

# Sports

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## Track: Lady Panthers crowned Region 7-AA champions

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
[sports@nganews.com](mailto:sports@nganews.com)

**Dalton** - The Union County ladies took home the Region 7-AA title last week at Coahulla Creek High School, while the men finished just short of the sweep, coming in second.

Leading the way for the girls were gold medal performances by junior Lola Hunter, who finished the 3200M race in 12 minutes, 23.30 seconds. The 4x800 relay team placed first with a time of 11:11.23.

In men's action, senior Jacob Turner won the region in the 110 hurdles, posting a time of 16.24. Senior Jack Wilson took first in the discus with a throw of 145 feet, 1 inch. Sophomore Jackson Totherow earned gold in the shot put with a toss of 47 feet, 3 inches.

Girls' runner-up performances included junior Ava Lloyd (100M, 12.70), sophomore Ava Klein (200M, 26.65), Hunter (1600M, 5:42.17), the 4x100 relay team (51.16), the 4x200 relay team (1:53.11), the 4x400 relay team (4:40.72), junior Leslie Rash (discus, 94-3), and sophomore Sofia Foster (shot put, 34-8.5).

Boys' silver medals went to sophomore Arthur Bowman (1600M, 4:48.79), sophomore Oliver Hillman (3200M, 10:49.80), and the 4x800 relay team (9:02.77).

Ladies earning bronze at the region meet were Lloyd (200M, 27.11), Hunter (800M, 2:40.28), freshman Gracie Miller (high jump, 4-8), and Rash (shot put, 32-11.5).

Men taking home third place included freshman Cole Brown (400M, 53.05), sophomore Andrew Nushtayev (800M, 2:14.08), Hillman (1600M, 5:02.10), Bowman (3200M, 10:51.80), and junior Daniel McPhee (triple jump,



The Union County girls track and field team edged Rockmart for the Region 7-AA title last week at Dalton's Coahulla Creek High School. Photo/UCHS

41-0). Fourth-place finishers included junior Avery Hussion (1600M, 3200M), Regan McCarter (100 hurdles), Miller (300 hurdles), Lloyd (long jump), Foster (discus), Noah James Payne (1600M, 3200M), Anthony Heredia (110 hurdles), and Christian Mullins (triple jump). Fortunately, all fifth-place finishers are underclassmen and will get another shot to qualify for sectionals in their respective events.

Other Union athletes that qualified for the region finals included Sara Patterson (100 hurdles); Katie Payne (300 hurdles, triple jump); Kate Barrett (1600M, 3200M); Adelyn Cisneors (long jump); Nomi Nelson (triple jump); Tanner (discus, shot put); Tyler Juracka (300 hurdles, high jump); men's 4x200 relay; Gunnar Ingram (shot put, discus).

Union County's top four individual performers from the region meet advance to Saturday's sectional meet at Decatur's Buck Godfrey Stadium. The action gets underway at 10:30 a.m. with field events, and the 1600M race will begin at 10:45 a.m. The next track event, the 4x800 relays, won't begin until all field events conclude at approximately 2:30 p.m.

The top eight qualifiers from sectionals will advance to the State Championships on May 9-10 at East Jackson.



Senior Jack Wilson won the Region 7-AA championship in the discus throw. Photo/UCHS



The girls 4x800 relay team of Avery Hussion, Lola Hunter, Kate Barrett and Averie Tanner helped put Union County over the top in the team totals last week at Coahulla Creek. Photo/UCHS

