

# Sports

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## Soccer: Panthers, Lady Panthers hit the road in first round of State

### Union County travels to second-seeded North Murray on Thursday and Friday

By Todd Forrest  
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Both Union County soccer teams will open the postseason on the road for the first time since 2014 when they travel to North Murray later this week in the first round of the Class AA State Tournament.

The Lady Panthers will face the Mountaineers at 6 p.m. on Thursday, with the men making a Friday trip to Chatsworth for another 6 p.m. start time at ninth-ranked North Murray (11-2).

Despite entering as No. 3 seeds, the Union County clubs like their chances at second-seeded North Murray, who share a region with a familiar foe in Fannin County.

The Lady Panthers, playing without several key contributors due to the basketball postseason, dismantled Fannin County 8-0 in Blue Ridge on Feb. 21. North Murray defeated Fannin by a combined two-game tally of 5-0. Additionally, the Mountaineers fell 6-2 on Feb. 3 to Class AAA's 8th-ranked Dawson County, who the Lady Panthers battled to a 1-1 draw on Feb. 22.



Seniors Alli Franklin (L) and Isaiah Ortiz look to remain unbeaten in the first round of State when Union visits North Murray. Photos/Todd Forrest

As for the North Murray men, they edged Dawson County 2-1 back in early February. Union County's men defeated Dawson County 3-2 in Blairsville, surrendering a

meaningless goal in the final seconds of a 3-1 contest.

Against Fannin County, the Panthers pulled away late in a 5-1 victory. In the win, senior Wilson Walker scored



twice as the Panthers logged four second-half goals to break open a 1-1 tie at the intermission.

North Murray defeated the Rebels in two meetings by

a combined 4-0 score.

Should the Union County men survive and advance, they will face the winner of fourth-seeded Eagles Landing Christian vs. top-seeded and

fifth-ranked Walker School, who owns a 1-0 win over Athens Academy and a 2-1 win over Fellowship Christian.

The Panthers knocked off Athens Academy 2-1 on the road but fell 6-3 to Fellowship at home in the 8-AA finale. The second round matchup would be on Apr. 20 at Walker or at home vs. ELCA.

The Lady Panthers would host fourth-seeded Elite Scholars Academy or travel to top-seeded and sixth-ranked Mt. Paran on Apr. 19.

Mt. Paran took a 12-2 loss to top-ranked Fellowship Christian on Feb. 23. Fellowship defeated Union County 10-0 on March 24.

Elsewhere in 8-AA, the top-seeded and second-ranked Providence men host Gordon Central. Second-seeded and seventh-ranked Fellowship Christian will host Murray County. The No. 4 seed, East Jackson, travels to fifth-ranked Model.

In the girls' brackets, top-ranked and No. 1 seed Fellowship Christian hosts Fannin County. Second-seed and fourth-ranked Athens Academy hosts Murray County. Fourth-seeded East Jackson travels to second-ranked Model.

