

# Seventh-ranked Cavs limit Union to 8 hits, 3 runs over two games

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

**Hogansville** - The Union County baseball season came to an end after giving up a seventh-inning run in game two of its first-round series at Callaway (18-9) on Thursday, April 29, despite limiting the seventh-ranked Cavaliers to just two singles in the deciding contest.

Leading 1-0 in the fourth inning and tied 3-3 in the seventh, the Panthers (12-19) surrendered the go-ahead run courtesy of an infield single, a hit batter and an error before going down quietly in the bottom half of the frame.

Union County suffered another hard-luck defeat in game one when junior Lake Hughes kept Callaway hitters off-balance for most of the day. However, five errors overshadowed a stellar complete-game performance from the Panthers' left-hander, who scattered five singles while allowing only two earned runs and two bases on balls in a 6-0 loss.

**Panthers 0, Callaway 6 (Game One)** - Cavaliers junior ace Justin Moore twirled a two-hit shutout - taking a no-no into the seventh - to drop Union County into an early 1-0 deficit in the best-of-three series to open the Class AA State Tournament.

His counterpart, Hughes, threw just 89 pitches and took a scoreless tie into the third inning before Callaway put a 4-spot on the board - a near-



Union County High School third-year head coach Zach Odum address his ball club following a recent home game. Photo/Todd Forrest

insurmountable advantage with Moore on the hill.

A single to right field and a hit batter sparked the Cavs' third-inning outburst, while two errors, two singles and a passed ball opened up the 4-0 lead.

Two errors, a base hit to center and an infield single in the fifth helped Callaway extend its margin to 6-0. Meanwhile, the Panthers' offense was unable to solve Moore, who didn't allow a baserunner until junior Bailey Brown worked a seven-pitch walk in the third.

Moore surrendered his

first hit in the seventh when senior Zeke Swartz lined a one-out single to center. Junior Thomas Dyer followed with a two-out knock up the middle, but Moore slammed the door with his 11th strikeout of the day.

**Panthers 3, Callaway 4 (Game Two)** - Hughes finished 3 for 3 with 2 RBIs and Brown went 2 for 3, but it wasn't enough to lift Union County past the Cavs and extend the series to a deciding third game.

Hughes spotted the Panthers an early 1-0 lead when he doubled and later scored

on a passed ball. Meanwhile, Swartz held Callaway hitless until the fourth inning when they pushed across 3 runs on just one hit after a walk and a hit batter put two aboard.

An RBI single evened the score at 1-1 when another hit by pitch loaded the bases with nobody out. Swartz fanned the next two hitters but a pair of wild pitches allowed the Cavs to plate two more runners for a 3-1 lead.

Union County responded with a two-out spark in the bottom half of the frame when a bases-loaded single from Hughes brought home

two Panthers. A six-pitch walk from senior Damien Chitwood and a first-pitch single by junior Conner Shields put the tying run aboard with one down. Later, a two-out base hit from Brown loaded the bases for Hughes, who took the first pitch the opposite way to bring home Chitwood and Shields.

With two on and two down in the fifth, Swartz received the hook from head coach Zach Odum and Mullanack entered and immediately escaped trouble with a backward 'K' - freezing the Cavalier hitter on a 2-2

count. Union County was unable to capitalize on Hunter Loyd's one-out walk in the bottom of the inning and Mullanack worked a perfect sixth to keep the game deadlocked at 3-3.

Brown kept the bottom of the sixth alive with a base hit up the middle and Hughes followed with a two-out walk but the Panthers were unable to deliver a late-inning, go-ahead ribby.

The Callaway seventh got off to a rocky start with an infield single and a hit batter but consecutive Mullanack strikeouts had Union County on the verge of escaping when a two-base error brought home the runner from second.

Moore returned in a save situation during the bottom of the seventh and fanned two Panthers and induced a tapper back to the mound, sending the Cavs to their ninth straight Sweet 16.

In other news, Region 8 Champion Elbert County was the only 8-AA team to advance beyond the first round after the 2-seed Banks County suffered a 21-8 loss to Haralson County in game three.

The Leopards bounced back for a 9-3 victory in game two after getting blanked 10-0 in five innings during the series opener.

Meanwhile, fourth-seeded Rabun County fell 10-3 and 13-3 at second-ranked Bremen. As for Elbert County, the Blue Devils made quick work of Heard County with victories of 11-4 and 14-4.

# Soccer: Lovett denies a pair of upset bids from Union County

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

Both Union County soccer teams suffered season-ending losses to Lovett in the second round of the Class AA State Tournament last week.

The Lady Panthers never threatened in a 10-0 defeat at second-ranked Lovett - trailing 3-0 in the 20th minute and 6-0 at the intermission. A day later, the seventh-ranked Union men dropped a 2-0 heartbreaker at home to third-ranked Lions despite a heroic 12-save performance effort from senior goalkeeper Aaron Helton in his final match as a Panther.

After denying a Lovett free kick in the 3rd minute, Union County was tagged with a questionable foul call when the Lovett striker appeared to flop after dribbling himself out of position for a potential shot attempt. The ensuing whistle awarded the Lions a successful penalty kick in the 9th minute that dropped the Panthers into an early 1-0 deficit.

A potential equalizer from Nolan Bachman missed



Seniors Aaron Helton and Malachi Patrick are surrounded by teammates as they embrace following the loss to Lovett. Photo/Todd Forrest

wide in the 12th minute and junior defender MJ Delatte broke up a Lovett scoring opportunity during the 16th.

