

Sports

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New coach Scott Williams lays out plans for baseball program

By Todd Forrest
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Scott Williams will take the reins of Union County High School's baseball program following his approval during the Thursday, June 8 school board meeting.

Williams moves to UCHS following a one-year stint at Class 6A Lee County, where he served as the team's associate head coach.

Williams learned about the Union County opening through a friend at Lumpkin County, who informed him of the program's recent struggles along with its potential.

"A good friend of mine, Jonathan Gastley, who was at Mary Persons but is now at Lumpkin County, he gave my brother a call and told him the Union County job is open. He filled us in on what's been going on up there and said [Union] had a rough couple of seasons.

"From what I understand, they needed someone to come in and change the culture. They were looking for someone that wasn't close to retirement -- someone who would invest in the program.

"It seems to me that Union County, looking through its history, is much better than a three-win ball club. From what I can tell [about the returning talent], the baseball-end will take care of itself. The challenge is going to be changing the culture and getting everyone excited about baseball again. I don't know what kind of leadership



Scott Williams



Union County baseball will be under the direction of a new head coach in 2024 after its win total decreased each year following a 14-12 campaign in 2019. Union won 12 games in 2021, nine in 2022 and three in 2023. Photo/Todd Forrest

they were under before, but from what I heard about the incident with the parents at the meeting, I think it's a situation where you have to start from the ground up, and that's what I plan on doing when I get there."

When asked about his plans for bringing a culture shift to Union County baseball, Williams answered, "I'm not coming up here to tell everyone, 'this is the way it's going to be.' But let's start over, get on the same page and build this thing the right way. If they take on that mentality and buy into that philosophy, then I think everyone will benefit from it. That's all you can do.

"They need someone to guide them through this. I've seen championship programs, been around some great coaches and seen how a championship program is run. And once you see that, you can spot the difference between players going through the motions and those playing to win a championship. The guys playing for championships do things a certain way, and hopefully we can implement a few of those things.

"As long as you're do-

ing things the right way, like I said, the baseball-end will take care of itself. Baseball skills are second-nature, I want to instill discipline, a philosophy and a culture, and you should see a distinct difference after year one. I'm not saying we're going to be world beaters or we're going to change overnight, but you will see a considerable difference in the way things are done."

As for on-field improvements in year one, Williams expects Union County to immediately compete for a play-off spot out of Region 8-AA.

"I'm pretty familiar with Class AA," he said. "I've seen the South Georgia powerhouses and been up against some of the [Class] AA Atlanta private-school powerhouses, but they don't really scare me. If we do things the right way and find our identity early, I expect us to get into the playoffs. I want to compete in the region and let everyone know we are here. I want people to sleep on Union County. That's good for us because we'll sneak up on them.

"Another thing I remember when I was up there meeting with Coach [Mandy] Hunter -- she took me into the gym and let me watch the basketball team practice, so I asked her to point out any baseball players. And I'll be honest with you, I was re-

ally taken aback. I'm used to watching these kids down here in south Georgia, so I was expecting to see a bunch of unathletic kids, but I watched [Union] play, and I realized they are pretty good. They way they handled the ball, and they way they got after it, they were athletes. You give me an athlete, and I'll teach them how to play baseball. You can't teach them how to be an athlete."

A 1999 graduate of Crisp County and a catcher by trade, Williams played his college ball at Georgia Southwestern before joining his brother Greg's staff at Lamar County in 2004.

In 2009, Scott Williams moved back home to Crisp County and spent a few years out of coaching when his alma mater came calling. As a member of the Crisp County staff, the Cougars featured a loaded squad that included current Tampa Bay Rays infielder Taylor Walls and future UGA standout Robert Tyler -- the 38th overall selection in the 2016 MLB Draft.

"I walked in my first day there, and I looked at [Bill] Pat and I told him, 'you have a state championship-caliber pitching staff,'" he said. "'You have [Tyler] throwing 94 (mph), another [pitcher] hitting 89 and a slew of other guys at 86-87. Nobody's going to be able to hit this.' And he

said, 'I know, that's why I need your help.'"

Crisp County advanced to one final four and finished as runner-up another year before the program took a slight downturn. However, Crisp remained a constant Sweet 16 and Elite 8 ender until Scott Williams ended up at Class AA Fitzgerald during the 2021-22 school year, where the Purple Hurricanes suffered a first-round sweep to Brantley County. He was also a member of Fitzgerald football's state-title-winning coaching staff in 2021.

