

# Sports

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## Union County High School spring 8-AA All Region selections

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

A pair of Union County sophomores, a junior and a senior headlined the school's spring postseason accolades with soccer standouts Trent Baker, Kyra McKechnie, Kyler Robbins and Lara Turner each taking home Region 8-AA's top awards.

Turner earned Offensive Region Player of the Year honors following a breakout 2022 campaign that saw the sophomore forward lead the Lady Panthers to their second 8-AA title and Elite Eight berth since 2019.

On the other end of the pitch, McKechnie anchored the Union defense with nine shutouts, earning the sophomore the title of 8-AA's top goalkeeper.

Meanwhile, the boys team included a pair of POY selections in Robbins (Offense) and Baker (Goalkeeper).

Robbins, a four-year starter at midfielder, was instrumental in the most successful four-year run in program history. As a freshman, Robbins was a member of the State Runner-up squad, scoring the clinching goal in Union's Final Four victory at Vidalia.

After COVID-19 cancelled the 2020 postseason, Robbins and the Panthers won consecutive 8-AA titles, finishing both seasons undefeated in region play. Against 8-AA competition this spring, Robbins scored 16 goals and dealt seven assists.

As for Baker, the junior goalkeeper was forced into a difficult situation from the get-go -- following in the footsteps of one of the program's all-time greats, Aaron Helton.

For the first time since 2017, Union County relied on a goalkeeper other than Helton and Baker proved up to the challenge, blanking the opposition in two of his first three starts. He ended the year with 10 shutouts, six coming against 8-AA competition.

Union's other first-team selections went to senior MJ Delatte, sophomore Zuriel Mancillas and junior Isaiah Ortiz.

Junior William Walker and a pair of sophomores, Eli Decker and Benton Gregory,



Union County soccer seniors: (L-R) MJ Delatte, Kyler Robbins, Melia Whitener, Lorelei Skinner and Savannah Evans. Photo/Todd Forrest



Region 8-AA Player of the Year Lara Turner. Photo/Todd Forrest



Region 8-AA Keeper of the Year Kyra McKechnie. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County baseball seniors: (L-R) Coach Brock Gordon, Logan Anderson, Connor Shields, Thomas Dyer, Bailey Brown, Coach Zach Odom, Caleb Towe, Lake Hughes, Tyler Loyd, Chris Fletcher and Parker Grisham. Photo/Todd Forrest

headlined the second team.

Rounding out the Lady Panthers' remaining 8-AA first-team selections are sophomore Avery Murray and senior Lorelei Skinner.

The second team featured sophomores Zoe Crawford and Alanna Franklin, junior Alli Franklin and freshman Ariel McCarter.

Honorable mention nods went to sophomore Maggie Delatte, senior Savannah Evans, juniors Kaylee Helton, Italia Salazar, Avery Smith-Foot and Madison Torres.

On the diamond, senior Tyler Loyd earned a first-team selection at third base. The Emmanuel signee led the Panthers with two homers and finished

second in doubles (six) and fourth in RBIs (15).

His .329 batting average and .481 slugging percentage were second best on the team, while an .881 OPS was good enough for third highest.

The 8-AA second team featured a trio of seniors: outfielder Thomas Dyer, first baseman Chris Fletcher and left-handed pitcher Lake Hughes.

The ace of the staff, Hughes logged 37 2/3 innings, compiling a 4.09 ERA and a 1.78 WHIP.

Hughes averaged 7.3 strikeouts per 7 innings, and when opponents made contact, the senior limited batters to a 13% hard-hit rate.

Hughes was also awarded

an honorable mention nod for his work as a leadoff hitter and outfielder.

Upon returning from basketball, Hughes quickly established himself as a prototypical leadoff hitter. His .495 on-base percentage, 29 runs, 25 walks and 22 steals (in 25 attempts) were all tops on the team.

Dyer, who flanked Hughes in the outfield and hit one spot behind him in the batting order, led the Panthers with a .333 average, a .529 slugging percentage and a .954 OPS.

Dyer's 29 hits, nine doubles and four triples were each team highs, while his 22 runs were tied for second-best and his 13 steals were fourth highest.

Additionally, he was

Union's most dangerous hitter with runners in scoring position, hitting .410 with a .529 slugging percentage.

First baseman Chris Fletcher emerged as one of Union's most consistent offensive weapons, leading the way with 17 hard-hit balls and coming in second with a 51.2 quality at-bat rate. His .333 average with runners in scoring position was the team's second-best mark.

His 19 RBIs and five two-baggers were third most on the team to go with a .297/.372/.365 slash line. Defensively, he posted a .967 fielding percentage, committing just five errors in 147 chances.

Seniors Caleb Towe and

Logan Anderson each received honorable mention recognition for their 2022 contributions.

Anderson finished second with one homer, 17 walks, 14 steals and six two-out RBIs. His .302 batting average, .429 on-base percentage, .384 slugging and .812 OPS were all top-five on the team.

Last but not least, Towe ends his UCHS career on the heels of a productive senior season, stealing 14 bags and scoring 22 runs - each matching the second best total on the squad.

For the year, Towe slashed .282/.364/.333 while covering all three outfield positions and working 8 1/3 innings on the bump.





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