

Basketball: Ava Hunter named Class AA Freshman of the Year

By Todd Forrest
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Ava Hunter Freshman Season Highs		
POINTS:	24	(vs Towns County - 11/20)
REBOUNDS:	15	(vs Putnam County - 01/05)
STEALS:	6	(at Fannin County - 11/30)
BLOCKS:	5	(at Rabun County - 01/04)
ASSISTS:	3	(at Putnam County - 01/26)
* Scored double digits in 19 of 25 games		
* Scored 20+ four times		
* Four double-doubles		
* First Team All-Region 8-AA		

Union County's Ava Hunter just completed one of most impressive freshman seasons in the history of Lady Panther basketball, drawing the attention of media from across the state.

Kyle Sandy of sandyspeil.com is one of the most respected high school basketball bloggers in Georgia and last month he released his 2018-19 award winners with Hunter among his selections as Class AA's Freshman of the Year.

With the ability to put the ball on the floor, break the press, beat defenders off the dribble and knock down outside jumpers, the 6-foot freshman isn't your typical post player. With the reputation as a workaholic and a gym rat, Hunter is constantly developing her skills, looking to add to an offensive arsenal that already includes a near-unstoppable drop step and jump hook.

When the dust settled on the 2018-19 season, Hunter finished as the team-leader in scoring at 14.1 points-per-game (353 points). She also led the squad with 1.4 (36) steals-a-game and 1.1 (27) blocks.

Her seven (176) rebounds-per were second to Kait McCarter's 7.7 RPG. Hunter was also second in field goal percentage to McCarter (.523), connecting

on 125-of-269 for a .465 success rate.

Hunter also shot .596 (102-171) from the charity stripe, good enough for third best on the team behind McCarter (.600) and Andelin Hill (.767). Hunter would finish at the top in both field goals made and free throws made.

The impressive numbers came as no surprise to anyone after Hunter's rookie season showed promise immediately, starting with 16 points and 4 rebounds vs Rabun Gap in the opener. In game two, she went for 24 and 9 vs Towns, followed by a 20-point, six-steal performance in a narrow victory at Fannin County.

She went on to make an instant impact in Region 8-AA action with a 16-point, 12-board double-double in her region debut at Elbert County, moving her Lady Panthers to 5-0 on the year.

Following a solid 10-and-8 stat line in a loss to Monticello, Hunter and Union County bounced back with a victory at Towns County where the freshman hit 7-of-8 from the floor and 5-of-8 at the line during a 19-point, 12-board double-double.

Ten days later in Union County's return to TCHS, Hunter poured in 17-and-8 to hand Hokes Bluff, Alabama its first opening round loss in five years at the Battle of the States.

After closing out the BOTS with consecutive losses, 2019 got underway with a trip to Rabun County. And despite the loss, Hunter blocked a season-high five shots while scoring 19 points and grabbing a dozen boards.

Union County halted its three-game skid the next day with an upset of Putnam County. In the W, Hunter hauled in a season-best 15 boards while swatting four shots and scoring



Freshman sensation Ava Hunter shows off her versatility as she beats the Towns County full court pressure en route to a season-high 24 points and a Lady Panther victory on Nov 20. Photos/Todd Forrest

a team-high 14 points.

Later in the month of January, Hunter would put up 17-and-7 at Social Circle and 21-and-8 vs Rabun County in consecutive games. She would close out the regular season with 13-6 in a come-from-behind win at Banks and 11-5 during a rout of Oglethorpe County that saw the starters rest most of the second half.

In the season-ending, playoff loss to Monticello, Hunt-

er went down swinging with 17 points and 8 boards.

Hunter is one of the four starters returning for Union County head coach Corey Garrett in 2019-20 as the Lady Panthers look to end a three-year State Tournament drought.

Hunter also plays AAU basketball under coach Ken Huffman for team EOTO (Each One Teach One), which originated in 2004. She is the daughter of Tim

Hunter and Mandy (Bradley) Hunter - both are 1994 graduates of Union County High School and are employed by Union County schools.