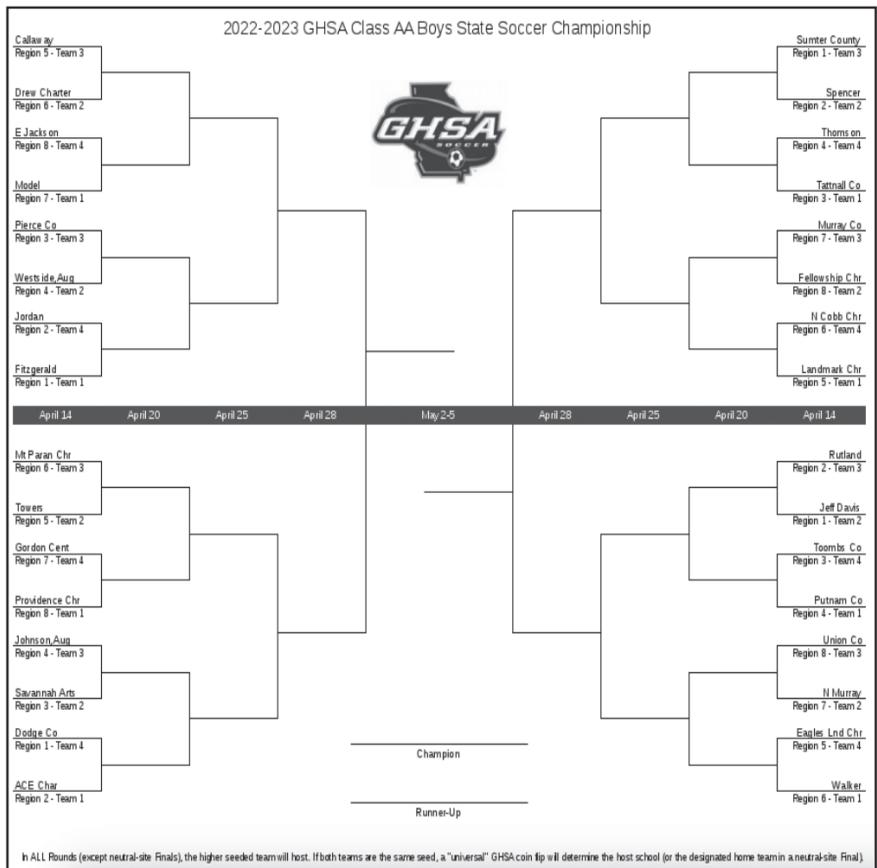
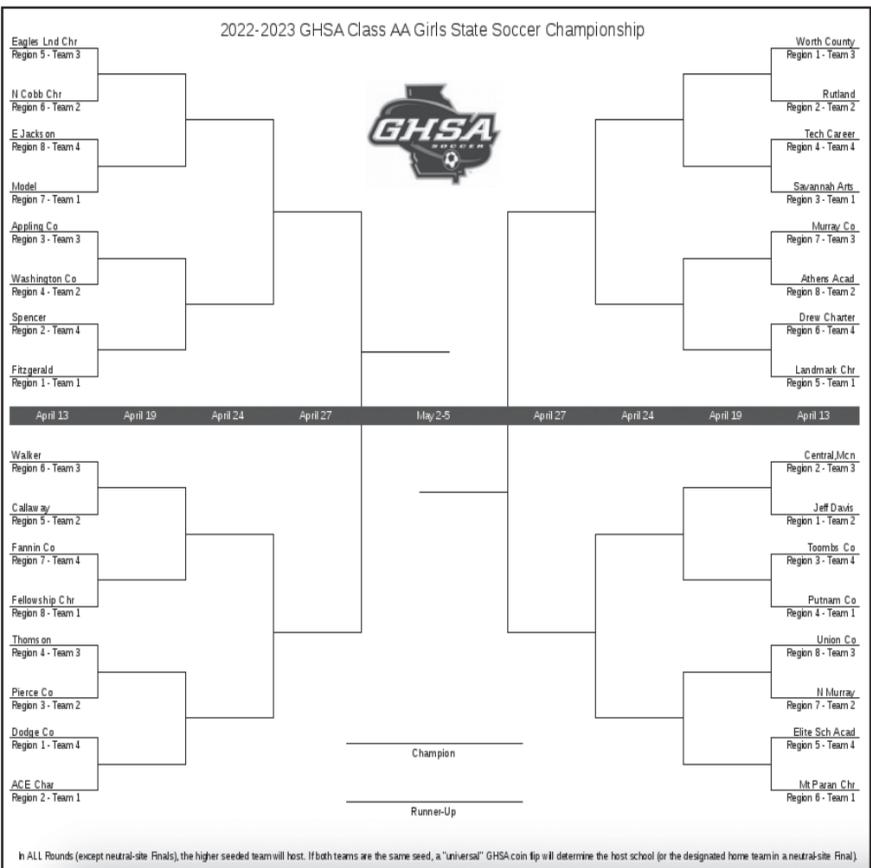


Union County High School recognized its senior soccer players during the March 17 sweep of Banks County. The Union County seniors have combined for three region championships and will enter this week's postseason with three Elite Eight appearances and seven state playoff wins, despite having their freshmen seasons canceled in 2020 due to COVID-19.

## UCHS honors '55 basketball team



In February, Bud Akins, alongside wife Mary, was recognized as part of the Union County's men's first region championship basketball team in 1955. Led by Coach Butterworth, team members included Akins, George Berry, Bud Hill, Charles Hill, Jack Lance, Jacky Payne and Tom Wilson. Akins and Wilson are the only surviving members from that historic run that saw Union claim the 9th District title by winning six games in six days. With only eight teams qualifying for the postseason in those days, Union fell 69-66 to Lakeland High in the opening round of the Class B State Tournament.



In ALL Rounds (except neutral-site Finals), the higher seeded team will host. If both teams are the same seed, a "universal" GHSA coin flip will determine the host school (or the designated home team in a neutral-site Final).

