

# Sports

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## Track: UCHS sweeps 8-AA team championships with 20 individual titles

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

**Homer** - Union County track and field used 20 individual Region Championships to claim the boys and girls team titles during last week's 8-AA Championships at Banks County High School.

Senior Lexi Sisum was crowned region champion in the 100M and 200M races, clocking in at 13.26 seconds and 27.73, respectively. Fellow 12th grader Hana Gregory earned gold in the 800M and 1600M races with her respective times of 2:35.57 and 6:04.13.

The 3200M race went to Natalie Payne, who crossed the finish line in 13:37.43. Linley Jones placed first in the 100M Hurdles at 16.45 and Hannah Long came in first in the 300M Hurdles at 48.46.

Allie Brey cleared 4-feet, 10 inches to earn gold in the High Jump and Mia McCombs collected gold in the Long Jump at 15-4.

The Union County relay teams took three of the four girls' races, coming in first in the 4x200, 4x400 and 4x800 events. The guys also battled .750 in the relay events, matching the ladies with gold in the 4x200, 4x400 and 4x800 races.

In the boys' 400M race, Zander Rotko finished first with a time of 51.10; Hunt-



The Region 8-AA Champion Union County boys track and field team at the conclusion of last week's Region 8-AA Championship meet at Banks County High School. Photo courtesy of Shannon Brey

er Hartzog paced the 800M field, crossing the finish line at 1:58.80.

Runner-up finishers included Rotko in the 200M dash and Hartzog in the 1600M race. Kanon Abercrombie placed second in the 110M Hurdles and Tyler McBride took home silver in the Shot Put.

On the girls' side, Han-

nah Long came in second in the 200M race and Noel Hyatt earned a runner-up finish in the 400M dash. Brey placed second in both the 800M and 1600M, Lydia Wagner was second in the 3200M race, while Jones picked up silver in the 300M Hurdles and the Triple Jump.

Hyatt was third in the

400M race and Ellie Adams picked up bronze in the 800M event. Other third-place finishers were Katie Byers (High Jump), Jones (Long Jump), Long (100M Hurdles), Payne (1600M) and the 4x100 relay team. Rounding out the girls' State qualifiers was the fourth-place finish of Long in the 100M Hurdles.



Union County finished 1-2-3 in the 1600M girls race. (L-R) Natalie Payne, Hana Gregory and Allie Brey. Photo courtesy of Shannon Brey

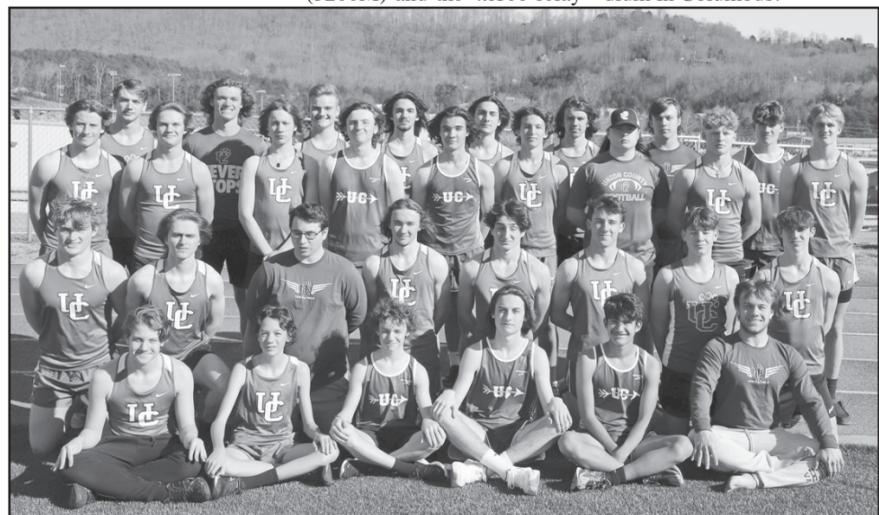
Coming in third for the Union County boys was Abercrombie (300M Hurdles), Rotko (100M) and Trace Wright (400M). Coming in fourth place were Gage Barnes (Discus and Shot Put), Tyler Grasty (Triple Jump), Benton Gregory (800M and 1600M), Sam Page (300M Hurdles), Noah Payne (3200M) and the 4x100 relay

team. The State Sectionals get underway on May 7 in Mableton at the Pace Academy Riverview Athletics Complex, located at 5700 Riverview Road, Mableton, Ga.