Mandy Hunter was a member of Union County's 1994 Region Champion basketball team and went on to play at North Georgia. Tim Hunter has led three different UCHS teams to the State Tournament as a head coach -- boys and girls soccer, boys basketball.

UCMS Soccer goes back-to-back, sights set on three-peat

North Georgia News Sports Special

JASPER - The Union County Middle School boys are once again winners of the Mountain League Soccer Championship, finishing the season with an 8-2 record.

The Panthers defeated Lumpkin County, 2-1 in a thrilling come-from-behind title game victory to claim back-to-back league championships.

After handling Dawson in a comfortable 3-0 quarter-final victory, Union County booked their spot in the finals by shutting out top-seeded White County, 1-0 in Cleveland.

The finale was a tense affair with Lumpkin taking an early lead on a penalty. The Panthers responded brilliantly by going on the attack and eventually earning a free kick on top of the Indians' penalty box. The ensuing kick was powered past the keeper by long-shot specialist Zuriel Mancillas.

The second half was a desperate pursuit by Union County to find the winning goal after dominating most of the contest. Following several close chances by Union in the second half, the dramatic winner came with 30 seconds left on the clock



Coach Alex Ortiz and UCMS Soccer is presented with the league championship trophy. Photo/Julie Ortiz

as forward Wilson Walker was played in behind the defense by Mancillas. Walker was able to hold off a defender while deftly slotting the ball past the rushing Lumpkin goalkeeper, giving Union its much-deserved lead.

In the end, Union outperformed expectations after fielding a team with only three returning starters. Panther coach Alex Ortiz spoke about the leadership displayed by the returning 8th graders.

"The challenge all along was to maintain the standard

of excellence set up by Coach (Chris) Robbins and his exceptional group of last year," he said. "The players who were a part of that team knew what it took to win and it was their leadership and experience that was the foundation of the team."

Coach Ortiz also drew on rising talent to shape his winning squad.

"The future is bright for Union County soccer. This year's seventh-grade class is so talented and they were each vital to the team's success. I'm

looking forward to seeing what they can do next year along with more incoming younger players as well."

The Union County boys soccer team would like to thank UCMS Athletic Director Mandy Hunter and the entire middle school staff for their continued support of the program. They would also like to thank the team parents who provided snacks and meals, as well as Fatz Restaurant for providing a delicious and healthy pregame meal for the league finals.

UCHS Fishing Team says 'thank you' to sponsors, the community

The Union County High School Fishing Team has made great strides this year with 14 members, making seven teams.

Through the Student Angler Federation as well as Georgia Bass Nation, the team has competed in several competitions all over the Southeast, and have progressed to have 5 qualifying teams for the state and national tournaments.

Due to this remarkable feat, the Fishing Team now focuses on fundraising efforts in order to enable them to attend these week-long competitions. Thus far, the team has successfully hosted a Cornhole Tournament and a Turkey Shoot.

At the Cornhole Tournament, Jerry Parker and Cole Davis walked away as the winning team, each receiving a set of North Georgia Cornhole Association official cornhole bags.

This accomplishment as well as the entire tournament was only made possible through the help of several critical sponsors, all of which the UCHS Fishing Team would like to extend a large, humble thank you: to North Georgia Cornhole Association, Jimmy Combs, Evan

Hughes for making the knife to be raffled off and won by Kole Jenkins, Patton Excavating, and Jeff Underwood. In addition to the Cornhole Tournament, the Fishing Team has hosted a Turkey Shoot with the grand prize winner being Terry Stover.

Lunch at the event was provided by Ingles and Foodland while the Stover Family hosted the proceedings. Overall, both fundraising events have been successful, but the team still needs additional funds to support the five teams representing UCHS.

Union County High School Fishing Team would like to thank everyone who organized, donated, and participated in these events. The team will continue to raise funds as they send these 5 teams for week-long tournaments in the state and national tournaments.

If you would like to donate to the UCHS Fishing Team or learn more about helping the team please contact Rhonda Colwell at rcolwell@ucschools.org.