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# Towns runs winning streak to seven with doubleheader sweep of Union

By Todd Forrest  
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The Towns County Indians (13-8, 7-5) swept a non-region doubleheader at Union County on Tuesday, April 4, leading wire-to-wire in an 11-2 game-one victory before holding off a late Panthers' rally in a 6-5 win to finish off the twin bill.

The doubleheader was rescheduled from Monday when rain washed out Union County's trip to Hiawassee. As a result, Tuesday's rematch in Blairsville became two games.

Towns County visited Robbinsville, North Carolina on Monday and will resume region play on Friday when they travel to Aquinas. The Indians will host Aquinas on Saturday for Senior Day.

Union County (1-22, 1-8) jumps back into Region 8-AA action on Tuesday when they welcome East Jackson to Blairsville at 5:55 p.m. The series shifts to Nicholson on Friday for a 5 p.m. doubleheader.

**Panthers 5, Towns County 6** - Towns County jumped out to a 6-2 lead in game two of last Tuesday's doubleheader before Union County answered with two in the fifth and one in the seventh.

Cale Kirby recorded two quick outs in the top half of the seventh inning, but Hunter Fleming walked and Hayden Hughes singled, putting the go-ahead run aboard. Eli Gwynn's eight-pitch at-bat ended with a Towns County error, allowing Fleming to come around and moving Hughes within 90 feet of tying the score at 6-6.

With the game on the line, Towns County turned to senior Seth Gillis to nail down the final out - a swing-and-miss strikeout.

Towns' Tanner Cunningham finished 3 for 4 with an RBI. Connor Chastain, Caleb Berrong and Stone Chauncey ended with two hits each.

Hughes walked and drove in two during a 3-for-3 performance.

Braydon Barrett logged the win on the mound, working five innings and striking out three. He allowed six hits, two walks, and three earned runs. Kirby punched out two Panthers over 1 2/3 innings, giving up a hit and one unearned run.

Maddox Patton tossed 5 1/3 for Union County, surrendering 14 hits, one walk and six earned. Gwynn worked 2/3 of an inning in relief, walking one and giving up a hit.



Sophomore Holton Fleming throws a scoreless seventh inning vs. Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union County, the visitors in game two, got on the board in the first when Patton singled to lead off the game and Hughes drove in courtesy runner Holton Fleming with a base hit to left field.

Towns answered with four in the bottom half when four of the first five batters singled to start the frame. RBI singles by Berrong and Chauncey made it 2-1, a groundout by Kade McConnell opened up a 3-1 score and Cunningham's base knock provided the Indians a 4-1 cushion.

Union County cut the lead in half during the second courtesy of Lane Haney's lead-off double and Mayo Collins-Spiva's run-scoring groundout.

Chastain and Chauncey used back-to-back RBI singles to build a 6-2 lead in the second, but both pitchers settled down to keep the score at 6-2 into the fifth inning.

Collins-Spiva's base hit opened Union's two-run fifth and Connor Swanson entered to run for the first baseman. A one-out single by Patton placed runners at the corners, and

Hunter Fleming's walk loaded them up for Hughes.

Another walk trimmed the margin to 6-3 before Gwynn's sacrifice fly made it a 6-4 game in the middle of the fifth. Patton worked around a one-out single in the bottom half and Kirby retired the Panthers 1-2-3 in the sixth.

Gwynn replaced Patton in the Towns County sixth and escaped a bases-loaded one-out situation via a pop-up and a strikeout.

Zane Floyd finished 2 for 2 with a pair of runs for the Indians; Berrong drove in two runs and stole a base; Chastain and Chauncey plated one apiece.

Eli McNabb went 1 for 2 and Gillis scored once during a 1-for-4 game. Kyle Davis stole a bag and scored; Matthew Chastain went 1 for 3 with a run.

Patton finished 2 for 4 for Union County. Haney scored during a 1-for-3 game; Collins-Spiva went 1 for 2 with an RBI. Holton Fleming scored twice; Hunter Fleming walked twice and scored; Swanson added a run.

Holton Fleming, Hughes, Patton and Swanson stole a base for the Panthers.

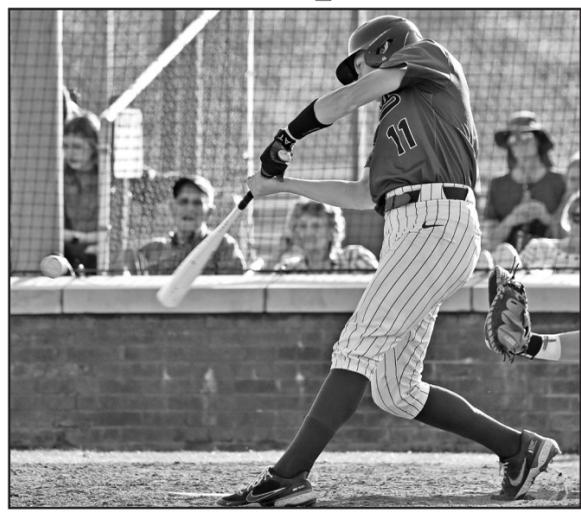
**Panthers 2, Towns County 11** - McConnell drove in four runs and fanned six over six innings on the bump as Towns County jumped out to an 11-1 lead through four.

