

# Sports

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## Both Union soccer teams in Elite Eight for second time since 2019

UCHS hosts State quarterfinals on Monday, Tuesday; Final Four slated for Thursday, Friday

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Union County soccer is sending both teams to the Elite Eight for the second time (2019) in school history following a pair of Sweet 16 home victories over ranked opponents last week.

While the Union County ladies coasted to a 4-1 win over No. 10 East Laurens (Dublin) on Wednesday, the men had their hands full a day later with ninth-ranked Woodville-Tompkins (Savannah).

**No. 6 Panthers 3, No. 9 Woodville-Tompkins 2** - The Union County men recorded their 15th win of the season -- the most in 12 years, equaling the 15-1 mark set by the 2010 squad.

However, it didn't come easy as the Panthers needed a late goal from senior MJ Delatte and a Trent Baker save on a Woodville-Tompkins free kick with 25 seconds remaining to fend off the Wolverines' rally.

"We were a bit lethargic coming out of halftime, it's typical, sometimes it happens, I've been a player before." Union head coach Chris Robbins said. "We took things for granted and I don't want to put blame anywhere, but the defense made two mistakes and it cost us two goals. I think [Woodville-Tompkins] attempted four shots for the entire game and they scored on two of them. Our defense has been absolutely stellar all season so it's a little frustrating."

Despite the mid-game hiccup, it was all Union in the early-going, sparked by a pair of Wilson Walker goals to spot the home team a 2-0 advantage during the 20th minute. Walker opened the scoring just 33 seconds in when Wes Seiler chased down a Kyler Robbins pass and delivered a cross into the box for the right foot of Walker, whose one-touch shot found the back-left corner of the net over the outstretched arms of the fast-approaching goalkeeper.

Union County remained on the attack, doubling its lead in the 20th minute when a header from freshman Antonio Solorio found Walker in the box for a 10-yard chip shot over the Wolverines' keeper.

With Woodville-Tompkins reeling from the early onslaught, the Panthers would not find the net again until the 54th minute, when Delatte's rebound broke a 2-2 tie. Following Walker's second goal, Kyler Robbins couldn't beat the goalkeeper in the 24th minute, then, moments later, the Panthers failed to convert a pair of attempts from point-blank range.

Later, the goalkeeper swallowed up a Kyler Robbins strike from 22 yards in the 26th minute, and sophomore Zuriel Mancillas missed wide in the 29th minute. Following a Wolverines' free-kick in the 31st, Kyler Robbins missed high during the 34th, and a Union free-kick was turned away in the 35th minute.

The Panthers failed to convert a counter early in the second half when a hustle-play by defender Seth Rutan prevented a Woodville-Tompkins 1-on-1 opportunity in the 42nd minute. Union quickly went on the offensive, but Mancillas couldn't chase down a long pass from Seiler.

Woodville-Tompkins eventually broke through in the 48th minute when they took advantage of an open goal and snuck a right-footed shot into the far-side of the net. The kick found the inside of the left post from the right sideline, just clearing an



Sophomore Avery Murray collected two assists and one goal in Union's second-round win over East Laurens. Photo/Todd Forrester

Isaiah Ortiz tackle attempt and, at the last second, slipping past Delatte, who raced back to defend the bending three-hopper.

"In my opinion, it was a bit of a fluke but a goal is a goal," Chris Robbins added. "How that ball went in, I don't know?"

With new life breathed back into its offense, Woodville-Tompkins equalized 119 seconds later via a header off a right-footed cross. But the Panthers still weren't out of the woods, turning away a free kick in the 53rd on a sliding save from Baker.

After Union failed to capitalize on an open-goal situation of its own in the 55th minute, Delatte came through with the game-winner during the 56th. Delatte's go-ahead score came to fruition when Solorio chased down a Union throw-in and quickly fed Mancillas in the box for a left-footed strike from 15 yards. The goalkeeper's diving stab batted away the sophomore's shot, which bounced to Delatte, who gathered in front of the goal and split a pair of defenders before using his right foot to find the back of the net from a yard out.

"[Woodville-Tompkins] came back to tie it up and as a senior, I wasn't going to let us go out like that," Delatte said about his game-winner. "I saw an opportunity to follow the shot, and when I did, the ball landed at my feet and then I saw a wide-open goal. That was an important goal because [Woodville-Tompkins was] starting to pick up steam so we needed to stop their momentum."

Coach Robbins offered his own take on Delatte's score.

