

Sports

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Track and field: Union qualifies 14 for State Championships

By Todd Forrest
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Mableton - Union County athletes qualified 14 times for this week's Class AA State Championships by placing among the top eight at last Saturday's State Sectional meet at Pace Academy's Riverview Athletic Complex.

Headlining the Panthers' day was a first-place performance by the men's 4x800 relay team, turning in a time of 8 minutes, 31.47 seconds.

Union County won the 4x800 handily, defeating second-place Heard County, who finished at 8:34.44, by nearly 3 seconds.

The men's 4x400 squad posted a runner-up performance with a time of 3:32.28 -- two seconds back of first-place Pace Academy. The Union women picked up a silver medal in the 4x800 event, clocking in at 10:53.37. Pace Academy pulled away from the field with a time of 10:21.242.

Other runner-up finishes included the men's 4x400 team at 3:32.28 and sophomore Zander Rotko, who crossed the finish line in 51.44 in the 400M race, less than four-tenths of a second back (51.05) of Pace Academy senior Justin Bowick.

Kanon Abercrombie (110M Hurdles) and Hunter Hartzog (800M) added a pair of bronze medal performances, clocking in at 16.48 and 1:59.33, respectively.



Members of Union County's 4x400 and 4x800 relay teams: Freshman Noel Hyatt, senior Allie Brey, senior Hana Gregory and junior Ellie Adams. Photo/Shannon Brey

Allie Brey placed fifth in the high jump, clearing 4-feet, 8 inches; Hana Gregory came in fifth with a time of 2:34.07 in the 800M race, and Ellie Adams finished one spot back in sixth, finishing in 2:35.14. Brey came in eighth at 2:38.46.

Other top-six finishes included the men's 4x200

team, who crossed the line at 1:34.82.

The women's 4x400 team placed seventh with a time of 4:28.76, and rounding out the state qualifiers was eighth-place Linfiers Jones in the 300M Hurdles (50.01).

Four Panthers just missed a spot at State by coming in ninth

at sectionals: Benton Gregory (800M), Tyler McBride (Shot Put), Natalie Payne (1600M) and Lydia Wagner (3200M).

Noel Hyatt (400M) and Jones (100M Hurdles; Long Jump) turned in top-10 finishes. Abercrombie (300M Hurdles), Mia McCombs (Long Jump) and Payne (3200M) placed



Union County sophomore Zander Rotko finished less than four-tenths of a second behind first place in the 400M race, ending the day as one of the team's four runner-up performances at last weekend's Sectional meet. Photo/submitted

11th.

The women's 4x100 and 4x200 teams, along with Lexi Sisum (200M) each finished 12th. Sisum also placed 13th in the 100M dash. Gage Barnes (Discus), Tyler Gasty (Triple Jump) and Sam Page (300M Hurdles) came in 14th. Barnes turned in a 16th place finish

in the Shot Put and the men's 4x100 team ended its race in 15th.

The State Championships will begin at 11 a.m. Thursday at Kinnett Stadium in Columbus. However, Union County won't see any action until 1 p.m. when the girls' High Jump event gets underway.

Getting to know incoming girls basketball coach Brad Cochran

By Todd Forrest
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Union County High School announced the hiring of its new Lady Panthers basketball coach, Brad Cochran, following his approval at last month's Board of Education meeting.

A 2003 graduate of North Hall High School, Cochran has spent the last seven seasons as the assistant women's basketball coach at Piedmont University. Prior to coaching in Demorest, Cochran served as an assistant at Lakeview Academy where he worked under Georgia high school coaching legend, Seth Vining.

As a player, Cochran earned all-region honors as a senior at North Hall. After high school, he played collegiately at Middle Georgia, North Georgia and Wallace State before graduating from Shorter in 2013.

Cochran also played with Torneo Decembrino in Mexico in 2009.

Recently, the *North Georgia News* reached out to Cochran to offer the new coach an opportunity to introduce himself to the community.

NGN: What was it about the Union County job that attracted you in the very beginning, or was that your first impression??

BC: Really, it was just how welcoming everyone was. Then I met with the team and they seem like a great group of girls.

NGN: What did you know about the basketball program before you applied?

