

Sports

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Soccer: Union County men Final Four bound

By Todd Forrest
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Union County soccer is through to the final four for the first time in school history following last week's 4-0 victory over the Jeff Davis Yellow Jackets.

Jeff Davis, the 4-seed from Region 2-AA, becomes the third team to see its season end at the hands of the fourth-seeded Panthers, who continue to peak at exactly the right time with nine consecutive wins - three coming by shutout.

"We didn't know much about (Jeff Davis) coming in," Panther head coach Leland Sarrell said. "We knew they would be fast, we knew they would be technical but we never expected a 4-0 win, we really didn't. Brian (Smith) was big and I know I've sang their praises a lot but Tyler (Robbins) and MJ (Delatte) were both big. But our outside-mids might have been our cornerstone today. They were flying up and down the sides and they might have had a few little tweaks but they played through it because they're tough kids."

Playing in the program's first-ever state quarterfinal, the Union men needed only 33 seconds to bring the home crowd to its feet when senior Brian Smith scored his first of three goals.

"This moment tops them all, even (Gordon Central). It's just an awesome feeling," Smith said following the state quarterfinal victory, changing his tune after calling the previous win the highlight of his career. "A hat trick in the Elite Eight is something that I never expected. I just wanted to go out there, keep my cool and just keep trying to put the ball in the back of the net. I know my team has my back and I have theirs and we're just going to keep on going as far as we can."



L-R: Brian Smith okey dokes a Jeff Davis defender during the second half. Smith scored three goals and did pretty much whatever he wanted against a frustrated Yellow Jackets' defense that had no answers for the senior forward. (Right) An already physical game became more intense as the final horn approached. That's when Union County went for the jugular and senior Colby Ives had a hand in the knockout blow, delivering a corner kick assist to Kobi Robbins in the 75th minute. Photos/Todd Forrest

Just over five minutes later, Smith struck again to spot the Panthers a 2-0 lead over a startled Yellow Jackets squad. Union County nearly blew things wide open in minute seven but Smith's shot was turned away on a diving save by the keeper.

Once the butterflies finally settled for Jeff Davis, things started to bog down for the Union County offense. And as the Jackets attempted to impose their will, Aaron Helton, Steven Seiler and the Union County defense picked up the slack and protected the 2-0 advantage until the offense was ready to deliver the dagger.

"We came out and popped them in the mouth right away but then (Jeff Davis) made some adjustments and starting doing things a little different," Sarrell said. "We kept telling our guys what to do and what switches need to be made but that's hard for a kid to make on the fly. You have to remember that these are high school kids. But once we got the adjust-

ments down we were able to score that third goal and break things wide open, then the fourth goal was just icing on the cake."

With desperation mode taking effect for Jeff Davis, the Panthers capitalized on a pair of mistakes, resulting in two late goals. The clincher came in the 73rd minute when Smith completed the hat trick on a perfectly placed volley over Jacket goalkeeper.

"We just wanted to secure the lead," Smith said. "A hat trick is obviously a big deal for me personally but I was just trying to lock down the win and move on."

Kobi Robbins, the hero of the Sweet 16, got in on the action with his second header goal of the playoffs, coming off a Colby Ives corner kick in minute 75.

When looking back at the winning streak, Coach Sarrell doesn't chalk it up to X's and O's or claim to possess a secret formula, it was simply a matter of getting everyone healthy at the right time and moving everyone back to their natural positions.

"About two or three wins into it (the streak), we got our injured center-midfielder (Kobi Robbins) back," Coach Sarrell said. "He was out for about three or four games, some of those during region play, so we had to move a striker into the middle, giving us two freshman (Tyler Robbins and MJ Delatte) in the middle. But once our injured midfielder came back, we put him back up top, essentially switching a striker and a midfielder, and that just set everything off."

After returning to 100% the Panthers' confidence began

to grow which each game, but according to Sarrell, the wins at Social Circle and White County is when his team realized they had the potential for a deep playoff run.

"That was the only region game (Social Circle) lost all season so that was a big one," he said. "Going down there and beating them was what put our name out there but it also proved to our guys that we could beat anyone."

"Another big win was the White County game," he added. "They were a really good squad from a much bigger school and we went down there and took it to them right away. Between Social Circle, White County and the recent playoff wins, now our guys know they can beat anyone."

In addition, Sarrell had a few words of praise for his assistant coaches: Jon Krieger and Chris Robbins.

"I can not say 'thank you' enough to those other two guys that are out here with me every single day," he said. "I actually had Chris Robbins as a coach in high school but I can not thank them enough for all of the time and effort they've put in, even more than me on a lot of days. It's been unreal and they've allowed me to focus on my bread and butter, which is the keeper position."

Up next: The Panthers will look for 10-straight wins when they visit No. 6 Vidalia (14-3), who's coming off a 4-1 victory over 2nd ranked Pepperell.

Vidalia is the champion of Region 2-AA and own a 4-3 victory over region-rival Jeff Davis. The next-closest common opponent is Gordon Central, who split with Pepperell



That's when Union County went for the jugular and senior Colby Ives had a hand in the knockout blow, delivering a corner kick assist to Kobi Robbins in the 75th minute. Photos/Todd Forrest



Getting junior midfielder Kobi Robbins healthy once again was a turning point in, not only Union County's regular season, but in its postseason run, according to head coach Leland Sarrell. Photo/Todd Forrest

during the regular season. Union's semifinal appearance is the first for any Union County sports team since the 2010 softball team reached the championship game. The last men's team to advance to a state semifinal was the 1995 State Runner-Up baseball team.



