

# Sports

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## Soccer: Both Union County teams moving on to Sweet 16

Turner's hat trick and Gregory's 'big goal' prove the difference in first-round sweep

By Todd Forrest  
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**Chatsworth** - Union County Soccer swept its opening-round matchups at North Murray and will advance to the Class AA Sweet 16 later this week.

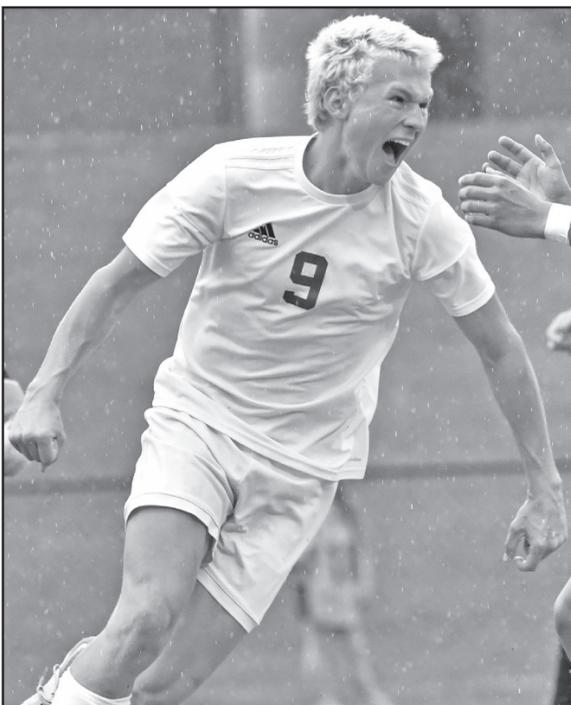
The Lady Panthers opened state tournament play on Thursday, April 13 with a 3-0 victory in Chatsworth. Junior Lara Turner recorded a hat trick, scoring two first-half goals before putting the game away with her third and final score in the 57th minute.

Unfortunately, junior Zoe Crawford suffered an injury early in the second half. As of last Friday night, head coach Tim Hunter listed Crawford's status as unknown, but doubtful, for Wednesday's second-round contest at sixth-ranked Mt. Paran.

On Friday, the Union County men (10-3) left North Murray with a 1-0 victory courtesy of junior Benton Gregory's first-half goal via Zuriel Mancillas' corner kick.

**Lady Panthers 3, North Murray 0** - Turner broke a scoreless tie in the 11th minute via a feed from Crawford. The Lady Panthers denied a pair of Mountaineer corner kicks in the 14th minute and a free kick in the 25th, allowing Crawford to find Turner again for a 2-0 edge in the 36th.

"Lara played fantastic," Hunter said. "We knew the way [North Murray was] playing, they were shifting really hard to the sides, so when we hit the centers and outside mids, we knew they were going to have runs. Every time Zoe got the ball on the sideline, we had a cross, a shot, we got something positive. I thought Kaylee Helton played a fantastic game; Madison Torres and our whole back line played very well. The girls did so much of what we've worked on in practice and what



Junior Benton 'Big Goal' Gregory celebrates his game-winner at North Murray on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

I asked of them." Union County (5-7) continued attacking early in the second half with shots from sophomore Ariel McCarter and seniors Italia Salazar and Madison Torres.

McCarter and senior Kaylee Helton each missed in the 51st and 56th minutes, respectively, but Turner found the net in the 57th for a 3-0 advantage.

The Lady Panthers couldn't add on despite earning corner kicks in the 68th, 74th and 77th minutes. Turner's final two shots were unsuccessful in the 72nd and 76th; Autumn Skinner missed in the 70th.

In the early going, Turner and Helton each missed from inside the penalty area during the 4th minute. Salazar was turned away in the 10th.

The Lady Panthers weathered a pair of corner kicks in the 14th and Crawford's shot

was stopped in the 28th before the junior missed wide of the post in the 35th.

"As a whole, I thought our girls played exceptionally well," Hunter said. "I think the [gap between the teams] was probably more distant than the 3-0 score. We kept possession the entire game, and in the second half, we switched to a 4-3-3 and pulled our wings back and that locked everything down."

Junior goalkeeper Kyra McKechnie, who logged her third clean sheet of the year, was back on the pitch after missing Union's regular-season finale. With McCarter and Addison Meeker also back in action, the Lady Panthers were at full strength for the first time since late February.

With her three goals on Thursday, Turner has two hat tricks in her last four State playoff games.