The Class AA State Championships are scheduled for May 12-14 at Kinnett Stadium in Columbus.



UCHS girls track and field team



UCHS boys track and field team

## Soccer: Panthers, Lady Panthers postseason run ends with home losses

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

Both Union County programs suffered losses last week, ending their respective seasons in the Class AA Elite Eight.

The Lady Panthers allowed two late goals to eighth-ranked Fitzgerald after rallying to equalize at 2-2 during the waning moments of the first half. Later in the week, the Union men couldn't recover from a 1-0 deficit at the intermission, giving up two second-half goals in a 3-0 loss to No. 7 Coosa.

**Lady Panthers 2, No. 8 Fitzgerald 4** - Freshman Ariel McCarter accounted for both Union County goals, but it wasn't enough as the Purple Hurricanes broke the 2-2 tie in the 74th minute, then tacked on an insurance goal in the 77th to escape with the 4-2 victory.

McCarter kicked off the scoring in the 8th minute, putting back an Avery Murray free-kick after the keeper failed to collect the shot, allowing McCarter to deflect the rebound into the net.

The Union goal was three minutes removed from a momentum-changing play by sophomore goalkeeper Kyra



Surrounded by a sea of white jerseys, freshman Ariel McCarter plays a corner kick off her body to tie the score at 2-2. Photo/Todd Forrest

McKechnie, who turned away a penalty kick in the 5th minute. The Lady Panthers used the defensive spark to go on the attack and break the scoreless tie moments later.

Fitzgerald equalized in the 10th and grabbed the lead during the 25th minute following a

McKechnie save in the 24th.

McKechnie denied Fitzgerald in the 34th and with under a minute to play before the half, the defense swatted Murray's corner-kick out of bounds, awarding Union County one final try with under 10 seconds on the clock.



Senior midfielder Kyler Robbins looks for an opening vs. Coosa during his final soccer match as a Panther. Photo/Todd Forrest

This time, Murray's corner kick found the torso of a leaping McCarter in the penalty area and deflected into the net with 6 seconds remaining before the break.

McCarter rejected seven shots to keep the score tied during the second half, and meanwhile,

Union County failed to convert three corner kicks over that same span. But after two acrobatic stops by McKechnie in the 73rd minute, Fitzgerald broke the 2-2 tie during the 74th.

The Lady Panthers hopes of one final equalizer suffered a serious blow when Fitzgerald

put the game out of reach in the 77th.

Unfortunately for Fitzgerald, they suffered a 10-0 loss at top-ranked Lovett in the Class AA Final Four. The Lions and Pace Academy will meet for the State Championship.

**No. 6 Panthers 0, No. 7 Coosa 3** - Union County failed to capitalize on its early opportunities and Coosa grabbed a 1-0 halftime lead via a goal in the 37th.

The Panthers attempted six free kicks during the first 23 minutes, out-shooting the visitors 8-4 when Coosa took the lead for good late in the half.

Union County was unable to convert a pair of shots from the penalty box during the 44th and 45th minutes and Coosa answered with its second goal in the 49th.

The Panthers final scoring opportunity came in the 61st when they missed another kick inside the box. Coosa broke things open in the 71st with its third goal of the day, building a 3-0 margin.

Coosa would fall 1-0 at No. 1 Lovett in the Class AA Final Four, setting up a Pace Academy vs. Lovett championship for the second straight year.

# Baseball: No. 7 Lovett sweeps Union following game one walk-off

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

The Panthers dropped the first two in a best of three series at Lovett following an extra-inning heartbreaker in game one of the Class AA State first round.

The season ends with a 9-20 record, the program's first 20-loss campaign in more than 15 years. Despite entering the first-round set at seventh-ranked Lovett as heavy underdogs, Union County came within two outs of stealing game one, eventually falling 5-4 in extra innings via a one-out walk-off single to center in the bottom of the eighth.