"That goal was pure heart, that's all it was," he said. "The keeper made a massive save and it came down to a situation where the ball was bouncing around in front of the goal and you end up having to go through somebody, even if it's your own teammate, to put the ball in the net. And that's what MJ did, 100%."

The Panthers returned to their attacking ways but couldn't extend the margin. Their best opportunity came in the 59th when Kyler Robbins' curving 20-yard free-kick nicked the crossbar.

An offside in the 60th minute negated a Solorio 1-on-1, then a sliding deflection by the Wolverines' keeper prevented another scoring chance in the 61st. On the ensuing corner-kick, sophomore Benton Gregory's 8-yard volley sailed high, and later, Kyler Robbins couldn't convert on a pair of tries in the 65th.

Excellent goalkeeping denied a Walker 1-on-1, then Union County squandered three corner kicks in the 74th and 75th minutes. Mancillas missed high in the 77th, and another aggressive goalkeeper play denied Walker's second breakaway attempt in the 79th.

After a tackle thwarted a Mancillas shot from 11 yards, Woodville-Tompkins had one last attempt to equalize when the Region 2 runner-up was awarded a free kick in the 80th minute. With 25 seconds on the clock, the Wolverines sent a 46-yard try toward the Union goal, but Baker stepped up to corral the shot then delivered a booming 60-yard goal kick that sealed the win.

"This win means a lot because [we lost at home in the Sweet 16 last year]," Delatte said. "We would like to play Thomasville in the next round just to get revenge for 2019, but either way, we're excited for the opportunity and we'll be ready to play."

**Up next:** Union County will host No. 7 Coosa (Rome) - the runner-up from Region 7-AA. The Eagles upset fifth-ranked Thomasville on penalty kicks during a lengthy road-trip to face the Region 1-AA champs last Thursday in south Georgia. Coosa owns a pair of wins over Fannin County, defeating the Rebels 4-1 in Blue Ridge on Feb. 8. However, five weeks later, Coosa (13-3-1) dismantled Fannin County by a 10-0 score in Rome.

On Feb. 24, Coosa finished in a 1-1 tie with Coahulla Creek, who fell 6-1 to Pickens and defeated Murray County 2-1.

Meanwhile, a shorthanded



Junior forward Wilson Walker, who scored two first-half goals, can finally relax as time runs out on last week's win. Photo/Todd Forrester



Senior MJ Delatte (2) breaks a 2-2 tie in the 54th minute as the visiting Panthers comes within inches of making a diving save. Photo/Todd Forrester

Union County Lady Panthers (12-3-1) continue to fly under the radar, advancing to their sixth Elite Eight with a convincing 4-1 victory over 10th-ranked East Laurens.

Freshman Ariel McCarter kicked off the scoring in the third minute via the first of two Avery Murray assists. The score came courtesy of a Union free kick after East Laurens committed its second handball penalty of the opening minutes.

"We really hurt them on our set pieces tonight," Union head coach Tim Hunter said. "Up front, with Ariel [McCarter] and Lara [Turner], we're going to [win most of the] 50/50 balls because they're so fast and so long. And [Murray's] kicks were on-point and she was just setting us up all night."

Junior Avary Smith-Foot built a 2-0 advantage when her shot from 30-plus yards found the net during the 14th minute. Smith-Foot's goal came on the heels of two unsuccessful Lady Panthers' corner kicks in the fourth and fifth minutes.

"I always harp on our outside defenders, when you're in that area, 'step up and shoot' and [Smith-Foot] did it and took care of business," Hunter said. Sophomore Lara Turner was turned away in the 15th minute, and moments later, fellow 10th-grader Kyra McKechnie denied East Laurens' first attempt of the game.

Following a failed East Laurens' free-kick in the 20th, Turner found the net in the 34th courtesy of Murray's second assist, mounting a 3-0 Union County advantage.

**Lady Panthers 4, No. 10 East Laurens 1** - The unranked

However, the Lady Panthers gave up a freebie before halftime when East Laurens snuck behind the defense and converted with 41 seconds on the clock.

"We didn't do a good job finishing the half, and as you advance to the later rounds, you have to make sure you slam the door [on your opponent]," Hunter said. "But, I would rather learn that lesson in a win, than have it be the reason we're cleaning out the locker room. But regardless, the girls played hard against probably the fastest team that we've faced. I feel they were more athletic than we were, but I think we're a bit more skilled."

