

Baseball: Panthers win fourth straight with sweep at Elbert

Union improves to 4-4 in Region 8-AA, now in sole possession of fourth place

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

ELBERTON - Union County (5-8, 4-4) extended its winning streak to four games at Elbert County with a doubleheader sweep of the defending Region Champions on Friday, March 22.

With the sweep, the Panthers move into fourth place in Region 8-AA with a one-game lead over fifth place Rabun County. Entering Friday night's twin bill, Elbert County was tied for first in region play with a 6-0 record. Now the Blue Devils drop into a tie for second with Social Circle, while Banks County sits atop of 8-AA at 8-0.

After dropping 8-of-9 to open the season -- including a six-game skid out of the gate -- Union County has won five of seven overall and four-straight in region play to move to within striking distance of second place in 8-AA.

This Friday, the Panthers will host last-place Putnam County -- winless in Region 8-AA -- as Union County looks to move above .500 inside of the region for the first time this year.

Elsewhere, Social Circle visits first-place Banks County on Friday in a doubleheader that could potentially tighten things up a little bit more in Region 8-AA.

Panthers 10, Elbert County 7 - Union County held off the Blue Devils after jumping out to huge early leads of 7-1 and 10-2. Junior Cayden Rich drove in four runs during a 2-for-3 day that included a 2-run homer in the second that opened up a 7-1 advantage. Rich also picked up a save as he worked a scoreless seventh - allowing one hit, one walk and striking out one.

Sophomore Issak Mullinax picked up the win in six innings of work, yielding 6 hits and 7 runs but only two were earned as the Panthers booted



Left: Cayden Rich homered and recorded the save in Union's 10-7 game one victory at Elbert County. Right: Hunter Kelley drove in three runs and scored twice during Friday's Region 8-AA doubleheader. Photos/Todd Forrest



the ball around to the tune of 5 fielding errors. He also fanned two, walked two and plunked a pair during a 99-pitch outing. At the dish, Mullinax scored twice while finishing 2-for-5 with a double.

Sophomore Zeke Swartz scored three times with an RBI, a stolen base, a pair of singles and a hit by pitch. Alec Scott also scored three times while drawing a pair of walks during a 2-for-3 game. Hunter Kelley knocked in three and was plunked twice during a 1-for-2 performance. Coleson Daniel drove in two runs while going 2-for-4 at the plate. His 2-run single in the first inning put the Panthers ahead for good when he brought in Swartz and senior Alec Scott for a 2-0 lead.

An error led to a Blue Devil run in the bottom of the first but Union County exploded for five in the second -- all coming with two down -- and eventually capped off by Rich's

2-run blast. A two-out double by Mullinax, a Scott single and a Swartz walk loaded the bags for Kelley, who cleared the bases with a double to center. Rich followed by sending the very first pitch out of the yard for a 7-1 advantage.

Elbert loaded the bases with two outs in its half of the inning but Mullinax escaped on a fly out to right fielder Ean Harkins.

Mullinax drew a one-out walk in the third and later scored on base hit by Swartz. After Kelley was hit by a pitch, Rich brought home two more with a single up the middle to open up a 10-1 margin.

A third-inning solo homer pulled the Blue Devils within eight at 10-2 but the home didn't start making any real noise until they put up a 5-spot in the fourth to pull within three at 10-7.

After getting the leadoff man in the fourth, Mullinax was

headed for another easy inning until a hit batter, a misplayed bunt and consecutive errors made it a 10-4 game. After a two-out single cut the Union County lead in-half, Elbert County used another dinger to trim the deficit to 10-7.

Things would remain relatively quiet until the sixth when the Blue Devils put the tying run aboard following two errors and a walk but Mullinax induced an inning-ending grounder to the shortstop Scott, preserving the three-run lead.

A double-play kept Union off the board in the seventh after Jonathan Everett drew a leadoff walk. In the bottom half of the inning, Rich recorded two quick outs on a strikeout and a ground-out to second but Elbert refused to go away quietly. A single and a walk brought the tying run to the plate but Rich put a lid on game one with a pop-up to the second baseman Mullinax.

Panthers 4, Elbert

County 0 - Swartz continues to roll right along, winning his second straight as the Union County southpaw recorded the game two shutout to put the finishing touches on a Panther sweep.

His contributions weren't limited to the hill as Swartz went 2-for-4 with 2 RBIs at the dish. Meanwhile, Rich continued to rake during the nightcap - going 2-for-4 with a double in the seventh.

Union County scored three in the first, then tacked on another in the second for a 4-0 advantage. As for the Blue Devils, they were unable to solve the Panther sophomore, finishing with five singles -- two were infield singles - and no extra base hits. Swartz yielded only one multi-hit inning while fanning nine and allowing one seventh-inning walk -- coming on his 100th pitch.

With the shutout, he lowers his already-microscopic

ERA to 0.80 and his WHIP to a near-inconceivable 0.74. In 35 innings this season, Swartz has tallied 50 strikeouts to only five walks and two hit batters.