The Lady Panthers trav-



Junior Lara Turner puts Union County on the board during the 11th minute courtesy of Zoe Crawford's assist. Photo/Todd Forrest

el to sixth-ranked Mt. Paran (Marietta) on Wednesday at 5 p.m. for their fourth consecutive trip to the Sweet 16. Mt. Paran blasted an overmatched Elite Scholars Academy 10-0 in the first round.

Union and Mt. Paran share one common opponent in top-ranked Fellowship Christian, who mercy-ruled both squads.

"I was absolutely thrilled with our performance [at North Murray], I would love to have this type of performance all the time," Hunter added.

**Panthers 1, No. 9 North Murray 0** - Mancillas' corner kick in the 33rd minute was the difference when Gregory crashed into the box and used his right foot to poke Mancillas' kick past the keeper for the game's only goal.

"Benton might not be our leading goal scorer, but he's probably leading us in big goals

scored for the season," Hunter said. "It seems like whenever he gets on the scoreboard it's at times that are very important to us - none more so than today."

Union County, who controlled possession for most of the game, earned 11 corner kicks on the day, compared to only four for the home team. However, the win wasn't without its share of tense moments.

North Murray (11-3) blasted the potential equalizer off the post in the 58th minute. Earlier, the Mountaineers failed to equalize before halftime when a close-range shot rolled wide during the 36th.

Despite a steady rain-shower for most of the first 40 minutes, junior Evan Bohms attacked early and often - firing off five shots during the opening half, including a pair of headers in the 18th and 40th minutes, respectively.

One of Bohm's attempts

appeared to draw a deliberate handball inside the box, but the penalty went uncalled.

The Panthers continued firing away in the second half, beginning with a North Murray save on Mancillas' shot in the 42nd. Gregory's attempt was blocked in the 43rd and Kooper Ashcraft missed in the 48th. An offside penalty in the 55th prevented a Wilson Walker scoring opportunity.

"We could have definitely scored more than one goal, but [North Murray] is a very good defensive team and a very frustrating team to play against," Hunter said. "They kept five guys back, but we pretty much dominated possession. It got a little scary a couple times but our defense held up and was very strong. Isaiah Ortiz, what can I say? I wish I could find a way to get him another two or three years in high school. And Zuriel, Evan and Joel [Mendoza] I thought all played very well."

The Mountaineers survived a Union County flurry in the 61st minute as Mancillas' corner kick led to a Bohms shot off the keeper and a Walker header that cleared the crossbar.

North Murray's final scoring opportunity came in the 79th but senior goalkeeper Trent Baker snagged a corner kick in traffic.

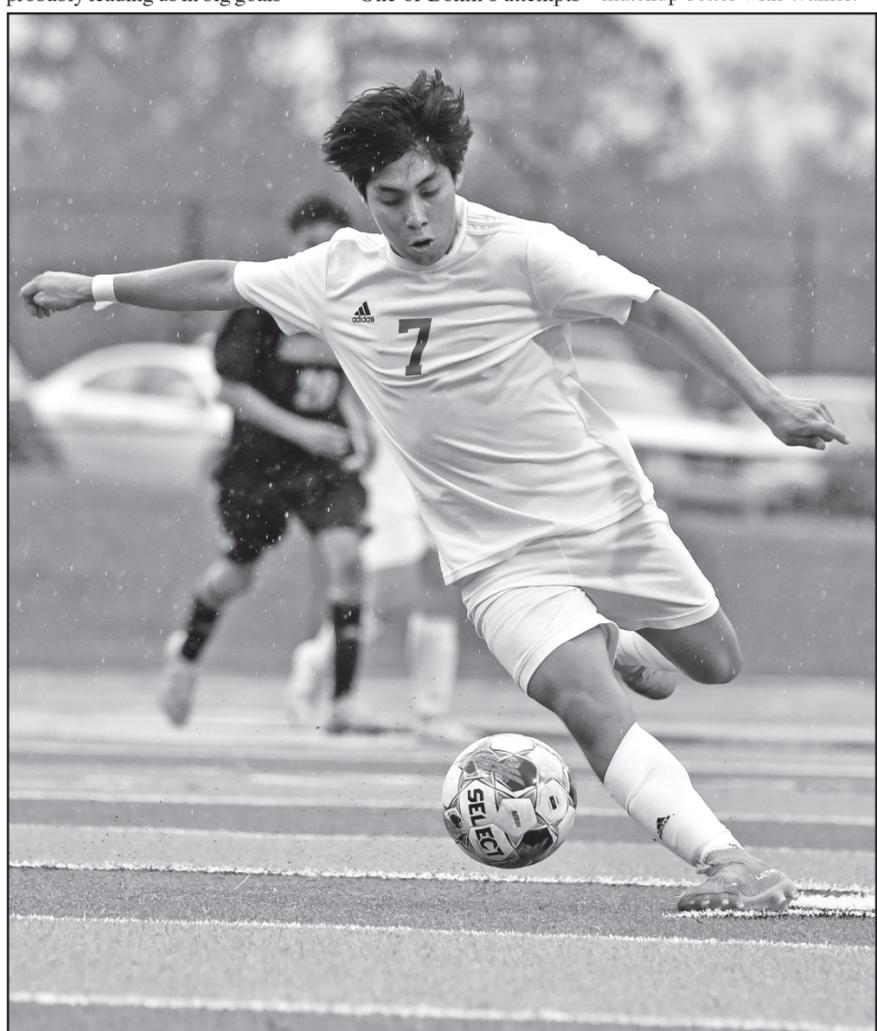
The Panthers will look for their fourth consecutive elite-eight appearance when they visit the second-ranked Walker School (Kennesaw) on Thursday.