BC: While I was at Piedmont, I recruited a few girls from Union County, but it was never anything serious. We had them on campus a few times and I remember watching them play and thinking they were good enough to play for [Piedmont]. But other than that, I didn't know a whole lot about the program.

NGN: Have you had a chance to tour the school or fa-



Brad Cochran with family

miliarize yourself with the area?

BC: Yes, I've been able to tour the school and I also came up one night just to get a sense of the area.

NGN: You've been at Piedmont for seven years but you also have some experience coaching high school, is that correct?

BC: I actually did two stints at Lakeview, one coaching the boys and another coaching the girls. I was able to work under Hall of Fame coach Seth Vining at Lakeview and we became really close and I consider him a mentor.

At the time, I hadn't finished my degree and [Vining] encouraged me to go back to school so I could [further my coaching career]. I had one year of eligibility left, so I emailed Shorter and they let me try out and I made the team. So I left Lakeview after the 2012 season and went and played at Shorter while I finished my degree.

Then I went back to

Lakeview and coached on the girls' side.

NGN: Speaking of Vining, that's a nice segue into my next question, which was going to ask you about who you would consider your coaching influences?

BC: Wow. Coach Vining, most definitely. But another one of my biggest ones is [Piedmont women's head coach Jamie] Purdy because I was with her for so long. There's so many lessons she has taught me, not only with basketball, but with coaching females. Having that time with her is going to make this new transition so much easier than if I were coming from a guys team.

Another one is [Lakeview head girls coach] John Carrick. I talked to him today. I called him to pick his brain about a few things. He's always been there, just a phone call away. He coached at Georgia College for 27 years before coming to Lakeview and has given me valuable insight on basketball

and coaching girls.

I've worked as an assistant coach for 14 years total, but never as a head coach. Now it my turn to take everything that I've learned from those people and put it all together.

NGN: Has becoming a basketball coach always been your dream?

BC: Oh man, that's been a dream since high school. You can go back to my senior [basketball] program and my future plans were to be a coach. I've always wanted to coach basketball. That's never been a secret.

NGN: What do you hope becomes the trademark of a Brad Cochran-coached basketball team?

BC: Honestly, it will probably be my shoes [laughter]. Like I told Principal [CT] Hussion and coach [Mandy] Hunter, I'm old school but new school. I don't like to wear ties or dress shoes, so I like to wear Jordans, and that's probably already my trademark. But as far as basketball goes, I want my teams to be known for their passion and defense.

I just want to instill a foundation that makes girls proud to be a Lady Panther, that's my No. 1 thing. As a college coach, I got to watch a lot of high school practices while recruiting, so I've seen a lot of things from coaches. For example, Buford hosts a breakfast club and 6th-12th grade are all invited with one goal of getting better as a program.

NGN: Before you coach your first game at UCHS, what's something you would like for the community to know about you as a person?

BC: I'm a big-time family man, and I guess you could say I love food [laughter]. I'm a big food-guy, I love to cook. But seriously, I love my family, I love the Lord and I love basketball, that's how I would describe myself.

And you can throw the food-thing in there too if you want [laughter].

Ava Hunter notches 5 points, four boards at All-Star basketball game



Union County senior and University of North Georgia signee Ava Hunter (back row, second from right) scored 5 points, grabbed four boards and dished out three assists during the North team's victory at the North-South All-Star Game earlier this spring.

Julia Morrow sinks hole-in-one



Congratulations to Julia Morrow, who recorded an ace on the Par-3 second hole at Old Union Golf Course on April 29.

Girls golf advances to State title match at Southern Landings G.C.

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Elberton - The Union County girls golf team is returning to the State Championship after sending one individual qualifier (Sofia McNabb) last spring.