## NASCAR's Ross Chastain joins GOHS to teach safe driving at UCHS

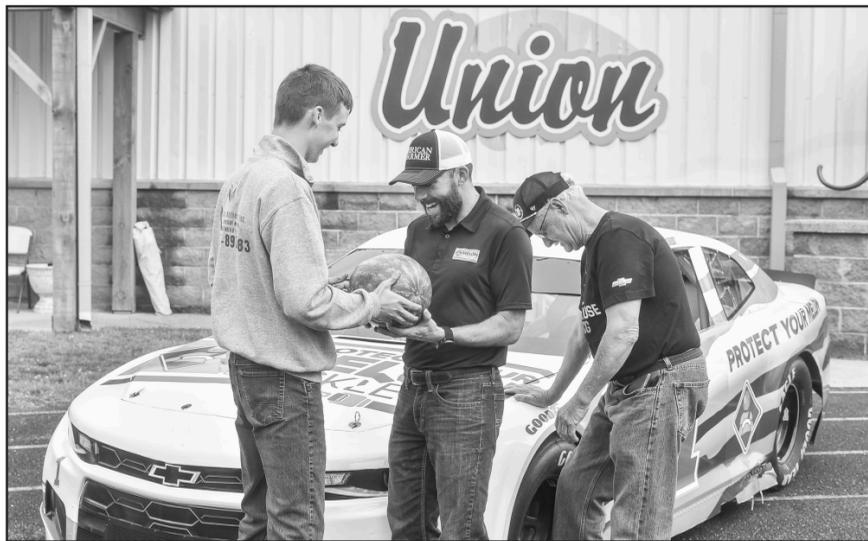
The students at Union County High School had a great time learning about safe driving last Friday, April 25 at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium, courtesy of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS).

Additionally, students were able to meet NASCAR driver, Ross Chastain and hear him speak on the importance of "Protecting Your Melon" and always buckling up when inside a vehicle. The students also enjoyed the GOHS Rollover Simulator, the seat belt convincer and the impaired driving simulator provided by the Twiggs County Sheriff's Office.

Chastain, a native of Alva, Florida, grew up growing watermelons on his family's farm. Now 31, Chastain competes full-time in the NASCAR Cup Series for Trackhouse Racing in the No. 1 Chevrolet. Over the last four seasons, Chastain has logged 200+ starts in NASCAR's top three national touring series, earning him the title of NASCAR's busiest driver.

Chastain's first victory in NASCAR competition came in 2018 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, auditioning for Chip Ganassi Racing and sweeping all three stages in spectacular fashion.

He has since won six more races in the NASCAR Xfinity Series and NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series. In 2019 Chastain finished second in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series championship standings and won the most popular driver award.



UCHS student Luke Moody presents NASCAR driver Ross Chastain with a watermelon. Chastain, an eighth-generation watermelon farmer, is known for smashing a watermelon after each win. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County Sheriff Shawn Dyer (left) joined representatives from the GOHS to teach safe driving habits. Photo/Todd Forrest



Students on the 'Seat Belt Convincer' machine, which simulated a 5-7 mph crash. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Rollover Simulator demonstrates what happens when a vehicle flips. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Baseball: Stephens Co. survives after Union takes series opener

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

**Toccoa** - Union County (15-14) dropped the second and third games at Stephens County on Saturday, following a game-one victory on Friday night in the best-of-three first-round series of the Class AA State Tournament.

The Panthers picked up their first playoff win since 2016 on Friday night, churning out 11 hits during a 9-3 victory that included a four-hour weather delay. Before the stoppage, junior Eli Gwynn allowed two runs and four hits over five innings. Colten Gibson converted the save opportunity, entering after the delay and tossing the final two frames.

Maddox Patton and Gunnar Akins set the tone offensively from the top two spots in the lineup, combining for six hits, four runs and three RBIs.

With the game-one rain delay postponing the second contest of the Friday night doubleheader, Union County returned to Toccoa on Saturday and squandered a pitching gem from Akins during a 1-0 loss.

Stephens County sent the Panthers packing by a 10-0 final in game three, scoring five runs in the second and five in the fifth.

Patton was unavailable to pitch during the series due to a hand injury suffered during the regular season finale at Rockmart.

Union County ends the year with 15 wins -- the most since 2016 when the Panthers reached the Elite Eight after winning their second straight region title.

**Panthers 9, Stephens County 3 (Game 1)** - Gwynn kept the Indians in check for five innings, allowing Union County to race ahead 5-2 before severe thunderstorms rolled through the area.

Following a four-hour delay, play resumed just shy of 11 p.m., and the Panthers added one run in the sixth and three in the seventh.