The Walker School (12-4) owns a pair of one-goal victories over Athens Academy and No. 7 Fellowship Christian. Union County defeated Athens Academy 2-1 and fell 6-3 to Fellowship.

"You never know," Hunter said when asked about Thursday's contest. "Fellowship was a tough matchup for us, but I think we could matchup better with Walker."



Junior Zoe Crawford finds Lara Turner during the 11th minute, moving the Lady Panthers out front to stay during a 3-0 playoff win at North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest



Joel Mendoza was one of the many Panthers to earn praise from head coach Tim Hunter following Friday's playoff victory at 9th-ranked North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Akins goes five strong, leads Panthers back into win column at EJ

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The Panthers took a 5-2 victory in the finale of last week's three-game set with East Jackson behind eight strikeouts from freshman southpaw Gunnar Akins.

Earlier in the week, Union County (2-24, 2-10) was on the wrong end of a complete-game two-hitter by junior lefty Garrett Waugh in a 6-1 home loss. Rain bumped the final two games back to Saturday in Nicholson, where the Eagles prevailed 5-1 during the second game of the series.

The Panthers are mathematically eliminated from postseason play and will wrap up the 2023 season this week with a three-game tilt vs. Banks County. Union County will travel to Homer on Tuesday before the season ends with a Friday doubleheader in Blairsville.

**Panthers 5, East Jackson 2 (GM 3)**- Freshman Maddox Patton went 2 for 3, and senior Will Duncan drove in two as the Union lineup backed Akins' stellar outing on the bump.

Sophomore Hayden Hughes nailed down a two-inning save, allowing a pair of hits and one walk while striking out two.

The Panthers raced ahead 5-0 until East Jackson struck for two in the sixth following a leadoff homer. After a base hit by the ensuing batter, Hughes entered with nobody out and a runner at first and quickly induced a timely pop-up.

But the Eagles added consecutive singles to load the bags before an RBI groundout and a strikeout limited the damage to only two runs.

Earlier, Patton broke a scoreless tie in the third inning with a sacrifice fly that scored Connor Swanson, who reached via a leadoff walk.

Freshman Eli Gwynn started the fourth with a base hit to left and Hughes reached on an error, setting the table for Duncan's two-run double.



Freshman Gunnar Akins tallied 9-plus innings over two games vs. East Jackson last week, striking out 13 and allowing three runs on eight hits. Photo/Todd Forrest

Duncan came around to score on a Moses Stevens single that spotted Union County a 4-0 advantage.

Patton began the fifth with a double and later scored on a Hughes groundout.

Akins allowed five hits and one walk while fanning eight over five-plus innings. He also went 1 for 2 at the plate with a double.

Stevens went 1 for 3 with an RBI and a stolen base; Gwynn scored once during a 1-for-4 game. Hughes scored a run and plated another; Swanson walked and scored; senior Hunter Fleming drew a base on balls and swiped a bag.

**Panthers 1, East Jackson 5 (GM 2)** - Gwynn threw all six innings and went 2 for 3, but it wasn't enough for a Union County lineup that accumulated only four hits from the other eight spots.

On the mound, Gwynn allowed nine hits and four earned runs while striking out four and walking a pair. Senior Jordan Gilliam turned in a 2-for-3 game at the dish; Fleming and Hughes each went 1 for 3.