Scott Williams spent

a year at Fitz before joining a former college teammate, Wes Shiver, on the Lee County staff.

Lee County finished 19-13 overall and 9-6 in Region 1 during the spring, but the Trojans suffered a first-round elimination by Region 3's No. 2 seed Glynn Academy.

Scott Williams also spent time as the hitting and catching instructor for Team Elite South 17U.

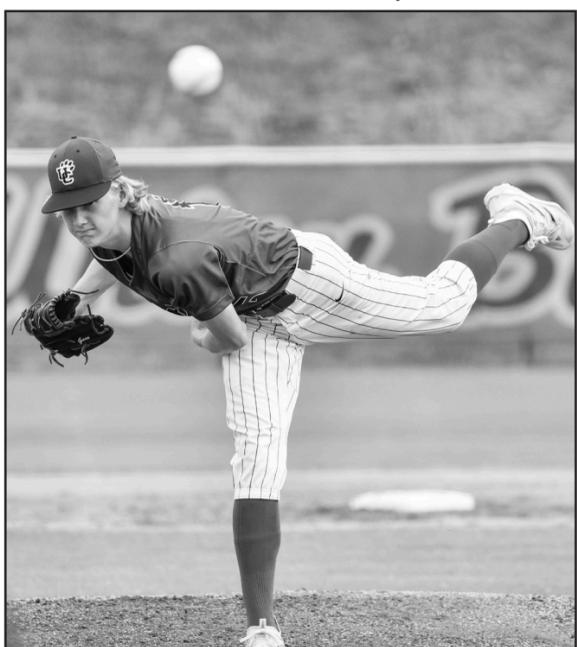
When asked what it is about the Union County job that made the lifelong south Georgia native want to change to mountain-living, Scott Williams cited the encouragement he received from his daughter.

"I'm not with my daughter's mom anymore, and my daughter goes to school at Crisp, and I've turned down a few jobs in the last five or six years to stay close to my daughter," he said. "I went to Fitzgerald, and it was within driving distance, and Lee County was 45 minutes away.

"But when [the Union County] opportunity came along, I had to pray about it a lot. But when my daughter looked at me and said, 'go for it,' that was all I needed to hear. Also, you can't beat the scenery [in northeast Georgia]. It's God's country. I love it. Plus, my mom lives in Gatlinburg (Tennessee), so I thought this was a great opportunity."

Scott Williams will be in Blairsville this week and is meeting the baseball team at 1 p.m. Friday.

"I'm excited to get started and see a lot of potential," he said. "I'm grateful to have this opportunity and looking forward to being a part of the community."



Southpaw Gunnar Akins was one of five freshman that provided significant contributions to the 2023 UCHS baseball team. Photo/Todd Forrest

UC WOMEN'S INDIVIDUAL BASKETBALL CAMP

When: June 27th - June 29th
Time: 9:00am - 12:00pm
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Who: Rising 2nd - Rising 8th Grade
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 (Includes a Camp T-Shirt)

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 (Includes Panther Football Camp Shirt)

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UCRD: 10U baseball to play for District 7 title; 12U finishes as runner-up

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
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As of Monday, the Union County Recreation Department will finish 2023 with both youth baseball teams among District 7's top two following the 10U squad's advance into Monday night's championship game in Dahlonega.

Results were unavailable at Monday's deadline.

Last week, Union County's 12U baseball team placed second at Meeks Park's District 7 tournament, dropping two games to champion Lumpkin County.

The 12U Panthers scored a 14-7 victory over White County in the opening round on Monday, June 5. The following day, Union County couldn't protect a late lead in a 14-8 loss to Lumpkin County but battled out of the loser's bracket with a 10-4 win vs. White County on June 7.

During the June 8 title game, Union County put up four in the first before surrendering 12-unanswered in a 12-4 loss to Lumpkin County.