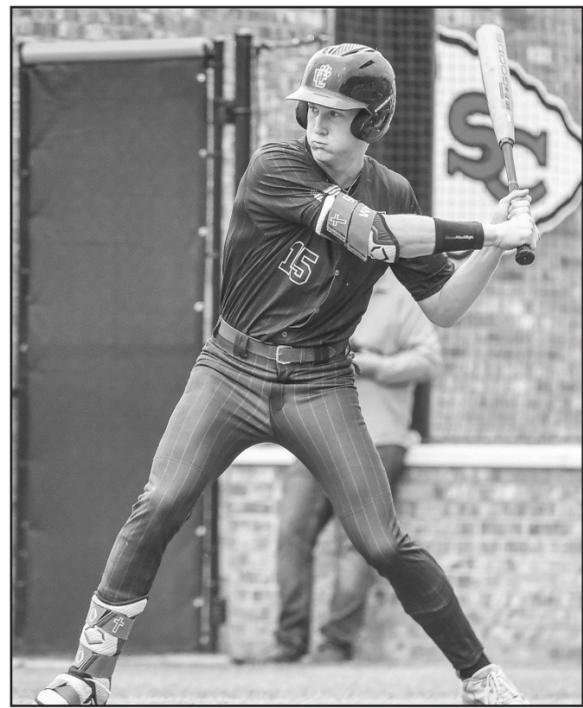
Union stranded two in the first and left another aboard in the second before finally breaking through for three in the third. During the inning, the Panthers were on the verge of stranding three more after Gwynn was plunked, Patton singled and Akins walked -- all with nobody out.

A pop-up and a strikeout brought Bo Brown to the plate with two down and the bags still packed, and the junior catcher delivered, lining a two-run single to right. One pitch later, Bentley Rich plated the third run with a base hit to left.

Stephens got one back via a wild pitch during the bottom half, but Union County answered with two in the fourth. Union's fourth began just like the third with Gwynn getting hit by a pitch. Patton followed with a double and Akins' sacrifice fly brought home Gwynn.



Junior Eli Gwynn helped deliver Union County its first postseason victory in nine years with a stellar game-one performance at Stephens County last Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Gunnar Akins went 3 for 3 in game one but suffered a tough-luck 1-0 loss on the mound in game two. Photo/Todd Forrest



Bo Brown fires up his team after the junior catcher drove in the first two runs of the game on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lane Haney's single to center tacked on another run, spotting the visitors a 5-1 advantage.

With one down and one run already in during the bottom half, Stephens loaded the bags but Gwynn induced a grounder to shortstop Hayden Hughes for a 6-4-3 double play, sending Union into the ensuing rain delay on a high note.

When play eventually resumed, Patton and Akins recorded back-to-back singles, allowing Haney's groundout to score Patton.

Gibson took the ball in the bottom of the sixth and recorded two quick outs before a single and a walk had the Indians in business. But Gibson escaped, getting Stephens County to chase a 1-2 breaking ball to end the frame.

Tracy was plunked to begin Union's three-run seventh and Gibson's double brought him home. Gwynn was hit for the third time, and two batters

later, Akins' two-run single opened up a 9-2 lead.

An error, two walks and a wild pitch allowed Stephens to manufacture a run in the bottom of the seventh.

Akins finished 3 for 3 with three RBIs, a run and a walk. Patton went 3 for 5 including a double and three runs. Haney drove in two during a 2-for-5 day; Brown went 1 for 3 with two RBIs and a walk; Rich drove in a run while going 1 for 4; Gibson finished 1 for 1 with an RBI double and a run.

Gwynn was hit on three occasions and scored each time; Hughes drew a walk and Chetley Cox stole a base.

**Panthers 0, Stephens County 1 (Game 2)** - Akins allowed one unearned run and six hits over seven innings, but the offense could only muster four singles and a walk.

Akins went 2 for 2 at the plate; Hughes and Rich each finished 1 for 3; Patton worked a base on balls.



Junior Maddox Patton scored three times during a three-hit game on Friday in Toccoa. Photo/Todd Forrest

Stephens loaded the bases with one away in the first inning but Akins navigated his way out of trouble. Union County left two aboard in the bottom half courtesy of an error off the bat of Haney and a Hughes single.

Two Indians singles went to waste in the third, and the Panthers followed suit after Patton's walk and Akins' base hit.