Each goalkeeper traded stops during the 17th and 19th minutes, but the Panthers failed to capitalize moments later on a pair of scoring chances when

a corner kick was denied and a right-footed cross pass to Bachman sliced out of bounds.

Helton delivered four huge saves over the final 8 minutes of the half, but Lovett was able to slip a breakaway shot past the Union keeper in the 33rd, set up by a no-call at

midfield when Kyler Robbins was knocked to the turf.

Trailing 2-0 out of the intermission, Helton turned away Lovett in the 43rd minute, just seconds removed from his first save of the half. Following two more denials from Helton, sophomore Wilson Walker

overshot the crossbar when a shanked goal kick left the Lovett keeper out of position.

With time running out, senior Malachi Patrick missed wide in the 64th, but Helton kept his team in contention with three saves between the 73-75th minutes - including a diving stop in the 74th.

The Panthers' final scoring opportunity came in the 77th, but the Lovett goalie iced the contest by snatching a Kyler Robbins shot with an acrobatic diving grab.

While Union County graduates Helton, Patrick, Bachman, Zach Jackson, Clayton Lester, Cort Olver, Reid Baumeister, Sammy Spivak and Noah Spillane, they also return their leading goal-scorer in Kyler Robbins and three players that tallied at least five goals in 2021.

In all, of the 19 players that recorded one goal or assist this spring, 10 will return in 2022. And of the 14 Panthers that scored a goal, half were underclassmen.

Union County freshmen accounted for 13 goals and 13 helpers in 2021, while 5 goals and 2 assists belonged to sophomores. On the defensive

side, Delatte, sophomore Isaiah Ortiz and freshman Seth Rutan will anchor the Union back line, while a deep and talented freshman class should take another step forward as 10th graders.

As for the Lady Panthers, head coach Tim Hunter is thrilled with the future of his program. Not only did underclassmen account for every Union County varsity goal in 2021, but a loaded crop of middle schoolers are expected to make an immediate impact as 9th graders in 2022.

Union County was tied for first in Region 8-AA with Rabun County when senior defender Jenna Scott and junior leading-scorer Melia Whitener suffered season-ending injuries.

Freshman Reagan Covington filled in nicely for Whitener before a bite from the injury bug ended her season in early April. However, sophomore Kaylee Helton and freshman Lara Turner led Union County down the stretch, while freshman keeper Kyra McKechnie established herself as the best stopper in 8-AA.

With Rabun County graduating its do-everything superstar Lara Barnes, the Lady Panthers should enter 2022 as the favorites to return to the top of 8-AA - a location they rarely relinquished during the previous decade - despite the graduations of Scott, Demi Thorn, Katie Baumeister and Anika Shah.

A few of the impact underclassmen from this spring were juniors Savannah Evans and Lorelei Skinner, sophomores Haleigh Helcher, Maggie Payne, Avary Smith-Foot, Madison Torres and freshmen Zoe Crawford, Maggie Delatte and Avery Murray.

Next week's North Georgia News will include the complete interview with men's soccer coach Chris Robbins following the loss to Lovett.

Some of the topics discussed were: The outgoing senior class, the future of Union County soccer, what went wrong (and right) vs. Lovett and more.

## UCHS seniors ink athletic scholarships



UCHS seniors JJ Littles (top) and Hunter Payne made their college selections last week. Both articles, interviews and additional pictures will be featured in next week's North Georgia News.

## Benton MacKaye Trail Association hikes for May 10th thru May 14th

The following hikes are sponsored by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. The current social distancing and health rules are used by hike Leaders.

May 10 (Monday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a difficult 7-8 mile hike Naked Ground, Haoe and Hangover via the BMT and back with possible side trip to Bob Bald off the Cherohala Skyway. We meet at the Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center in Tellico Plains, TN. We will hike up the Stratton Ridge Trail 2 miles to the intersection with the BMT, then go north to Naked Ground, Haoe and the Hangover with its 360 degree views of the Smokies and the surrounding mountains in TN and NC National Forests. For more information, Hike Leaders Brenda and Rick Harris. For more information contact hikeleaderBH@bmtamail.org or hikeleaderRH@bmtamail.org.

May 12 (Wednesday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors moderate to strenuous 7 mile hike on the Fires Creek Trails near Hayesville, NC, following Phillips Ridge to Rim and return. Beautiful Rhododendron and spring wildflowers and wildlife... it's a beautiful wilderness not frequently visited. Hike Leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

May 14 (Friday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 4 mile hike Trail near Lafayette, GA. Maze of large, oddly shaped sandstone-conglomerate boulders atop Pigeon Mountain and a short waterfall trail enroute. Hike Leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

## Tackle Football & Cheer Program Registration at UC Recreation



Registration opens at the Union County Recreation Department for tackle football and cheer May 10th-June 25th. Fee: Football \$100 and Cheer \$105. You may register online at unioncountyga.gov or in person at the Union County Sports Center, located at 519 Industrial Blvd.; 706-439-6074.



Senior Demi Thorn was one of the few 12th graders on the 2021 Lady Panthers soccer team. Photo/Todd Forrest

**Trout stocking sites week of April 26-30, 2021**

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

Lumpkin: Etowah River and Nimblewill Creek

Union: Cooper Creek, Suches Creek and Ward Creek

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. The hatchery also provides trout for the state. Please contact Georgia DNR for information on sites stocked by the state. NTMay5:216JCA