The 10U baseball tournament kicked off on Friday, June 9 at Lumpkin County's Yahoola Creek Park with a



Union County's 12U baseball team following its second-place District 7 finish at Meeks Park on Wednesday, June 7. Photo/Todd Forrest

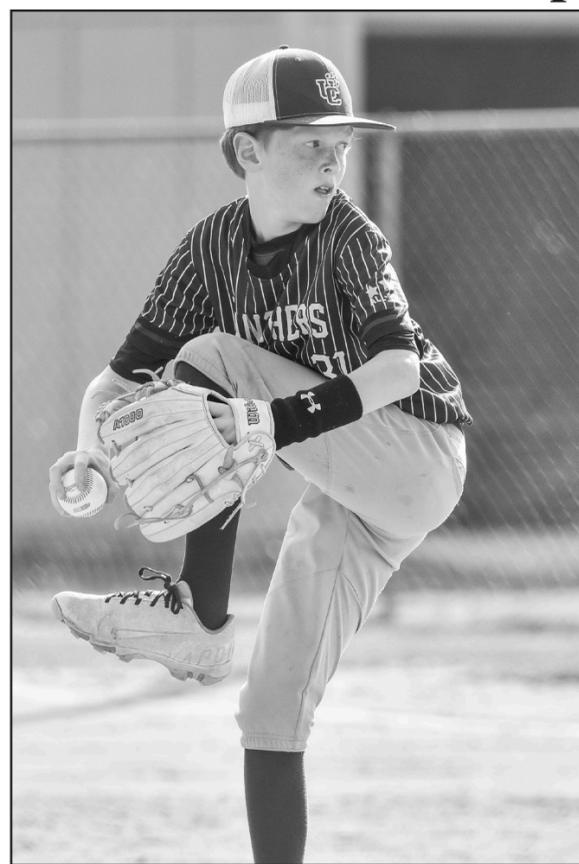
10-4 win over Commerce. During the second game of Friday night's doubleheader, Union stunned the host Indians with a 7-1 victory.

The Panthers returned Saturday morning to edge

White County 11-10, setting up Monday night's championship game vs. Lumpkin County at 6 p.m. The 'if necessary' game would be at 7:30 p.m.

If Union County wins one of those two games on

Monday, they will travel to Jeff Davis County for the GRPA Class C State Tournament from June 20-24. The Panthers would face District 2 runner-up Brantley County at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 20.



Nolan Towery deals during Union County's 10U victory over Commerce. Towery got the start and picked up the win. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lake Nottely: Tour of Summer honors memory of the late Summer Wright

"Lake Nottely: Tour of Summer," Blairsville's newest tour, officially named in memory of the late Summer Erskine Wright, is awaiting you.

Join the Wright Brothers and friends of Summer at the "Lake Nottely: Tour of Summer" Preview. This special event will take place on Wednesday, June 21st, coinciding with the first official day of Summer 2023 and marking of the upcoming one-year anniversary of the late Summer Erskine Wright's passing.

The event is free of charge and open to the public, welcoming everyone from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Lake Nottely Boat Club and Marina located on Nottely Dam Road.

During this exclusive preview, you will be granted a firsthand look into the tour dedicated to preserving Summer's memory. Summer's family members, alongside a close family friend, has rented a pontoon boat for the occasion.



Summer Wright

Throughout the day, boat rides will depart hourly, accommodating 10 people per ride. These scenic journeys will transport attendees to five distinct locations, each integral to the upcoming tour. At every stop, you will be treated to captivating video footage providing historical context and essential information about each site. Preview boat ride

reservations will be honored on a first-come, first-served basis.

To secure your spot, kindly RSVP by contacting jakeg1739@gmail.com.

In consideration of the Lake Nottely Boat Club and Marina, our gracious host, we kindly request that you refrain from bringing outside food or beverages. The marina store offers an array of refreshments and snacks for your convenience. While donations are not mandatory, we encourage contributing to a charity chosen by the family of Summer Wright.

Join us as we commemorate and cherish the memory of Summer Erskine Wright, dedicating Union County's newest tour in her honor.

Furthermore, as a gesture of support and respect for Summer's family, we kindly ask all boat owners with docks on Lake Nottely to tie or place sunflowers to their dock, symbolizing remembrance and solidarity.

