

Sports

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Golf: Lady Panthers ninth at Class AA State Championships

By Todd Forrest
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Blackshear - Freshman Lydia McNabb and junior Hope Patton paced Union County women's golf to a ninth-place finish in last week's rain-shortened Class AA State Championships at Okefenokee Golf Club.

Thundershowers turned the 36-hole event into a one-round affair on Monday, May 22, where McNabb's 100 led Union County to the program's second-straight top 10. Patton's 107 led to a combined score of 207 -- one stroke back of eighth-place Gordon Central and two behind seventh-place ACE Charter.

Meanwhile, Union put 23 strokes between themselves and 10th-place Banks County (230).

Along with McNabb and Patton, Union County senior Ivie Chapman fired a 109, while fellow 12th-grader Saylor Noe turned in a 119.

McNabb's round opened with par at the first, followed by bogeys on the next five holes. After a double-bogey on the seventh, she shot a combined 2-over on No. 8 and No. 9 for a 45 at the turn.

Highlighting's McNabb's 55 back-nine was a bogey-6 at the 435-yard par-five 15th.

As for Patton, the junior opened with a double-bogey



With a ninth-place finish last week, the Union County girls golf team has placed in Class AA's top 10 in back-to-back years. Photo/Todd Forrest

but bounced back with a par at No. 2 -- a 319-yard par-4. After bogeys at No. 6 and No. 7, Patton went +6 at eight and nine.

She logged pars at No. 12 and No. 17 but went through another rough patch during the middle of the second nine -- shooting +8 between holes

14-16. After her 3 at the par-3 17th, Patton collected a snowman at the 340-yard 18th.

Chapman's 109 was two strokes back of Patton for a spot in Union's top-two, shooting a 53 on the front-nine and a 56 on the back. The senior's round was headlined by a 5 at

the 441-yard par-five eighth. She notched a pair of bogeys during her first nine (1 and 5) and four on the back nine (11, 14, 16 and 17).

Noe picked up bogeys at No. 4 and No. 8 to give the senior a 56 at the turn. Unfortunately, a +10 over a three-hole

stretch to open the back nine led to a 119 to finish her round.

Host Pierce County took home first at 153 - finishing 30 shots better than runner-up Athens Academy (183). Jeff Davis came in third at 184, Mt. Paran Christian was fourth at 185 and Walker's 199 rounded out the

top five. Dodge County's 201 was good enough for sixth.

Pierce County picked up first and third individually, with McKenzie Connell's 73 (+1) earning a state championship. Appling County's Madison Taylor fired a 74, and Pierce's Addison Walker shot an 80.

Basketball: Summer practices offer coaches first look at 2023-24

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County basketball teams practiced four days last week, allowing incoming Lady Panthers' head coach Thomas Nelson a first glance at his new squad.

Nelson expects to open year one with four returning starters from last season's 14-win playoff squad, led by rising seniors Kamryn Mull and Lara Turner.

"We're trying to get to a point where [the girls] can leave the summer with some positives they can take into the season," Nelson said. "We don't want to overwhelm them, but I've been extremely proud of them. We had a great turnout. They're showing up with the right attitude, they're working really hard and their effort is top notch."

"In order to change the culture of the team, we need to have the parents on board, and so far, so good."

Meanwhile, the Panthers, who entered the summer looking to replace outgoing senior Eli Underwood, have another opening following the out-of-state move of rising-junior guard Maddox Young. Fortunately for head coach Corey Garrett, the Union men have sixth-man Cade Dockrey (rising sophomore) waiting in the wings and ready to take on a more significant role in 2023-24. The Panthers also receive a boost from a talented crop of incoming 9th graders.

Headlining next year's freshmen are guard Ethan Hogesed and post Jaxon Totherow, who both saw action with the starting five during last week's practice. Additionally, rising-sophomore Vince Marevka, rising-junior Kaden Combs and others saw time with the starting unit.

With the added freshman depth, Garrett hopes to play a more aggressive style of defense in 2023-24, paired with an up-



Head coach Corey Garrett conducts defensive drills on Thursday, May 25. Photo/Todd Forrest

tempo, guard-oriented offense. This week marks the Georgia High School Association's mandatory dead week. The men resume activities with a June 5 practice, then travel to Hayesville, North Carolina on Tuesday, June 6. Union will host Andrews, NC at 1 p.m. on June 7 and attend an all-day camp at Towns County on June 8.