Swartz helped himself in the top of the first, driving in Mullinax for an early 1-0 lead. Courtesy runner JJ Littles would score in place of Swartz when Kelley singled and Rich took advantage of a Blue Devil error. Kelley later scored on a groundout by Austin Garrison to spot Swartz a 3-run cushion.

Swartz continued to aid his own cause in the second when Scott walked and advanced to second on a passed ball, allowing the Union County pitcher to plate Scott with a base knock to center.

Swartz pitched out of trouble in the bottom of the second when a two-out single put two aboard. Elbert also reached on two-out hits in the third and fourth, followed by a one-out error in the fifth but Swartz seemed to find another gear from the stretch. With runners on, Elbert was just 1-for-11 with all 9 of his punch outs coming with a Blue Devil on the base paths.

Following a 1-2-3 sixth, Elbert sparked a mini-rally with a one-out error and a walk but Swartz fanned the final two batters of the contest.

Despite some clutch hitting early on, Union County left 11 runners on base, including two in the top of the seventh following a leadoff double by Rich.

A Scott double and an error off the bat of Swartz were wasted in the sixth; a Rich single and a Garrison walk went for naught in the fifth and a Youngblood base hit and another Garrison walk resulted in two more runners stranded during the third.

Up next - Union County visited West Hall on Monday but will host Rabun Gap at 5 p.m. Wednesday. Region play resumes at 5 p.m. Friday when the Panthers play host to Putnam County in a Region 8-AA doubleheader.

Meeks Park hosts the 3rd Annual Duncan Dash 5K For the March of Dimes

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

The Duncan Dash 5K brought more than 135 runners to Meeks Park on the morning of Saturday, March 23. The results are as follows:

Male Overall winner: Thomas Mellendorf; Female Overall winner: Brianne Merry.

Male Masters winner: Jeff Kenney; Female Overall winner: Charla Green.

Age Group Winners: Male 10U: 1. Sawyer Fox, 2. Creighton Davis, 3. Gray Gwynn.

Male 11-15: 1. Benton Gregory, 2. Liam Smith, 3. Payson Davis.

Female 15-19: 1. Jessie Holbrook, 2. Anastasia Grubbs.

Male 20-24: 1. Nathan South, 2. Lake Arnick, 3. Andrew Brown. Female 20-24: 1. Meagan Barnett, 2. Madison Barnett, 3. Mallory Barnett.

Female 25-29: 1. Heather Davenport.

Male 30-34: 1. Kyle Debell, 2. Dustin Thompson. Female 30-34: 1. Anna Hopple, 2. Rebecca Rush, 3. Jessica Turner.

Male 35-39: 1. Aaron Stanley. Female 35-39: 1. Jill McWatters, 2. Nataley Goins, 3. Lucretia Collins.

Male 40-44: 1. David Eckles. Female 40-44: 1. Lana Dunn, 2. Autumn Wahl, 3. Regina Hedden.



The Duncan Dash 5K overall winner with a time of 19:43: Thomas Mellendorf. Photos by Todd Forrest

Male 45-49: 1. Jeff Kenney. Female 45-49: 1. Jennifer Smith, 2. Brenda Rosser, 3. Tonia Forrister. Male 50-54: 1. Jeff Gwynn, 2. Von Hobbs, 3. Jeff Weldon. Female 50-54: 1. Amanda Dockery, 2. Anita English, 3. Jill Nielsen. Male 55-59: 1. Mike Masiello, 2. Joey Hyatt, 3. Brian Green. Female 55-59:

1. Kendel Prescott, 2. Nancy Vandiver, 3. Debbie Carey.

Male 60-64: 1. Bob Buckner, 2. Jim Prentice.

Male 65-69: 1. Robert Frankis, 2. Walt Prescott. Female 65-69: 1. Anne Lewis, 2. Carolyn Cavins.

Male 70-plus: 1. Ernest Smallman. Female 70-plus: 1. BJ Foster, 2. Linda Boyett.



Duncan Dash Female overall race winner: Brianne Merry

Butternut Creek Ladies Golf begins 2019 Season

Every spring since 1985, a group of ladies have dusted off their golf clubs and have begun another fun season of the Butternut Creek Ladies Golf League. The BCLGA began as a small group of local ladies who loved golf and created the league to foster interest, enjoyment, and competition in the sport. This group is currently an organized league and play will begin at Butternut Creek Golf Course on Thursday, April 4, at 10 AM.

League play continues each Thursday through the first week of October. Local golfers continue to play throughout the fall and winter months, weather permitting, in a more informal format.

On league days, the ladies compete in a variety of formats and games, including stroke play,

scramble, best ball, etc. Each golfer must maintain a handicap, and golfers of all skill levels are invited to participate.

The BCLGA is involved in many activities throughout the season. Each year the league sponsors several tournaments, some of which are competitive and others are fund raisers for charities. Nine and Dine tournaments are scheduled to include men and women in fun, social events.

All ladies who are interested in golf are encouraged and invited to join the BCLGA. League membership is \$25. Butternut Creek is a beautiful mountain course and we look forward to an enjoyable season. Please join us at Butternut on April 4. For more information, you may contact Carol Crossley at carol.s.crossley@gmail.com.