The Eagles scored four in the second after the first five hitters reached to start the frame. Union County loaded the bases with nobody out in the fourth, but only mustered one run - an

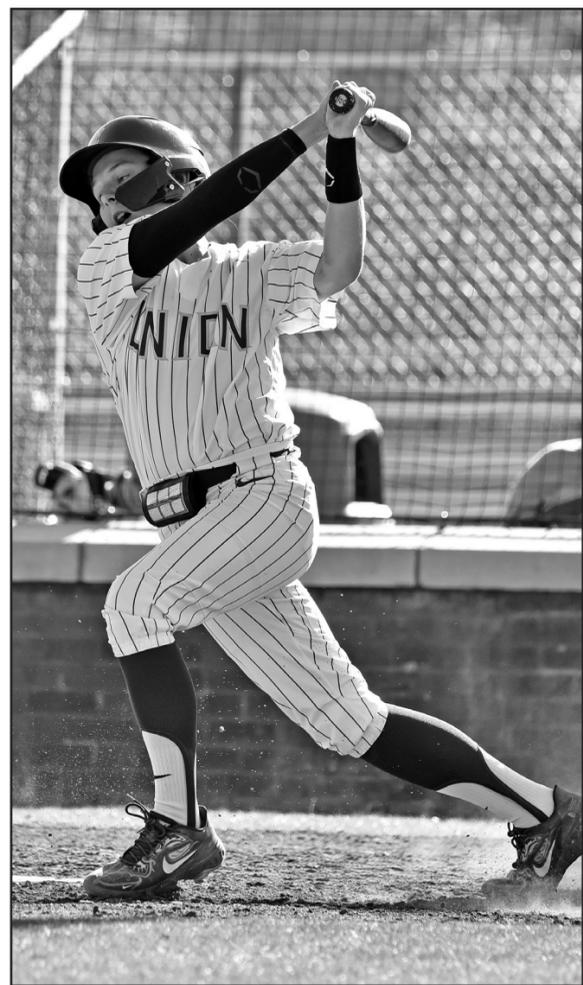
Akins sacrifice fly that brought home Fleming.

East Jackson used a two-out single to tack on an insurance run in the fifth.

Sophomore Holton Fleming stole a base for Union County.

**Panthers 1, East Jackson 6 (GM 1)** - Waugh took a no-hitter into the sixth inning before Patton's one-out single loaded the bags for Hunter Fleming and the senior drove in his team's only run when Swanson, who reached via a leadoff walk, came around on an RBI groundout.

East Jackson scored an unearned run off Patton in the



Freshman Eli Gwynn had three hits and tossed six innings during last week's East Jackson series. Photo/Todd Forrest

first by way of an error and a no-man's land single behind third base.

The first four Eagles reached during a four-run third inning, with the big blow coming via a bases-clearing triple. A sacrifice fly brought home the runner from third and put the home team in a 5-0 deficit.

East Jackson tacked on an insurance run in the sixth via a two-on, two-out single.

Patton got the nod in the series opener and went three innings, giving up five hits, three walks and three earned runs. Akins tossed four innings in relief, striking out five while surrendering three hits and a

run. He also reached on an error during Union's run-scoring sixth.

Despite coming within five outs of a no-no, Waugh struggled with control all day - issuing seven walks during a 109-pitch outing that broke almost even between balls and strikes (54 balls, 55 strikes). Patton and Duncan took two free passes apiece; Hughes, Gwynn and Swanson each worked one base on balls.

**Up next:** Union visits Banks County (15-10, 8-4) at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

The 2023 season concludes Friday with a doubleheader at 5 p.m.

# UCHS track and field victorious at Gilmer

By Todd Forrest  
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**Ellijay** - Union County placed first in the team standings, defeating host Gilmer, Pickens, Fideles Christian and Johnson Ferry Christian.

Eleven girls and six guys took home gold medals for Union County during the Tuesday, April 11 meet at Gilmer.

Lola Hunter and Ava Loyd earned two first-place finishes, while the girls swept all three relay events.

Loyd collected gold in the 100 and 200-meter races. Hunter dominated the long distance events - placing first in the 1600M and 3200M.

Elsewhere, Ellie Adams won the 400M race and Hannah Kazmierzak was victorious in the 800M.

Katie Byers crossed the finish line first in the 100M hurdles and Mattie Brookshire placed first in the discus.

On the boys' side, Jonah Kluth earned gold in the 100M race and the high jump; Zander Rotko was victorious in the 400M and Cooper Kluth won the 110M hurdles.

The 4x100 and 4x200 relay teams took home gold medals.