The Panthers travel to North Forsyth's camp on June 12-13, visit Andrews, NC on the 14th and Towns on the 15th. June 19-21 is a three-day University of North Georgia camp; Union hosts a youth camp June 26-29.

The girls will attend the University of North Georgia Camp from June 8-10th. On June 12, Union County will visit Murphy, North Carolina for a play day with multiple teams.

"June is going to be a big month for us," Nelson said. "We're not looking for excuses, just positive results from the team. That's going to be our key. When we show up, we want to play hard."

Another play-day at Murphy, NC is slated for June 15. The Lady Panthers will travel

to Towns County for a camp on June 21. Union visits Fannin County on June 27.

The Lady Panthers' busy summer schedule culminates with a youth camp on June 27-29.

"We're overly excited about the youth camp," Nelson

said. "We're still setting up the QR code so they can register. It should be ready by the end of this week. We have a lot of people coming in to meet with the kids. We're going to try and make it as fun and as positive of an experience as we can."



Rising-sophomore Vince Marevka pulls down an offensive rebound during last week's practices. Photo/Todd Forrest



UC WOMEN'S INDIVIDUAL BASKETBALL CAMP

When: June 27th - June 29th
Time: 9:00am - 12:00pm
Where: UCHS Gym
Who: Rising 2nd - Rising 8th Grade
Cost: \$60.00
 (Includes a Camp T-Shirt)



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YOUTH BOY'S BASKETBALL CAMP

JUN 26 - JUL 28, 2023
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 UPCOMING 2ND - 8TH GRADERS
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REGISTRATION FEE:
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Scan the QR code to sign-up:




12U baseball second at Diaz; 10U Softball begins District Thursday

By Todd Forrest
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Blue Ridge - The Union County 12U baseball team finished second at last week's Ralph Diaz tournament at Fannin County - falling 7-6 in the finals to Lumpkin County in a potential District 7 Championship preview.

The Panthers opened Thursday's pool play with a 4-4 tie vs. the host Rebels, followed by a 9-6 win over Dawson County. During a rematch with Fannin County to kick off Saturday's championship tournament, Union County walked it off with two in its last at-bat.

However, the Panthers were the victims of a walk-off in the title game when the Indians pushed across two in the bottom of the sixth.

Union County's 12U squad returns to Fannin's Tom Boyd Park on Thursday to face Hayesville, North Carolina at 7:30 p.m.

The District 7 Tournament gets underway June 5 at Meeks Park's Hamby Field when Union meets White County at 5:30 p.m.

The 10U baseball team dropped two of three at the Diaz tournament, knocking off Murray County in pool-play before suffering consecutive losses to



Anthony Mederos deals during the first inning of Saturday's 12U title game vs. Lumpkin. Earlier in the day, Mederos delivered a two-run walk-off single to beat Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union's 10U Softball team opens District tournament play on Thursday at Towns County. Photo/submitted

Lumpkin County and Murray -- the second coming in Saturday's championship tournament.

The 10U MAC tournament is at Lumpkin County later this week. The District 7 tourney starts June 9 at Lumpkin County.

Union's 10U softball team suffered three losses at the Diaz tournament. The Lady Panthers will travel to Towns County on Thursday for district when they face the host Indians at 6 p.m.



Union's Gavin Frakes singles during Thursday's 12U baseball pool play action at Fannin County's Ralph Diaz tournament. Photo/Todd Forrest



The 10U baseball team picked up one win at the Diaz tournament ahead of this week's MAC tournament in Lumpkin County. Photo/submitted

12U Earthquakes fourth at Rec Roundup



Union County Earthquakes 12U soccer team
On May 20-21 the Union County Earthquakes boys' 12U soccer team participated in the Rec Roundup tournament in Cumming. The team finished in fourth place during the tournament and had a successful

Spring 2023 soccer season with a 6-2-1 record. Participants on the team were Corbin Swor, Aidan Harwood, Carson Wester, Parker Dillinger, Cannon Robinson, Levi Bridges, TJ Hughes, Alex Resindez, Nate Colvin,

Benjamin Pierce, Vincent Pimenta, Nathaniel Wantland, Riley Livingston, and Mason Bradburn. The Earthquakes are coached by Chris Robinson and Nicholas Harwood.