Trailing 3-1, the visitors opened the second half with momentum, but McKechnie and the Union defense tightened up, rejecting two corner kicks and a pair of shots in the first 12 minutes. But during the 53rd minute, Murray pushed the margin to 4-1 when the sophomore rebounded her own penalty kick and found the net.

McCarter just missed out on a brace when the goalkeeper collected her shot attempt in the 60th minute. The Lady Panthers failed to convert a pair of corner kicks in the 65th and 72nd, keeping the tally at 4-1 until the final horn.

**Up next:** The Lady Panthers hosted unbeaten and eighth-ranked Fitzgerald (12-0-1) on Monday after the weekly deadline. The Union-Fitzgerald winner will travel to either top-ranked Lovett or No. 6 Lamar County in the Final Four.

Entering the week, all that stood between Fitzgerald and a perfect mark was a 1-1 tie at Class 7A Lowndes County (Valdosta) on Feb. 22. Fitzgerald already owns a 10-0 first-round win over Washington County and a 5-2 Sweet-16 victory over Region 7-AA runner-up and fifth-ranked Model, who finished tied atop the region standings with No. 7 Fannin County.

As for the Lady Rebels, they punched their ticket to the Elite Eight with a 4-1 win over Thomasville and will host third-ranked Pace Academy. Meanwhile, Region 8-AA runner-up Elbert County dropped a 7-2 contest at No. 4 Jeff Davis.

Commerce, Social Circle and Towns County all moved on to the Class A-Public Elite Eight. Athens Academy advanced but Fellowship Christian was eliminated in Class A-Private. Class AAA No. 5 Lumpkin County, who defeated Union on Feb. 8, will visit No. 6 Oconee County in the Elite Eight.



Avary Smith-Foot extends the lead to 2-0, becoming the second player of the postseason (Evans) to score their first career goal. Photo/Todd Forrester

# Baseball: Panthers begin postseason play Thursday at No. 7 Lovett

## Union completes season sweep of Murphy, drops a pair to No. 5 Fellowship Christian

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Union County (9-18) enters this week's Class AA State Tournament after dropping two of three to close out the 2022 regular season.

However, the results are a bit misleading as the Panthers suffered a walk-off loss Thursday in Roswell at Class A-Private's fifth-ranked Fellowship Christian (22-2), one day removed from scoring a 7-2 home win over Murphy, North Carolina.

The week began with a less-than-stellar 11-4 home loss to Fellowship Christian on Tuesday after the Panthers surrendered five runs in the first and fell into a 10-1 hole.

**Panthers 7, Murphy, NC 2** - All square at 2-2, Union County broke things open with a four-run fourth inning, then picked up an add-on run in the sixth to secure the season sweep over the neighboring Bulldogs.

Senior Tyler Loyd launched his second homer of the year -- a solo shot to lead off the four-run fourth -- to finish 1 for 3 with a walk, a stolen base and a pair of RBIs. Parker Grisham scored and drove in a run during a 2-for-4 game. Caleb Towe went 1 for 3, scoring twice, swiping two bags and drawing a walk.

Junior Will Duncan tossed a 105-pitch complete game for the Panthers, allowing seven hits, two walks and two earned runs while striking out five in the win.

Braden Rumpfelt and Isaac Cole collected two hits apiece for Murphy.

Following Loyd's go-ahead bomb to left field, Union County continued to pull away, beginning with consecutive singles from Towe and Grisham.



Junior Will Duncan turned in his first seven-inning complete game during last week's 7-2 win over Murphy. Photo/Todd Forrest

Senior Connor Shields brought home Towe with a grounder to third, and Grisham came around to score on a Duncan base hit. Courtesy-runner Hunter Fleming replaced the pitcher and stole second, allowing senior Lake Hughes to plate him with a two-out single to center.

Duncan retired his fifth-straight batter with a 1-2-3 sixth, and Towe sparked a two-out rally with a walk and a stolen base during the Union half of the frame. Grisham capped the scoring with an RBI single to left field, spotting the Panthers a 7-2 advantage.

Duncan ran into trouble to begin the seventh, hitting a batter and giving up a single, but he settled down to fan the next two Bulldogs before ending the game on a pop-up.

Union got on the board in the first when senior Thomas

Dyer doubled and came around on a Loyd ground out. Murphy grabbed a brief lead in the fourth when a two-run, two-out triple provided the visitors a 2-1 advantage.