Second-place boys' finishes belonged to Nikolai Gromowa (high jump), Jonah Kluth (200M), Daniel McPhee (triple jump), Noah Payne (1600M), Nolan Thompson (300M hurdles), Eli Underwood (shot put), Taylor White-



Junior Van Marevka was fourth in the triple jump and long jump events at Gilmer. Photo courtesy of UCHS

head (400M) and the 4x800 relay team.

The girls that took home silver were Brookshire (shot put), Noel Hyatt (400M), Linley Jones (300M hurdles and long jump), Giovanna Salazar (200M) and Lydia Wagner (3200M).

Third-place finishes went to Abby Barrett (triple jump), Cade Dockrey (100M), Ivan Garcia (800M), Tyler Grasty (triple jump), Ethan Hill (1600M), Jones (100M hurdles), Kazmierzak (high

jump), Sam Page (300M hurdles), Braden Plott (long jump), Charlie Robinson (discus), Salazar (100M), Averie Tanner (800M), Underwood

(discus) and Wagner (1600M). Union County now turns its attention to the Region 8-AA Championships on April 24 at East Jackson.



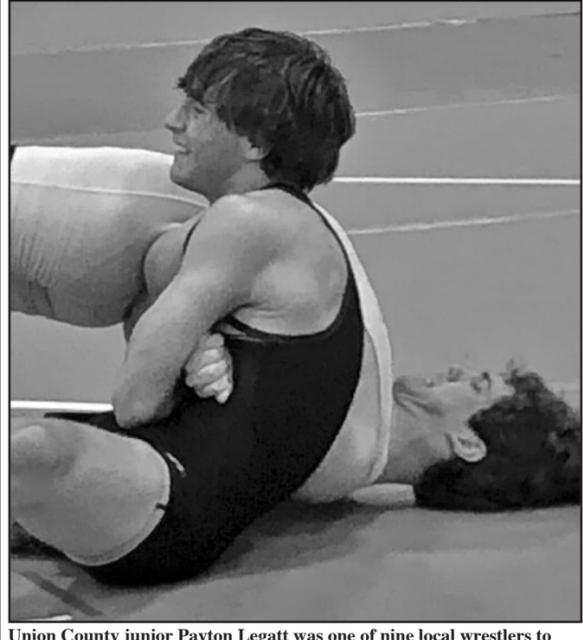
Senior Mattie Brookshire placed first in the discus and second in the shot put events at Gilmer. Photo courtesy of UCHS.

# UC defends home turf, sweeps Fannin and Towns at Butternut



Saylor Noe (pictured) fired a 49 and Hope Patton shot a 42 to lead the girls' golf team past Towns County (116) and Fannin County (128) at Butternut Creek Golf Course. The Union County guys tallied a 173 to defeat Fannin (195) and Towns (223) at Butternut. The guys were led by Huston West (40), Jett Busbee (41), Turner West (43), Leo Nam (49) and Maddox Young (49)

# Union County wrestlers prep for busy spring, summer



Union County junior Payton Legatt was one of nine local wrestlers to compete at Nationals in Virginia Beach, Virginia last month. Joining Legatt were middle schoolers Landon Bell, Eli Flowers, Kevin Kilpatrick and Paxton Legatt. High School wrestlers competing at Nationals were Anderson Clouse, Thomas Gary, David Heredia, Payton Legatt and Asa Smith-Foot. Union County wrestlers will compete at the Frank E. Rader Southeast Regional Championships in Cherokee, North Carolina on May 26. On June 18, they will attend the Jeff Jordan wrestling camp in Urbana, Ohio.

# Union County QB Club Fundraising Golf Tourney

Union County Quarterback Club Panthers Mountain Made Golf Tournament Friday, April 28, 2023 Butternut Creek Golf Course	
<b>Tournament Agenda</b>	
9:00AM - 10:00AM = Registration	
9:30AM - 10:00AM = Long Drive and Putting Contest	
10:15 = Instructions and Shotgun Start	
<b>FOUR MAN SCRAMBLE</b>	\$100 per player
<b>MULLIGANS</b>	\$10 Each / 2 for \$20 1 Door prize ticket per mulligan 2 max per person Mulligans are individual mulligans
<b>JUMBO DOOR PRIZE</b>	\$10 Each
<b>BEST DEAL</b>	\$125 FOR 2 MULLIGANS AND JUMBO DOOR PRIZE
<b>CASH DRAWING</b> ½ the Pot	\$10 per ticket - Cash Only
<b>LONG DRIVE CONTEST</b>	\$10 for 3 Balls \$5 per Ball for 2 More
<b>PUTTING CONTEST</b>	\$10 for 3 Putts