Local 8th Grade Tropics basketball team finishes season with wins on and off court



The 8th-grade Tropics basketball team is comprised of players from Andrews, NC, Fannin County, Towns County and Union County. The Tropics are coached by Sam Hogsed and Greg Wilson. Photo/submitted

By Greg Wilson
North Georgia News
Sports Special

Our local Tropics recently concluded their three-year journey as a travel basketball team and left coaches, families and friends feeling proud, emotional and hopeful for what is to come.

These boys, comprised of seventh and eighth-graders from Union, Towns, Fannin and Andrews, North Carolina, have worked relentlessly to become a powerful force on the court and have also created lifetime brothers in the process.

They have not only been extremely successful during tournament play, but they have provided leadership and community service to allow for younger athletes to share their passion for the game. In order to grasp the success of the Tropics, you have to look at the last three years on a few different levels.

Statistically, the Tropics started their career by learning the hard way. They played their first season with nationally ranked teams in a North Atlanta League as Covid created a very small window for competitive play. Only the highest-level teams competed. Well, them and the "just out of rec league" Tropics. To put it gently, we got obliterated pretty much for three months. As reality slapped us weekly, there was a silver lining that gradually appeared. First, the boys refused to give up and they gradually became better. Second, they were becoming more of a family and less of just a new team.

The 2022 season came with promise as the same group of friends were back and ready to put in the work. They started their season with a tournament win in the Fannin Christmas Clash and never looked back, ending 2022 with a 19-4 record and multiple tournament wins. The boys were now playing as a unit and were becoming even closer friends.

Now we reach the 2023 season's end with the same Tropics and a completely different reputation from opponents. This squad went from the sheep to the wolf and created a gigantic target on their backs throughout the entire tournament schedule. They were seeing teams at their best trying to take down the "mountain boys". We saw everything from bearded 'supposed' 8th graders to others who were able to legally drive themselves to the games. I'll let you do the math. Well, against those odds, the Tropics went 16-2 with three tournament wins and a No. 1 seed for the gold bracket championships in all 2023 tournaments. Statistically, that's pretty darn good.

Now, from the life lesson point of view. These guys went from being rival county strangers to great friends all while getting pressed emotionally, physically and mentally during sweat soaked practices and pressure laden games. They never forgot the importance of fun as they constantly found time to bond with movies, swim parties and other non-basketball adventures. They found that a pat on the back was always better than a knife in one as the boys always supported each other.

The Tropics also learned to give back for the gifts that they were given. The community has always supported them and in 2023, the team eagerly raised over \$1,000 to provide young athletes from four different counties with new basketball goals and equipment to encourage them to pursue their love for the game.

Lastly, from a coach's and dad's point of view. I speak for myself, but probably for several parents, when I say that there were many times when I questioned if the time and effort sacrificed was going to be worth the rewards and lessons gained. For any others in the same situation, I can tell you without a shred of doubt that if you are blessed with the opportunity to lead a group of young men like the Tropics, don't hesitate. These athletes and their families are now a family and I am forever grateful to be a part of them.

For that coach or parent out there considering starting a travel team, but afraid of the commitment needed, do it. Yes, it is a physical and emotional challenge, but when you see your kids laugh, cry and celebrate with their new lifelong friends as they learn about sport and life, it will all be worth the effort.

Also, as a sidenote from a now veteran travel coach, get adjoining rooms, boys smell after four basketball games. To the Tropics, coaches and families, thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for all of the blessings you have brought me. Your relentless drive and dedication will forever have my admiration and I eagerly await your next chapters.

Union

FOOTBALL

SUMMER YOUTH CAMP

HOSTED BY THE UCHS FOOTBALL TEAM

When: June 13th & June 14th

Time: 1:00pm - 3:00pm

Where: UCHS Stadium

Who: Rising 2nd Grade

Rising 6th Grade

Cost: \$50
(Includes Panther Football Camp Shirt)

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IF ASSISTANCE IS NEEDED TO ACCESS QR CODE, PLEASE CONTACT UCQB CLUB AT UCQBCLUB@GMAIL.COM