UCHS student athletes attend Rhinehardt's FCA Captain's Camp



Pictured L - R: Jerry Helton - FCA, Ellie Adams, Natalie Payne, Tyler Grasty and Eli Sosensky. From May 31-June 2, four Union County High School athletes attended FCA Captain's Camp at Rhinehardt University. This camp helps equip student athletes to better lead their campus's FCA ministries. Jerry Helton would like to thank all those individuals and businesses who not only helped make this camp possible but who support Union County FCA. Photo/submitted

Local Racing Report: Tri-County Racetrack hosts Cumberland Plateau Open Wheel Mods

By Blake Lynch
Racing Reporter
North Georgia News

Brasstown, NC - Tri-County welcomed the Cumberland Plateau Open Wheel Mods this past Friday night. The track had limited/ Crate Late Models, 602, Street Stock, Pony and Front wheel drive.

Street Stock: No.03 Matt Whitener was the winner. No. 32 Logan Exum was second. No.21 Troy Turner was third. No. 77 Erick Ray was fourth. No.01 Jacob Lynch came in fifth.

Pony: No. 88 Zac Cox took home the win. No. 4 Danny Burnett was second.

No.11 P Landen Payne was fourth. No. 10 Shannon Jones was fifth.

Open Wheel Modified: No. 15 Clayton Miller took home the checked flag. No. 18 Brandon Kinzer was second. No. 28 JT Ayer's was third. No. 92 Mathew Hopper came in fourth. No. 5 Billy Palmer was fifth.

Interstate Welding 602: No. 88 Ricky Smith was the winner. No. 44 Bobby Elkins was second. No.56 Colton Berong was third. No. 117 Dylan Beaver was fourth. No. 11 Seth Wimpey was fifth.

602 Non Qualifiers: No. 73 CB McKinnon was the winner. No. 3L Mark Ledford was

second. No. 94 Noah Wright was third. No. 7 Keith Rollins finished fourth.

FWD: No. J3 Josh Deese was the winner. No.32 Shannon Jones was second. No. 59 Matt Cordin was third. No. 5 Shawna Harkins was fourth. No.16 Jake Ware was fifth.

Limited/Crate Late Model: No.4 Danny Ledford was the winner. No. 03 Dante Curtis was second. No. 22 Tucker Anderson was third. No. 25 Jacob Hamby was fourth. No. 11 Preston Crisp came in fifth.

The next race will be June 23 with Carolina Sprint Cars plus the regular program.

Basketball: Panthers wrap up busy week; Lady Panthers attend North Georgia camp

Union County basketball summer camps are off and running with the Panther men wrapping up five days on the hardwood last week.

The Panthers practiced Monday, June 5 before traveling to Hayesville, North Carolina to face the Yellow Jackets and Dawson County on Tuesday.

Union returned home Wednesday for a scrimmage vs. Andrews, North Carolina, then participated in Towns County's all-day camp on Thursday. While in Hiwassee, Union County squared off with Murphy, North Carolina, Gilmer and Hayesville.

Union's junior varsity faced Murphy and Hayesville. On Friday, Union participated in a camp at the University of Georgia.

The Lady Panthers traveled to Dahlonega for the University of North Georgia camp over the weekend. This week, the girls visited Murphy on Monday and will return on Thursday.

The Union men went to North Forsyth on Monday and Tuesday before visiting Andrews on Wednesday. The Panthers will be back in Towns County at 11 a.m. Thursday.



Rising junior Hayden Hughes hit seven 3s during Union's Wednesday, June 7 scrimmage vs. Andrews, NC. Earlier in the week, he hit six treys vs. Dawson County at Hayesville, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

Football: Panthers host 7-on-7 vs. Gilmer



Rising-sophomore receiver Tyler Parker hauls in a touchdown pass from Caiden Tanner during last Thursday's 7-on-7 vs. Gilmer. Union County opened summer workouts on Tuesday, June 6 and hosted Gilmer later in the week. No score or down and distance were kept during 7-on-7 play. Both teams received 10 minutes to run as many plays as possible from the opponent's 40-yard line. Later, the offenses ran plays from inside the 5-yard line to practice goal-to-go situations. Tanner and the passing attack were able to move the ball at will. Meanwhile, Union's opportunistic secondary forced multiple interceptions vs. the Bobcats, who normally feature a run-heavy Wing-T offense and aren't known for their aerial capabilities. Photo/Todd Forrest



Houston Henry (2) looks on as Jude Ellis (13) guards Gilmer's 7-foot center Jackson McVey at Towns County's camp on Thursday. McVey is considered by many recruiting services as Georgia's top post player in the Class of 2025. Gilmer held on 61-58 after Ellis left with an ankle sprain. Photo/Todd Forrest