

West Hall, RGN and Putnam are the latest victims of Panther winning streak

Eight straight wins has Union at 9-8 overall and two games out of first in 8-AA

By Todd Forrest
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Union County ran its winning streak to eight games last week following victories over West Hall, Rabun Gap-Nacoochee and a Friday night sweep of Putnam County in a Region 8-AA doubleheader.

Combined with Social Circle's sweep of first-place Banks County, the Panthers (9-8, 6-4) move to within two games of the region's top spot as Elbert County, Banks and Social Circle all sit atop Region 8-AA with two losses each.

Entering the week, Union County was all alone in fourth place, one game up on fifth place Rabun County. Both the Panthers and Wildcats took care of business in their respective doubleheaders with Rabun taking two from Oglethorpe County and Union downing Putnam, 10-0 in game one and 7-1 in game two, to preserve its one-game cushion over fifth.

The Panthers' eighth-straight victory is the longest winning streak in five years, matching the program's lengthiest winning streak of the decade. Union County last tallied eight straight between March 20 and April 4, 2014. According to UCHS Principal and former baseball coach CT Hussion, if the baseball program ever recorded nine-straight victories, it's been more than 20 years since it last happened.

"I think the six-run rally in the seventh against Monticello (March 15) was what sparked (the winning streak) and got us over the hump," Union County Head Baseball Coach Zach Odom said. "We had seven hits in that inning and it woke us up and proved to us what we're capable of."

The Panthers toughest test of the week, however, came on Wednesday, March 27 when they hosted the Eagles of Rabun Gap-Nacoochee. Trailing 5-3 entering the seventh, Union County rallied for three runs with the third scoring when senior Jonathan Everett was hit by a 2-2 pitch with two down and the bases loaded.

Panthers 6, Rabun Gap 5 - Union County was playing catch-up most of the night until a walk-off hit-by-pitch provided the Panthers with their first and only lead of the game in the bottom of the seventh inning.

Four straight walks in the fifth allowed the Eagles to open up a 4-0 advantage before Union finally got on



L-R: The No. 1 and 2 hitters in the Union lineup, Issak Mullinak (L) and Alec Scott (R) combined to finish 9-for-15 with 8 RBIs and 5 runs during the Putnam County doubleheader on Friday night. Mullinak also threw six



shutout innings in the game one victory. Photos/Todd Forrest

the board in the bottom half of the inning. A two-run, two-out single by sophomore Zeke Swartz brought home Issak Mullinak and Alec Scott, who both reached on an error earlier in the inning.

Sophomore JJ Littles made his varsity pitching debut and kept the Eagles off the board in the sixth despite giving up a two-out double. Trailing 4-2, the Panthers inched closer in their half of the sixth when senior Hunter Kelley was hit by a pitch and later scored on a Littles sacrifice fly.

A two-out throwing error in the seventh allowed Rabun Gap to tack on an insurance run but Littles brought the inning to a close when he caught the Eagle hitter looking at a 3-2 strike.

Needing two runs to tie and three to win, the Panthers immediately went to work in the bottom of the seventh, putting runners at second and third on back-to-back singles by Mullinak and Scott to open the inning.

Swartz reached on a grounder to load the bases when Mullinak returned to safely third after Rabun Gap tried throwing him out at the plate. Mullinak was eventually cut down at the plate for the first out when junior Cayden Rich bounced back to the mound. With the bags still full, Kelley scored Scott with an opposite-field single to left, pulling Union within a run at 5-4. Junior catcher Alec Youngblood brought home the tying run when he drew a five-pitch walk.

Later in the inning, with two down and the bases still full, Everett was dinged by a 2-2 fastball to score Rich and give Union County its sixth consecutive win.

Swartz finished 2-for-4 with a run and 2 RBIs; Kelley was 2-for-2 with a double, a walk and an RBI.

Senior left-hander Ean Harkins got the start and allowed 4 hits, 3 earned runs and 2 walks in three innings of work. Harkins was replaced by senior Coleson Daniel, who walked four over two innings while giving up one hit and one earned. Littles picked up the win after tossing the final two innings, surrendering 2 hits, one unearned run and recording one strikeout.

Panthers 10, Putnam County 0 (GM 1) - Union County ended the game via the "mercy rule" with two runs in the bottom half of the sixth to open up a 10-0 advantage.

Mullinak was efficient while going the distance for the Panthers. The sophomore right-hander allowed 6 hits and one walk to go with 7 Ks during an economical 69-pitch outing. At the dish, Mullinak scored three times and knocked in one while turning in a 3-for-4 performance.

Cayden Rich finished 3-for-3 with 3 RBIs, including a two-run single in the sixth that ended things at 10-0. Austin Garrison and Scott had two hits apiece for Union County with Scott doubling twice and driving in a pair. Swartz also scored and knocked in two during a 1-for-3 day at the plate.

The Panthers got on the board in the second when RBI singles by Rich and Garrison spotted them a 2-0 advantage. Swartz made it 4-0 in the third with a two-run single, then Kelley came home on an error for a 5-0 lead.