MJ Delatte was one of the midfielders receiving tons of praise from coach Leland Sarrell following the quarterfinal win. Photo/Todd Forrest

Soccer: Lady Panthers' season ends with loss to St. Vincent's Academy

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The Lady Panthers' season comes to end in the Class AA State Quarterfinals, taking one on the chin courtesy of top-ranked St. Vincent's Academy.

The Saints were on the attack from the opening kick, firing away at the Union County goal. They finally broke through, scoring the first of five goals in the 6th minute. Trailing 1-0 in minute 17, the Lady Panthers attempted to impose themselves but senior Madison Yost's shot was denied.

Union keeper Sadie Underwood turned away six of St. Vincent's eight first-half shot attempts but the Saints' eventually struck again in the 22nd minute to take a 2-0 advantage into the break.

The Lady Panthers had one more opportunity but were unable to cut the margin in half entering the intermission when Yost's shot attempt sailed high in the 38th minute.

Underwood stopped three Saint shot attempts in the first five minutes of the second half while senior Ellie Garrison's free kick was unsuccessful in minute 47.

St. Vincent's scored the critical third goal in the 48th minute, then added a fourth on a free kick in minute 51. The final Saints goal came in the 72nd minute, resulting in a 5-0 final.

Union County finishes the season at 12-3-1, but more



The Union County Lady Panther senior captains prior to the St. Vincent's match: (L-R) Maddie Sutton, Ellie Garrison, Madison Yost and head coach Tim Hunter. Photo/Todd Forrest

importantly, were 7-0 in Region 8-AA after winning just three region games combined in two seasons at the Class AAA level.

The Class of 2019 goes out with two region titles and two Elite Eight appearances while coach Tim Hunter received 2019 Region 8-AA Coach of the Year honors and

Garrison was named 2019 Region Player of the Year.

In other individual achievements, Yost became the first player in school history to score 100 goals while also being named First Team All-Region

Other first team selections were Desaray Patterson and Mattison Ruff.

Maddie Sutton, Anzly Sherman, Isabella Nottage and Allison Fair received second team nods.

Sheyenne Dyer, Sadie Underwood, Sophia Romano and Lorelei Skinner were named Region 8-AA Honorable Mention.

- REGION 8-AA GIRLS CO-PLAYERS OF THE YEAR:**
Ellie Garrison - Union County
Lauren Barnes - Rabun County
- REGION 8-AA BOYS CO-PLAYERS OF THE YEAR:**
Diego Sanchez - Putnam County
Imanol Diaz - Rabun County
- REGION 8-AA GIRLS COACH OF THE YEAR:**
Tim Hunter - Union County
- REGION 8-AA BOYS COACH OF THE YEAR:**
Joey Logan - Social Circle
- Region 8 AA All Region Teams**

1 st Team - Boys	1 st Team - Girls
Christian Williams - Social Circle	Ellie Garrison - Union Co.
Walker Thomas - Social Circle	Madison Yost - Union Co.
Austin Bell - Social Circle	Desaray Patterson - Union Co.
Shane Bolson - Social Circle	Mattison Ruff - Union Co.
Diego Sanchez - Putnam Co.	Caitlin Wilson - Oglethorpe Co.
Brenton Nelson - Putnam Co.	Madison Nimmons - Oglethorpe Co.
Bryan Arruela - Putnam Co.	Lourdes Tompkins - Oglethorpe Co.
Imanol Diaz - Rabun Co.	Lauren Barnes - Rabun Co.
Pedro Silva - Rabun Co.	Morgan O'neal-Blurton - Rabun Co.
Brian Smith - Union Co.	Jessie Owens - Social Circle
Mario Sapanari - Elbert Co.	Marissa Murray - Putnam Co.
Luis Arteaga - Banks Co.	Paula Medellin - Elbert Co.
Matthew Soto - Oglethorpe Co.	Lucy Hughes - Banks Co.
Kevin Ortiz - Monticello (Jasper Co.)	Lacey Rutledge - Monticello (Jasper Co.)
2 nd Team - Boys	2 nd Team - Girls
Parker Williams - Social Circle	Madelyn Sutton - Union Co.
Eric Taylor - Social Circle	Anzly Sherman - Union Co.
Rion Wanek - Social Circle	Isabella Nottage - Union Co.
Elian Aguirre - Social Circle	Allison Fair - Union Co.
Marcos Almanza - Putnam Co.	Stephanie Basinger - Oglethorpe Co.
Jase Burrell - Putnam Co.	Kensea Fowler - Oglethorpe Co.
Victor Hernandez - Putnam Co.	Kodi Eidson - Oglethorpe Co.
Edwin Diaz - Rabun Co.	Ashley Dickerson - Rabun Co.
Levi Loveless - Rabun Co.	Kaitlin Coleman - Rabun Co.
Kobi Robbins - Union Co.	Brianna Neese - Putnam Co.
Jake LeBarron - Elbert Co.	CeCe Wigfall - Elbert Co.
Jesse Elias - Banks Co.	MacKenzie Tripp - Monticello (Jasper Co.)
Kevin Duarte - Oglethorpe Co.	
Drew Schilling - Monticello (Jasper Co.)	