**Panthers 4, Lovett 5 (8 innings)** - Senior Lake Hughes tossed a six-inning gem, limiting the Lions to four hits and one earned run before exiting with this team on top 4-3.

However, Hughes issued six walks in the start, driving up his pitch count to 108 and forcing head coach Zach Odom to make a move to begin the seventh. Senior Caleb Towe opened the seventh on a short leash, and following a leadoff walk, Odom called upon Will Duncan to face the middle of the Lovett order.

With a runner at first, Duncan got ahead 1-2 on the No. 5 hitter before ending up in a full count, where he recorded a swing-and-miss strike 3, but the Panthers couldn't cut down the base runner that took off on the 3-2 offering.

After a first-pitch strike on the ensuing batter, a two-



Senior Lake Hughes departed last week's game one loss at Lovett with a 4-3 lead following a 108-pitch outing. Photo/Todd Forrest

base passed ball allowed Lovett to knot the score at 4-4 before Duncan induced a fly out to right field. A two-out single and a Union throwing error on the same play moved the winning run to third, but Duncan escaped via a pop fly to center.

In the Panthers' half of the eighth, the visitors couldn't take advantage of two walks and entered the bottom of the inning still tied at 4-4.

A hit batter and a sacrifice bunt advanced the winning run to scoring position before coming home on a first-pitch walk-off single by Lovett's No.

2 hitter.

Senior Thomas Dyer went 2 for 3 with a pair of runs, an RBI, a walk and a double. Chris Fletcher added an RBI during a 2-for-4 game.

Union County struck for two runs in the first when Dyer walked and scored on a balk to spot the Panthers a 1-0 lead. Later, Tyler Loyd doubled and scored when senior Logan Anderson grounded out.

Lovett cracked the scoring column in the second with a sacrifice fly following a walk, a single and a sacrifice fly. Union added on in the third



Senior Thomas Dyer doubled and scored twice during a 2-for-3 performance in the series opener at seventh-ranked Lovett. Photo/Todd Forrest

when Dyer's RBI double plated Hughes, who reached on a base hit to center.

Trailing 3-1 in the fifth, Lovett evened the score on an error and a bases-loaded walk. The Panthers answered in the sixth with a single from Dyer and a run-scoring base knock by Fletcher.

Hughes worked his way out of a two-on, two-out situation in the bottom half of the sixth via a groundout to first.

At the dish, Hughes and Loyd each finished 1 for 4 with a run. Anderson walked twice and drove in one; Towe walked and

stole a base during a 1-for-3 day. Hunter Fleming also reached on a walk for the Panthers, who left five runners aboard and committed three errors.

**Panthers 0, Lovett 11 (6 innings)** - The Lions jumped out to a 4-0 lead through three innings and never looked back, eventually ending the game with a two-run sixth that built an 11-run advantage.

A Connor Shields single accounted for Union's only hit as Lovett's Will Prigge fanned 11 during a six-inning shutout.

Hughes drew a walk, Loyd was hit by a pitch and

Parker Grisham reached on an error as the Panthers struggled offensively.

Junior James McPherson tossed four innings in the start, allowing eight hits, four walks and six earned runs over 82 pitches. Duncan worked the final two innings, giving up three walks, two hits and one earned run.

With nine departing seniors on this year's squad, the Panthers will hit the reset button in 2023 as they enter a new-look Region 8-AA that will feature Banks County and Union as its only returning programs.

# Cheer: Emily Pollin chooses Shorter University

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

Union County senior basketball and football cheerleader Emily Pollin officially accepted a scholarship offer to Rome's Shorter University during a signing day ceremony hosted by UCHS.

Following the festivities, the *North Georgia News* chatted with Pollin to discuss her decision.

**NGN:** Do you remember what it was about Shorter that first made you consider going there?

**EP:** I didn't even consider that school until I spoke with some [UCHS graduates] that attended [Shorter]. And I always knew that I wanted to cheer, but I didn't want the full big-school experience, I wanted to attend a smaller school.