A fourth-inning error came back to haunt Union County when Stephens County manufactured a run via a single and a run-scoring bunt.

Rich's base hit in the fourth and Akins' sixth-inning single accounted for Union's only base runners over the last four innings.

**Stephens County 10, Union County 0 (Game 3)** - The Indians' five-run fifth ended the contest early via the mercy rule to close out the first-round series vs. Union County. Singles from Tracy and

Gwynn was the Panthers' only offense in the Saturday afternoon loss.

Hughes started on the mound and gave up five runs on five hits over 1 2/3 innings. Gibson replaced Hughes and allowed five runs and five hits in 2 2/3 innings of work. Tyler Richards replaced Gibson and gave up an infield single to the only batter he faced.

Brown and Rich reached on walks for Union County.

Stephens left the bases loaded in the first, and Hughes retired the first two batters of the second before running into

trouble.

A hit batter, a stolen base and an RBI single put the Indians on the board. Then another base hit was followed by back-to-back homers, dropping Union into a 5-0 hole.

The Panthers failed to capitalize on singles from Tracy and Gwynn in the third, but Gibson kept hope alive by retiring the first seven hitters he faced.

Walks by Brown and Rich went to waste in the fifth and Stephens ended the contest when seven of its eight batters reached in the bottom half.

## UCHS soccer seasons end at Callaway, Pierce Co.

The Union County men and women both suffered first-round road losses last week, ending their respective seasons.

The Lady Panthers dropped a 2-1 contest at Callaway on Thursday, April 24.

Union County fell behind 2-0 at the break but made it a contest in the second half when Destiny Hill drew a foul inside the box during the 59th minute, resulting in a Kiella Strand penalty kick.

The Lady Panthers end the year at 7-7-1 after combining for just seven wins over the previous two seasons.

The Panthers were dealt a 7-1 loss at Pierce County on Friday, April 25. The only scoring coming by way of a goal from senior Julian Jimenez.

Freshman Brayden Torres and senior Antonio Solorio were credited with an assist on Jimenez's goal.

Union finishes 9-5.



The Lady Panthers suffered a 2-1 loss at Callaway on Thursday night, but the future is bright with the bulk of the roster made up of freshmen and sophomores. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Preseason has begun for The Old Union Women's Golf Association



Monday brought out over 20 ladies honing their golf skills for the 2025 season which starts May 5. The Old Union Women's Golf Association has grown to approximately 50 ladies. During preseason rounds, there are no games.... just practice.

After golf on opening day, Old Union Golf Course will treat the ladies with hot dogs and fixings including drinks. The ladies will enjoy

their lunch and all the camaraderie on the new sundeck next to the clubhouse. Thank you, again, Old Union, for all your support for the ladies league.

For those interested in joining the fun group of ladies at Old Union, the membership fee is only \$35 which includes the Hole-In-One Fund and the Sunshine Fund. Golf on Mondays for OUWGA members will be \$25. Participation in the weekly games plus chip-ins and birdies, continues to be \$4. Typically, after golf, the ladies will patronize local restaurants to continue their fun and laughter. If anyone is interested, please contact Karen at 352-638-3649 or Cynthia at 706-633-7587. (N/Apr30,26,CA



With Friday's loss at Pierce County, Union County soccer bids farewell to senior Antonio Solorio, one of the program's most prolific goal scorers in recent history. Photo/Todd Forrest

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## EXCITING NEWS!

# UFA U19 GIRLS & BOYS SELECT TRYOUTS

**Mark your calendars – tryouts are happening May 24, 2025 at Elan Fields!**

• U19 Girls | 5:00 PM • U19 Boys | 6:30 PM

**Registration Fee: \$310 Uniform Cost: Under 180**

**SIGN UP TODAY:**  
<https://mountains.unitedfa.org/tryouts-mountains>

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** When registering, Make sure to request the u19 team tryout. Any questions contact Julie Ortiz at [junebugscottage@gmail.com](mailto:junebugscottage@gmail.com).

DON'T MISS YOUR CHANCE TO BE PART OF SOMETHING GREAT. SEE YOU ON THE FIELD!