Gwynn went 2 for 4 and scored a run for Union County. Connor Chastain scored three times, doubled and drove in two during a 2-for-3 game for the Indians.

Towns County scored three in the first off Gunnar Akins, beginning with Connor Chastain's RBI double. Chauncey's two-out triple built a 2-0 advantage and McConnell punctuated the top half of the first with a run-scoring double.

Moses Stevens put Union on the board with a base hit to right - scoring Gwynn in the second inning. But three walks to begin the third had Towns County back in business, and McConnell made the Panthers pay with a two-run single.

Kirby's base hit up the middle brought home two more, spotting the Indians a 7-1 advantage.



Hayden Hughes went 3 for 3 in game two vs. Towns. Photo/Todd Forrest



Mayo Collins-Spiva drives in a run vs. Towns. Photo/Todd Forrest

Connor Chastain's two-run single capped off three-straight hits to start the fourth off new pitcher Will Duncan. McConnell made it 10-1 via an RBI groundout, later a Union County error extended the Indians' lead to 11-1.

Gwynn's two-out single in the fifth prevented the mercy rule when Patton scored from third. Duncan singled to put two Panthers aboard, but McConnell induced a fly out to left field that ended the inning.

Towns County loaded the bags in the sixth and Union stranded a pair in the bottom half.

Gillis scored two runs and went 1 for 4; Floyd scored during a 1-for-5 day. Chauncey finished 1 for 1 with three runs and three walks. Kirby drove in two during a 1-for-3 day.

Patton went 1 for 4 with a run for the Panthers. Duncan and Eli Sosensky each finished 1 for 3; Stevens drove in a run during a 1-for-3 day.

Gillis tossed a perfect seventh for the Indians with a pair of strikeouts.

Meanwhile, Akins lasted

three innings in the start, giving up five hits, seven earned runs and five walks to go with four strikeouts.

Duncan walked four and surrendered three hits over three innings, recording one punch out and giving up three earned. Holton Fleming fanned one batter and didn't allow a baserunner in one inning on the mound.

The Panthers look to get on track this week vs. an East Jackson squad winless in region play.

At 1-8 in Region 8-AA, the Panthers sit four games back of the final playoff spot with six games remaining. However, the two teams currently tied for fourth (Athens Academy and Providence) both own the tiebreaker over the Panthers, putting Union essentially five games out.

To keep things interesting heading into next week's season-final series vs. Banks County, Union needs to win at least win two of three over East Jackson and hope for a sweep either way in the Providence-Athens series.

## Union County sends nine to Nationals in Virginia Beach



UCMS 8th grader Paxon Legatt (top) finished seventh, becoming Union County's first placer at Nationals.



Union County 8th-grader Kevin Kilpatrick went 3-2 at Nationals.



Sophomore Asa Smith-Foot went 4-2 at Nationals and met Olympic champion Kyle Snyder.



Junior Davd Heredia went 3-2 at Nationals. Union County sent a record five high schoolers and four middle schoolers to Nationals.

## Union County QB Club Fundraising Golf Tourney



Union County Quarterback Club  
Panthers Mountain Made Golf Tournament  
Friday, April 28, 2023  
Butternut Creek Golf Course

### Tournament Agenda

- 9:00AM - 10:00AM = Registration
- 9:30AM - 10:00AM = Long Drive and Putting Contest
- 10:15 = Instructions and Shotgun Start

FOUR MAN SCRAMBLE	\$100 per player
MULLIGANS	\$10 Each / 2 for \$20 1 Door prize ticket per mulligan 2 max per person Mulligans are individual mulligans
JUMBO DOOR PRIZE	\$10 Each
BEST DEAL	\$125 FOR 2 MULLIGANS AND JUMBO DOOR PRIZE
CASH DRAWING ½ the Pot	\$10 per ticket - Cash Only
LONG DRIVE CONTEST	\$10 for 3 Balls \$5 per Ball for 2 More
PUTTING CONTEST	\$10 for 3 Putts