So I started to look [at Shorter] online and I realized they are a private, Baptist college. Whenever I applied, I listed that I was [on the UCHS cheer team], so the coach [Jason Stockton] texted me to ask if I could come to their gym. I said, 'of course' and I fell in love with the program and the campus.

**NGN:** Have you decided if you're going to be on the competition team?

**EP:** That's still up in the air. [Stockton's] wife, Amy, is the assistant coach. Then they have another coach, Indiana [Kimbrough], who does the competition side of it.

**NGN:** For now, are you



Emily Pollin signs with Shorter during her ceremony last month at UCHS. Photo courtesy of UCHS

going to cheer for football and basketball?

**EP:** I plan to do both. I have a tryout coming up for the competitive team, but I'm for sure on the sideline [for basketball and football].

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

**EP:** I did look into another very, very, very tiny school and their [cheer] program was brand new. Their coach reached out to me and I went and toured the school. I didn't practice with them but their skill level was very low.

I had some other options but I wasn't on their skill level, so it turned out Shorter was a very good fit.

**NGN:** What do you want to major in?

**EP:** Sports management.  
**NGN:** How much of a role did academics play in your decision?

**EP:** [At Shorter], I can fast-track and get my master's degree in four years. So that really pushed me to choose Shorter because I can get everything done in four years and still cheer.

**NGN:** What are your future plans after college?

**EP:** I hope to be an athletic director and coach competitive cheer.

**NGN:** Has cheering in college something that's always been a dream of yours?

**EP:** It's something that I've considered for probably 12 years. Back in 7th grade, I didn't think I had the skill level yet, but

I hoped I would reach that level by high school.

**NGN:** Do you remember a turning point where you realized that a scholarship for cheer was possible?

**EP:** Probably this last year. After my sophomore year I took a very long break and I didn't know if I could get my skills back in time. But then following my junior year, I started to think that it was very possible, so I pushed myself even harder, and now I'm here.

**NGN:** Is there anyone you would like to mention or thank for helping you get here?

**EP:** Definitely all my high school coaches for always being there. Then my mom, obviously, because she's been there through it all with me.

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## Next week: UCHS coaching hire interviews; Area Golf results

Next week's *North Georgia News* will feature an introductory interview with the Lady Panthers' incoming basketball coach, Brad Cochran. In other news, Union County golf wraps up its Area Championships on May 3. The results of the boys' and girls' tournaments will be included in next week's newspaper.

# Run Above the Clouds attracts 100-plus participants in first race since 2019

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

**Suches** - The Run Above the Clouds returned to the Suches community on Saturday, April 23, ending the event's recent hiatus that began with its cancellation in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Approximately 105 runners took part in last month's race, the winner's of each race/age group are as follows.

**Female - 10K**  
20-29: Natalia Yakushko;  
30-39: Savannah Crittenden;  
40-49: Amy Rase; 50-59: Teri Hilchie; 60-69: Allyson Brantley; 70+: Linda Evans.

**Male - 10K**  
14U: Aiden Gilfillan;  
15-19: Ervin Altman; 30-39: Paul Anderson; 40-49: Woon Yeo; 50-59: Thomas Karisny; 60-69: Paul Blais.

**Female 5K**  
14U: Katie Payne; 15-19: Natalie Payne; 20-29: Grace Crumley; 30-39: Christy Dixon; 40-49: Miranda Callis; 50-59: Vanessa Bernstein-Goldman; 60-69: Diane Hall; 70-79: Susan Ross.

**Male 5K**  
14U: Whit Daniel; 20-29: David Echols; 30-39: Zachary Padgett; 50-59: Greg Goldman; 70+: Larry Robbins.

Mark your calendars for the 2023 Run Above the Clouds, which will also take place in the spring. For further details, you may visit [www.runabovetheclouds.org](http://www.runabovetheclouds.org).



Despite the challenging course facing the participants, runners of all ages and skill levels couldn't wait to return to the scenic sights, sounds and smiles that have become a staple of Suches' annual Run Above the Clouds 10K and 5k races. Photos by Todd Forrest