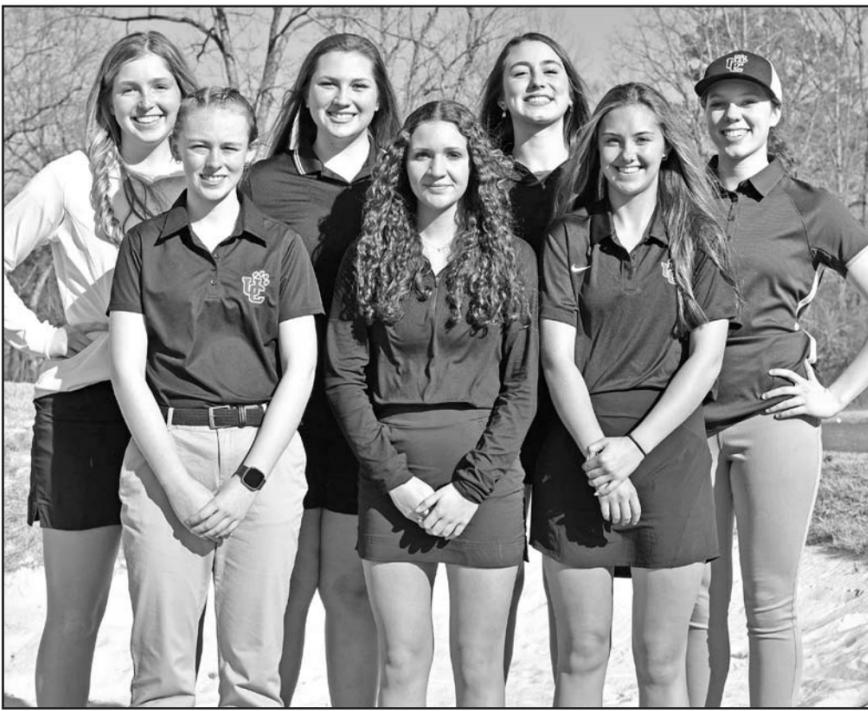
The area match, hosted by Arrowhead Pointe at Richard B. Russell State Park, saw Union County place third behind Lovett and host Elbert County. Leading the way for the ladies was Hope Patton's 110 and McNabb's 115.

Union advances to the two-round State title match at Southern Landings in Warner Robins, beginning on Monday, May 16. The final round will be May 17.

The men placed sixth at a brutal area match that included the top two programs in Georgia, Lovett and Pace Academy.

"I am proud of the way we played overall," head coach Greg Chambers said. "We shot our best team score in several years."

"Our seniors will be missed: Braedon Gay, Kyler Robbins and Locke Thomas."



The UCHS girls golf team earned one of the top-three spots at Area to qualify for State. Photo/Todd Forrest



Hope Patton fired a 110 to lead Union at Area. Photo/Todd Forrest

Spring Football: Week one in the books; Perry pleased with effort, numbers

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Spring football practice kicked off last Monday for Union County football with a record turnout of 74 players, offering a potential preview of good things to come in head coach Micheal Perry's second year at the helm.

The two-week spring session wraps up Friday before the Panthers switch gears for summer break and open their annual June 7-on-7 action starting June 6th at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

"The biggest thing [during the spring] is just having the guys fly around and give a great effort on both sides of the ball," Perry said. "We've got to get a lot more physical, that's something we talk about every day. Last year I thought we were way too soft, as was evident to anyone that was at the Pickens game or the Fannin game."

"[The spring] is really about getting stronger and more physical on both sides and flying to the football. Those are the biggest things that we're looking for and I feel we've made vast im-



Second-year head coach Michael Perry runs through drills with the offense during the first week of spring practice. Spring football photos by Todd Forrest

David Heredia are two guys that have really stood out during the spring. [Heredia] is playing running back some, and of course, he plays defensive end.

"Another kid that's been a surprise is Braylen Rader, who didn't play for us last year. He's playing linebacker and running back, and we think he can be very good for us."

Despite suffering heavy graduation losses in the secondary, the defensive adjustments, according to Perry, are a result of personnel and future matchup advantages.

"We have more skill guys [on the roster] than we do linemen, and it suits us going against the spread [offense]," he said.

One area of concern is at kicker and punter, where Perry is looking at multiple options to fill the shoes of departed senior Kyler Robbins.

"We're working hard on that position," he said. "We're looking at Wilson Walker, who's helping us out with his soccer experience. Zuriel Mancillas is another option from the soccer program along with Ethan McBride and Asa Smith-Foot. who are both competing for that spot."