But the Panthers answered in the bottom half of the frame when a Shields single and a Bailey Brown RBI double knotted the contest at 2-2.

Brown and Shields each went 1 for 3 with a ribby. Duncan finished 1 for 2 with a stolen base and Hughes swiped two bags during a 1-for-4 day at the plate.

Fleming added two stolen bases and senior Logan Anderson picked up one steal. Overall, Union County finished 9 for 10 in the stolen base department.

**Panthers 8, No. 5 Fellowship Christian 9** - The Panthers couldn't preserve a 6-1 sixth-inning lead but still



Senior Tyler Loyd bashed his second homer of the year during Wednesday's win over Murphy, NC. A day later, he notched the first four-hit game of his career at No. 5 Fellowship Christian. Since March 31, Loyd is slashing .444/.500/.667 with a homer and 9 RBIs. Photo/Todd Forrest

battled back to even the score at 7-7 before giving up a walk-off single in the bottom of the seventh.

Junior James McPherson earned the nod and worked into the sixth frame, finishing with a stat-line of 5 1/3 innings, eight hits, four runs, two earned runs, three walks and a strikeout. The junior also surrendered two homers, the first a solo shot in the fourth, trimming the Union lead to 3-1. The second big fly came in the sixth - a two-run shot cutting the margin in half at 6-3.

Two batters later, Grisham replaced McPherson and gave up three hits, four runs and two walks without recording an out. Loyd entered in the sixth and escaped trouble but stayed around to allow two hits and a run in the bottom of the seventh.

At the plate, Loyd fin-

ished with a career-high four hits in five at-bats while scoring once and driving in a run. Chris Fletcher doubled and drove in three runs during a 2-for-3 game. Brown, Fleming and Shields also turned in a two-hit performance for the Panthers.

After surrendering the lead via a seven-run sixth, Union County rallied with two in the seventh to extend the game another half-inning. The frame got underway with a Shields single and an RBI double by junior Jace Vinez.

Hughes' infield single put runners at the corners with one out, but a strikeout brought Loyd to the plate with the tying run 90-feet away and two down. On the second pitch of the at-bat, Loyd's fourth hit of the day -- a single to left field -- tied things up at 8-8.

A leadoff double opened the bottom half of the seventh,

and following a pop-out, Fellowship Christian walked it off with a base hit to left on an 0-1 pitch.

Hughes finished 1 for 4 with a walk and a run. McPherson went 1 for 3 with an RBI. Anderson walked and Dyer scored a run.

Hayden Hughes and Carter Deal added one run apiece for Union County.

**Panthers 4, Fellowship Christian 11** - Union County allowed seven unanswered runs to begin the game as Lake Hughes labored through 3 2/3 innings, giving up 10 runs (five earned), nine hits, two homers and a walk. The Union County ace fanned four batters during a 105-pitch outing.

Dyer entered in the fourth and allowed two hits and one earned run over 3 1/3 innings, walking one and striking out a pair.

At the plate, Lake Hughes doubled, scored and drove home two during a 1-for-2 game that included two bases on balls. Dyer went 1 for 3 with an RBI; Anderson and Fleming finished 1 for 2 with one walk each.

Down 7-0 in the bottom of the third, Union County cracked the scoring column when Lake Hughes singled and scored via an infield single off the bat of Dyer.

Trailing 10-1 in the fourth, Lake Hughes delivered again, cracking a two-run double that scored Grisham and Hayden Hughes - who both walked earlier in the frame. A Duncan sacrifice fly scored Grisham during the bottom of the sixth, bringing the final tally to 11-4.

**Up next:** The Panthers will visit No. 7 Lovett for two first-round playoff games on Thursday at 5:30 p.m.. The "if necessary" game in the best-of-three series would be Friday at 6 p.m.

## Tyler Loyd signs baseball scholarship with Emmanuel, rejoins older brother in Lions' infield



Union County baseball senior Tyler Loyd (seated-center) is flanked by family members during his signing day ceremony at the UCHS library earlier this month. Photo/Todd Forrest

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Union County third baseman Tyler Loyd inked a scholarship with Emmanuel College, joining his older brother Hunter, who is currently a freshman first baseman at the Franklin Springs school.

Tyler Loyd expects to continue manning the hot corner at the next level following a stellar senior season at UCHS. He currently leads the team with a .342 batting average and two homers, and is second in RBIs with 15 and slugging at .493.

Following his signing on April 14, the *North Georgia News* sat down with Tyler Loyd to discuss his college decision.