A base hit by the pitcher Mullinak opened up a 6-0 advantage before Scott cleared

the bases with a two-run double - making it 8-0 after four.

After Union stranded two in the fifth, Mullinak led off the sixth with a base hit. Swartz and Kelley were both plunked to load the bases with one down, setting the table for Rich who closed out game one with a two-run single.

Panthers 7, Putnam County 1 (GM 2) - Union County overcame a sluggish start and an early 1-0 deficit to pull away late, 7-1.

Swartz recorded his third consecutive complete-game victory, allowing five hits and one unearned run during a 7-strikeout performance.

Mullinak remained red-hot going 2-for-2 with 3 RBIs, two walks, and a stolen base. He wrapped up the twin bill a combined 5-for-6 with 4 RBIs. Daniel finished 3-for-3 with 2 runs and a steal; Garrison scored three times and stole a base during a 2-for-3 performance while Scott was 2-for-5 with 2 RBIs and a stolen base.

A leadoff error allowed Putnam to take a 1-0 lead in the second but Mullinak tied the game when he scored Garrison on a sacrifice fly in the Union half of the inning. Mullinak walked and later scored in the fourth on a throwing error. He brought

home another run in the fifth when he drew a bases-loaded walk. Scott made it 5-1 when he followed with a two-run single that scored Daniel and Everett.

Everett would give the Panthers a 6-1 advantage when he scored Garrison on another Putnam fielding error in the sixth. Mullinak would plate his final run of the night when a base hit scored Daniel for a 7-1 lead.

"The win gives us eight in-a-row but we still want to get better and don't want to be satisfied with where we're at," Coach Odom said. "I'm glad the second game was at least competitive so we could learn something from it. The last thing I want is for us to become satisfied."

Panthers 3, West Hall 2 - Garrison fanned five during a complete game, 3-hitter in Oakwood on Monday, March 25.

Swartz went 3-for-4 at the plate with a run and an RBI as Union County held on after jumping out to a 3-1 lead in the third inning.

The Panthers struck in the first when three-straight two-out hits were capped off by a Kelley RBI single. The Spartans answered with a run in the bottom half of the first to even the score at 1-1.

Union stormed back in front with two in the third off

a West Hall error and a Swartz single. A leadoff walk in the fifth led to a Spartan run but that's all they would get off Garrison in his first start of the season.

The sophomore overcame a pair of two-out errors in the sixth, then pitched around a leadoff error in the seventh to record his first career varsity win.

Up next: Union County hosts White County on Thursday at Young Harris College in the only game of the week. First pitch is scheduled for 5 p.m. at Zell B. Miller Field.

The Warriors are 7-1 overall but own a pair of victories over a common opponent in West Hall. White County defeated West Hall 5-4 and 10-0 while Union won a pair of one-run games vs the Spartans.

"We only have the one game this week during Spring Break and we want the guys to just take it easy this week," Odom said after Friday night's doubleheader. "They've been busting their tails for a couple months so we'll give them a few days off. We'll come back for three or four days (prior to Thursday's game), then give them a few more days off at the end of Spring Break."

Notes: At 9-8 on the year, the Panthers' winning percentage is above .500 for the first time this season.

Coach Odom was correct in naming the Monticello rally as the turning point of the season. Dating back to the Monticello doubleheader on March 15, Union County is hitting a sweltering .361 with a .875 OPS. Over the same time span, the Panthers' walks and hit-by-pitches outnumber their strikeouts 45-to-38.

Prior to the Monticello series, Union was the victim of 81 strikeouts to only 41 BB/HBP. Hits were also at a premium as they struggled to generate offense with a .170 batting average and a .466 OPS.

The pitching has also shown improvement as the Panthers posted a team ERA of 2.85 prior to Monticello. Since then, the pitching staff has been cruising along at a 1.47 clip.

Proposed Hunting Regulations changes available for review; Public Hearings scheduled



Hunters and other interested citizens are encouraged to review proposed hunting regulation changes relative to the 2019-2020 and the 2020-2021 hunting seasons, and then make plans to offer comment at one of three scheduled public hearings, or through other available methods.

Proposed changes include amendments to reflect statutory changes, shift the Central Georgia bear season, adjust either sex firearms days for deer, extend archery season for urban counties that meet criteria, regulate hunting and other activities on wildlife management areas and other public lands, and some house-keeping changes.

The complete public notice and synopsis of all proposed rule changes are available on the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division webpage at <http://georgiawildlife.com/regulations/proposed>.

Three public hearings are scheduled to provide the public an opportunity to share comments on the proposed changes. All meetings will begin at 7 p.m. April 15, 2019, Gainesville Civic Center, Chattahoochee Room, 830 Green Street, NE, Gainesville, GA 30501; April 15, 2018, Monroe County Convention Center, 475 Holiday Circle, Forsyth, GA 31029; April 18, 2019, Evans County Wildlife Club, 501 Cedar Avenue, Hagan, GA 30429.

