 victory in Homer on March 2, the shorthanded Lady Panthers (4-2, 3-1) were well aware that the next two region matches (Banks County and Elbert County this week) were must-win situations to preserve their second-place position entering the 8-AA finale vs. first-place Rabun County on March 30.

And despite a smothering defensive performance on Friday, the Union County offense was unable to break through vs. Banks County (3-6, 1-3) until the midway point of the second half.

The first goal went to freshman Lara Turner in the 58th minute after fellow 9th-grader Reagan Covington's shot ricocheted hard off the post and directly to Turner, who blasted the rebound into the back of the net from just outside the penalty box.

A little over four minutes later, Union County went up 2-0 when freshman Zoe Crawford found the net from 25 yards out thanks to a feed from sophomore Kaylee Helton.

Helton added a goal in the 66th minute when junior Lorelei Skinner's pass split two Leopards,



Senior Nolan Bachman records a hat trick during a rainy Senior Night match at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Photo/Todd Forrest

finding the Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Photo/Todd Forrest

Senior Nolan Bachman picked up his first career hat trick with the first two goals coming in a 57-second stretch in the first half, spotting Union County leads of 4-0 and 5-0. His third goal came in the early stages of the second half when he provided the Panthers a 6-0 cushion during the 43rd minute.

Fellow 12th-grader Clayton Lester took home the brace, converting a header off a corner kick in the 26th minute before giving his team a 7-0 lead with another goal in the 60th.

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Sophomore Kaylee Helton had one goal and two assists during Union County's 4-0 win over Banks County. Photo/Todd Forrest

kicked off the Panthers' scoring in the 4th minute, then the Leopards surrendered an own goal off a Union corner kick in the 14th.

Notching assists for the Panthers were senior Zach Jackson (3), junior Kyler Robbins (2) and senior Sammy Spivak.

**Panthers 8, Riverside Military Academy 0** - In a match originally scheduled for Tuesday, March 16 in Gainesville, the contest was postponed until Wednesday and moved to Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. The return fixture will be on April 1 in Gainesville.

Similar to the previous week's 6-0 victory at Rabun County, the Panthers got off to a sluggish start during the first 16

minutes before a Robbins free-kick goal put Union out front to stay.

This time, a Robbins free-kick goal in the 17th minute -- off a pass from junior M.J. Delatte -- ignited a four-goal half after the Panthers were unable to convert on a pair of early corner kicks. Riverside also had a pair of scoring opportunities, starting in minute 5 with an interception off a Helton goal kick that resulted in the ensuing shot rolling wide of the post. Later, an Eagles' free-kick sailed high from just outside the box during the 12th minute.

After Robbins gave Union the lead, a Jackson header off a corner kick from freshman Zuriel Mancillas was too strong. Two

UChS Senior Night Photos by Todd Forrest

more scoring opportunities came and went until Patrick converted a corner-kick header from Jackson in the 26th minute.

Robbins collected the brace with a 20-yard strike off a feed from Mancillas. Lester spotted Union a 4-0 advantage in the 36th minute with a header off an assist from Spivak.

Freshman Benton Gregory drew a foul in the 49th, allowing Helton to score his first high school goal on a penalty kick. Within minutes of Helton's conversion, the steady drizzle turned into a heavy downpour that refused to ease for the remainder of the match. But the weather didn't deter the Panthers, who began pouring it on as well.

Gregory made it 6-0 with an unassisted goal in the 51st minute. Jackson scored off a feed from Mancillas in the 54th, and Lester capped off the scoring with a goal in the 57th, courtesy of a Patrick assist.

**Up next:** Union County's Tuesday visit to Gilmer has been postponed until after Spring Break.

Region play continues Friday when Union hosts Elbert County at 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. Currently, the Elbert guys are tied for second with Riverside following the Blue Devils' 7-3 victory over Rabun County on Friday.

Meanwhile, both Union County teams can clinch home field (a top-two seed) in the first round of state with wins over Elbert. The Union guys could lock up the No. 1 seed as early as Friday - should Elbert County defeat Riverside on Tuesday and the Panthers knock off Elbert on Friday.

The Lady Panthers are still in contention for the No. 1 seed in Region 8-AA, but it will certainly be an uphill climb. Union's girls would first need to take care of Elbert before scoring a victory over first-place Rabun County (who beat Union 6-3 on March 9) by at least four goals on March 30.



Senior Aaron Helton with family



Senior Malachi Patrick with family



Senior Noah Spillane with family



Senior Cort Olver with family



Senior Nolan Bachman with family



Senior Sammy Spivak with family



Senior Zachary Jackson with family



Senior Anika Shah with family