**NGN:** When did you first consider Emmanuel and what caught your attention?

**TL:** It was probably around the time (March 2021) that Hunter signed [with Emmanuel] because I was already doing a lot of showcases with travel ball. Actually, Emmanuel reached out to me and wanted me to come out to a showcase. But before that, I had gone to a showcase at Darlington [High School] and one of the Emmanuel coaches saw me and emailed me. He told me that I had a lot of heart and that he liked the way I played and how aggressive I was, so he invited me to their showcase game just to see what I had.

When I got there, I met with the coaches and the atmosphere was awesome. But the

most important thing to me, [Emmanuel] puts God before everything else. That is really important, because without God, nothing is possible.

**NGN:** Did you talk to the coaches about staying at third?

**TL:** Yes, the coach asked me if I played third because they have been looking for one. He said the one they have is struggling a little so they are looking for [depth at third base].

**NGN:** What would you like to accomplish in year one? What would you consider a successful freshman season?

**TL:** I definitely want to limit my strikeouts and keep my batting average around .300 or above. If I can do that as a freshman, I think I'll continue to be successful, as long as I keep putting in the work and giving it my all, which is all that matters at the end of the day.

**NGN:** Do you see yourself competing for a starting job in year one?

**TL:** I definitely want to win the starting job in year one. That would be a confidence boost. One of my goals is to get 80 at-bats and that would help [me reach that number].

**NGN:** Anything you want to accomplish before you graduate?

**TL:** I really want to be on varsity for all four years, but the main thing is just having fun while playing the game I love.

**NGN:** Do you know what you plan to major in?

**TL:** I'm doing two sepa-

rate things - I'm doing sports management and wildlife management. So I can get a coaching degree or I can also [work for] the DNR.

**NGN:** Is that where you see yourself in four years?

**TL:** As long as baseball keeps being good to me, I would love to keep going and see how far it takes me. If not, I will continue on my career path and just see where God takes me.

**NGN:** Did you consider other schools?

**TL:** Actually, I was going back and forth between Lee University and Kennesaw State. The coach at Lee reached out after the Emmanuel showcase, but for some reason, Emmanuel really stood out and they won me over.

**NGN:** Is there anyone you want to thank or mention?

**TL:** First, I want to thank God for everything he's seen me through. I want to thank my family, my mom, dad and of course, my girlfriend, because she's pushed me more than anything and she's been there through everything. I also want to thank my coaches and teammates, especially [UCHS head] coach [Zach] Odom. My freshman year, I thought he was a hard coach, but my junior year, I finally realized why he was so hard on me. And I just want to thank him for pushing me when I didn't realize that I needed to be pushed. He believed in me and helped me [be successful in difficult] situations.

**NGN:** After playing alongside your brother in high school, what do you think it's going to be like in college?

**TL:** Oh man, I can't wait. We've always played amazing together and we have great chemistry and can always rely on each other.

**NGN:** As a third baseman, it's gotta be nice having your brother across the diamond?

**TL:** Yep. And we know each other's strengths and weaknesses so we help pick up the slack for one another

## Track: Union County visits Rabun in final tune-up meet ahead of Region 8-AA Championships

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Union County picked up 14 gold medals in its final meet of the regular season ahead of this week's Region 8-AA meet at Banks County.

At Rabun County, on April 21, the Panthers competed against Rabun County and Fannin County, where they finished among the top-three in 35 events.

Placing first for Union County was Lexi Sisum in the girls' 100M and 200M races. Zander Rotko came in first in the guys' 200M and 400M races while finishing second in the 100M dash.

Ellie Adams and Hunter

Hartzog each took home gold in the 800M race. Hartzog also placed first at 1600M.

In the relay events, the girls placed first in the 4x100, 4x200 and 4x400 races. The boys teams came in first in the 4x200 and 4x400 races. They were third in the 4x100 while both teams placed second in the 4x800 race.

Allie Brey collected gold in the high jump; Linley Jones came in first in the long jump and second in the triple jump. Mattie Brookshire finished as the runner-up in the discus throw.

Other second-place finishers included Hana Gregory in the 400M and 1600M races. Trace Wright placed second in the 400M event, Natalie

Payne took home silver in the 3200M race and Hannah Long was second in the 100 and 300M Hurdles.

Kanon Abercrombie was the runner-up in the 110M Hurdles and third in the 300M Hurdles. Giovanna Salazar and Taylor Whitehead placed third in the 100M races. Adams and Brady Guild came in third in the 400M event.