Any participant at the hearing may present data, make a statement or comment, or offer a viewpoint or argument, either orally or in writing. Statements should be concise to permit everyone an opportunity to speak. Participants must register upon arrival and notify the registering official of their intent to

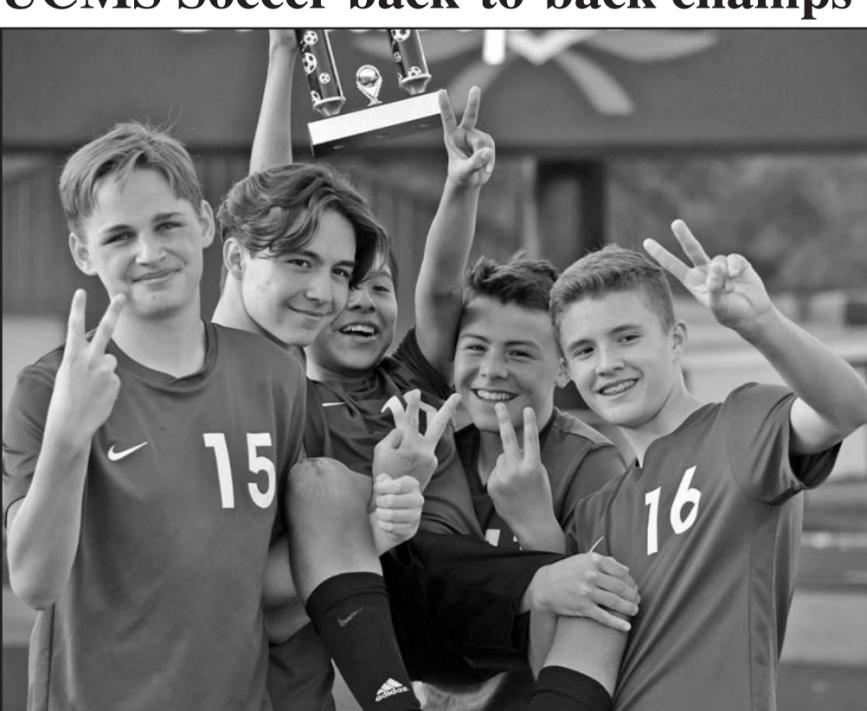
give a statement. Those unable to attend may submit input either electronically or in written statement form. Input must be received by close of business (4:30 p.m.) on April 26, 2019.

Written statements should be mailed to: GA DNR/Wildlife Resources Division/ Game Management Section; Attn: Tina Johannsen; 2067 U.S. Highway 278, S.E.; Social Circle, Georgia 30025. Statements may be electronically submitted at: <https://georgiawildlife.com/regulations/meetings>

These meeting sites are accessible to people with physical disabilities. To request sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids, contact Tina Johannsen at (706) 557-3350 no later than 4:30 p.m. on April 7, 2019.

For more information or to view the proposed regulation changes, visit <http://georgiawildlife.com/regulations/proposed>. NT(Apr3)218CA

UCMS Soccer back-to-back champs



The members of the Union County Middle School Soccer team that were a part of both league championships celebrate with the trophy following their win last week. For more on UCMS soccer's second straight championship, pick up a copy of next week's North Georgia News. Photo/Julie Ortiz



The Union County Middle School soccer team poses with the first place trophy following their second league title in as many years. Additional information and photos from UCMS soccer's championship run will be available in next week's North Georgia News. Photo/Julie Ortiz

Team DreamRide Bound: A journey to Connecticut

Team Dream Ride is a group of Special Athletes and their chaperones who make an annual trip to Farmington, Connecticut each year in August to the Dream Ride Rally.

The Dream Ride Rally is an amazing event for special needs individuals, young and old. The oldest participant is in their 60s and has participated in Special Olympics for over 40 years. His name is Bobby and we look forward to seeing him each year.

The Rally is a 3 day event that focuses on the Athletes. There are numerous events for the athletes to participate: fishing, Bocce ball, corn hole, mini golf, and Zumba tournaments to name a few, there are concerts, a unified basketball game, swimming, a dream cruise, and so much more.

There the athletes are treated like kings and queens. The red carpet is rolled out to welcome them. They are the special guests.

They meet and get to play basketball with Tayshaun Prince and Ben Wallace, NBA All-Stars. They also get to meet and work with the New England Patriot Cheerleaders to cheer the players on.



Team DreamRide

The athletes make wonderful memories that last a lifetime.

To make this trip possible we will be holding fundraisers throughout the year.

Our next fundraiser will be, April 9, 2019 at Zaxby's from 5 p.m - 8 p.m. Come out a support this wonderful group of Athletes.

We will continue to update on fundraising events coming up, so please keep a look out for the events.

If you or your business would like to donate to Team DreamRide Bound for this

amazing trip, please contact the following people: Terri Post, 706-400-9839; Paulette Dyer, 706-897-9938; or Suzanne Taylor, 706-897-8997.

The money raised goes toward airfare to and from Connecticut, a four day hotel stay, and other expenses, such as van rental to and from the airport, food, fuel, etc.

You can check out what Dream Ride is all about at www.dreamride.org.

Your support will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you!
Team DreamRide Bound