Once again, the UCFT extends an enormous thank you to the events' sponsors because of their generosity to help the students in their community.



Luke Gambrell and the Union County Track and Field team are back from spring break and have two more regular season meets to prepare for the Region Meet at Banks County, beginning April 24. Photo/Todd Forrest

UCHS Soccer to host Senior Night on Friday

By Todd Forrest
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With a Region Championship clinched for the girls and a playoff spot secured by the guys, Union County soccer's priorities are a bit different at this point in the season. Recognizing its seniors and staying healthy are the only

thing that should be on the players and coaches minds during the three games this week.

Following a 12-day hiatus, Union County will pay a visit to Gilmer on Tuesday with the girls scheduled to get underway at 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday will feature a girls-only contest vs Rabun Gap at 5 p.m. before Friday night's main event.

Union County's Region 8-AA finale will get underway at 5:30 p.m. Friday when they host Monticello for Senior Night. The festivities and recognition of the seniors will take place between games.

Saturday's makeup game with Darlington has been canceled but the Tuesday, April 16 match at White County is still a go as of this writing.



Lady Panther seniors following the region-clinching win at Social Circle. Photo courtesy of Lisa Garrison

Union County Track & Field

2018-2019 Track & Field Schedule

DATE	Location	Time
Tuesday, March 5th	Lumpkin	3:30
Thursday, March 7th	Dawson	4:00
Monday, March 11th	Stephens	3:30
Tuesday, March 19th	Fannin	4:00
Friday, March 22	Habersham	3:30
Friday, March 29	Mt. Yonah Invitational @ White	3:30
Friday, April 12	Banks Invitational	3:30
Thursday, April 18	Rabun	3:30
Wednesday, April 24	Region Meet @ Banks	8:30
Friday, April 26	Region Meet @ Banks	4:30
Saturday, May 4	Sectionals @ Bremen	TBD
Thursday-Saturday, May 9-11	State @ Berry College Valhalla Stadium	TBD

Local Racing Report: Tri-County Racetrack

By Blake Lynch
North Georgia News Staff Writer

BRASSTOWN - It's springtime and it's now racing season as Tri-County hosted Opening Day on April 5th. Here's the top five from each class.

Street Stock - Things got off to a rough start with No. 1 Evan Winkler Jr. starting on the pole and No. 27 Bryson Hamby on his outside. Winkler held on to the victory, fending off the second place car of Hamby, Coming in third was No. J69 Jim Weller, fourth place went to No. 01 Jacob Lynch, and fifth place belonged to No. 5 Carson Shields.

Modified Street - First place went to No. 88 Ricky Smith and second place went to No. 20 Lynn Burtchfield. Coming in third place was No. 34 Greg Southerd, finishing in fourth place was No. 48 Colton Stroud, and rounding out the top five was No. 6 Mark Wilbanks.

Limited/Crate - Coming in first place was No. 200 Jacob Anderson. Finishing in second place was No. 7 Jason Deal. Finishing in third place was No. 16 Wesley English, coming in fourth place was No. 9 Brian Kinersley and finishing in fifth place was No. 12 Drew Deaver.

Pony - First place went to No. 8 Jonny McClure ahead of No. 15 Ryan Crawford's second place car. Coming in third place

was No. 76K Korah Bumgano, finishing in fourth was No. 104 Ricky Queen and finishing in fifth place was No. 17 Bobby Hampton.

Late Models - Coming in first place was No. 8 David Payne. Placing second was No. 1C Kenny Collins and finishing in third place was No. X15 Shawn Chastain. Finishing in fourth place was No. 38 Jamie Oliver, and coming in fifth place was No. 96 Bobby Painter.

Front Wheel Drive - Coming in first place was No. 14 Charles Devin Jr. Coming in second place was No. 32 Jim Exum, Picking up third place was No. K3 Sandi Klukie. Finishing in fourth place was Lucas Beaver and running in fifth place was No. 9R Sean Rice.