Lydia Wagner collected a bronze medal at 800M, Jones was third in the 110 and 300M Hurdles. Tyler Grasty placed third in the Triple Jump.

The Region 8-AA Track and Field Championships get underway on Wednesday at Banks County High School. The region meet will conclude on Friday, April 29.

## Union County coaching hires update

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As reported on the *North Georgia News* Facebook page last week, Union County High School hired three new coaches for the 2022-23 school year.

Megan Brown (Marietta) takes over Union County volleyball following the resignation of two-year head coach Anna Chapman, who stepped down at the conclusion of last fall's second consecutive Final Four run.

Brad Cochran (Piedmont University) replaces Mandy Hunter as the Lady Panthers basketball coach. Hunter served as the interim coach during the 2021-22 season and will remain the UCHS athletic director.

And finally, Union County assistant softball coach,

Carissa Owenby, has been promoted to replace four-year head coach Stephen Mitchell as UCHS' third fast-pitch coach since the program's inception 17 years ago.

Mitchell and his family are moving to Haralson County (he is originally from nearby

Bowdon) where he plans to take some time off from coaching high school sports.

Over the coming weeks, the *North Georgia News* will introduce each of the three coaches to the community with a series of articles and interviews.

## Trout stocking sites week of April 18-22, 2022

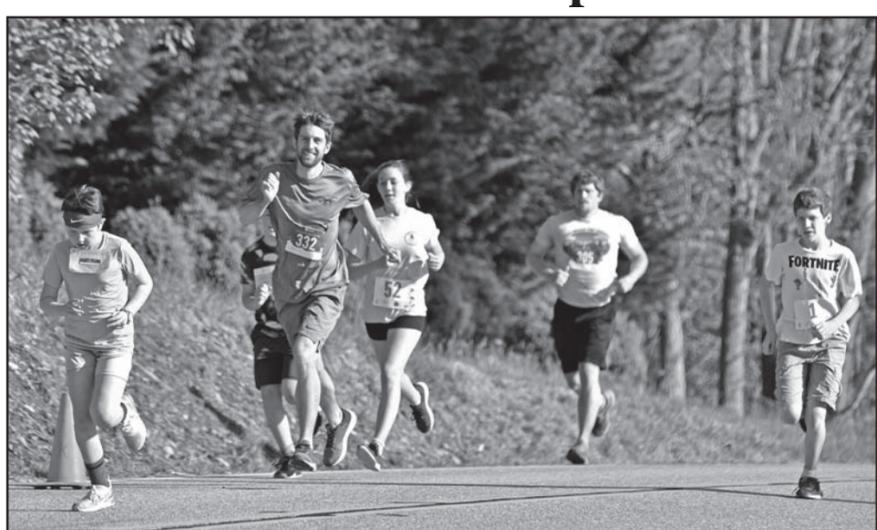
Fannin: Big Creek, Hempton Creek, Hothouse Creek, Rock Creek, Rock Creek Lake, Sugar Creek, Toccoa River and Toccoa River Tailwaters (below Lake Blue Ridge)

Lumpkin: Etowah River, Dockery Lake, Nimbewill Creek and Ward Creek

Union: Cooper Creek, Suches Creek, Toccoa River and Winfield Scott Lake

Note: Information is subject to change. Please call the hatchery at 706-838-4723 for questions. Stay up-to-date with stocking and events through Facebook [www.facebook.com/chattahoocheeforestnfh](http://www.facebook.com/chattahoocheeforestnfh). The hatchery also provides trout for the state. Please contact Georgia DNR for information on sites stocked by the state.

## A Suches Tradition: The Run Above the Clouds makes triumphant return



Runners of all ages and skill levels pass the Suches General Store, just south of the starting-line located near Woody Gap School. Next week's *North Georgia News* will feature results and additional photos from Saturday's race, which attracted 100-plus participants in the first Run Above the Clouds since 2019. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Youth Hike to Preacher's Rock



Time is running out! Register for the next hike to Preacher's Rock on May 7th guided by the one and only Dustin Rogers!

This hike will be 2 miles round trip. Kids age 7-13. Parent or legal guardian must accompany child.

Space is limited to 10 kids along with parent. (20) You must register at the Union County Sports Center by May 3rd. \$5.00 Bring sack lunch and wear appropriate shoes, no flip flops. Don't miss out on the beauty of Union County!