

Sports

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Hunter takes the reins, becomes first female AD at UCHS

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The Union County Board of Education introduced its new high/middle school athletic director during last week's June meeting, naming Mandy Hunter as Union County High School's first female AD.

On Thursday, June 18, the North Georgia News and Hunter met at UCHS to discuss her new position, expectations for the athletic department and more. The transcript of the interview is included below in its entirety.

According to Superintendent John Hill, it's believed that Hunter will be the first woman athletic director at a Pioneer RESA-district high school. Pioneer RESA encompasses 15 northeast Georgia school systems from Hart County to Fannin County.

A few years after taking over as Union County Middle School Athletic Director in 2010, Hunter went on to serve as a member of the UCHS Athletic Committee, joining Brian Allison, C.T. Hussion and the late Ed Rohrbaugh in its inception during the 2012-13 school year. Different alterations of the committee would continue through the 2018-19 school before Union County hired Banks Bitterman to serve as lone athletic director in the



Mandy Hunter



Flanked by high school principal C.T. Hussion and Superintendent John Hill, UCHS alum Mandy Hunter was announced as Union County's new athletic director during last week's Union County Board of Education meeting. Photo/Todd Forrest

spring of 2019. Following one year at the helm, Bitterman cited family and personal reasons for his resignation, tendered earlier this month. He will remain a close advisor to the Union County athletic department, Hill said.

In recent years, Hunter served as an assistant Union County girls basketball coach, a position she will continue to hold in 2020-21. Hunter will also retain her post as a physical education teacher at UCMS, albeit in a limited role.

Not only is Hunter the school's first female AD, but she follows in the footsteps of her uncle Terry Rogers, who served in the same capacity during the 1980s and early-90s.

As a senior in 1994, Hunter, nee Bradley, led the Union County Lady Panthers basketball program to its first state playoff berth in seven years, picking up a Region title and an Elite 8 appearance

the same year. Upon completing a high school career that included 1,000-plus points on the hardwood and numerous softball accolades, Hunter attended North Georgia on a basketball scholarship.

Hunter is the daughter of Milton Bradley and Kay Rogers - another Lady Panthers basketball standout. She is married to fellow 1994 UCHS graduate Tim Hunter. They have two daughters, Ava (16) and Lola (12).

Tim Hunter is currently the head coach of the Lady Panthers soccer program and teaches at UCHS. He also served as head coach of the boys' soccer and basketball programs and has held multiple assistant-coaching positions during his 20-plus years at the school.

NGN: Do you mind taking me through the backstory on how you got the position? How did you find out the AD job was open? What was your reaction when you learned the job was yours?

MH: After I heard that Dr. Bitterman resigned, I was told the job had not been filled. I have been working as an assistant (athletic director) for a long time now, so after (Bitterman's resignation), the job opening was brought to my attention. So my first reaction was: I would be very honored to have that position.

When I learned I got the job, I was excited, of course, but a little nervous too. But once again, I was just very honored. I'm incredibly thankful for the UCHS administration for allowing me the opportunity to do this. I've worked under a lot of great people who have taught me so much, but I still have a lot to learn.

NGN: Your family has had a significant impact on Union County sports through the years - even your old high school basketball coach (Jim Hughes) served as AD. Growing up around so many influences with deep ties to the athletic department, and the

community in general, almost makes you a perfect fit.

MH: I was raised here, went to school here and taught here, but I still consider this a tremendous honor. I couldn't have done it without everyone who has helped me along the way and will continue to help me because there is so much more that I can learn.

NGN: Has Coach (Terry) Rogers offered you any advice? Have the two of you been able to speak?

MH: Oh yeah. He's just really proud and told me to call him if I ever need anything.

NGN: I don't know if there is any advice that can prepare you for taking over during a pandemic; this is all uncharted territory that you're diving right into.

MH: For sure, this is not the norm. Everybody is just trying to feel their way through this while putting student safety first.

NGN: COVID drama aside, is there anything in particular that has you anxious

to roll up your sleeves and get to work?

MH: I just want school to start. I'm really excited about it starting back up. Even in years past, I always get excited about this time of year. I'm like a kid on the first day of school. But I'm just hoping and praying that we can all come back in August and return to some type of normalcy. I think we'll all feel better once we can get back into that routine.

NGN: What is the job description of an athletic director, and how has their role changed since we were in high school?

MH: Now, with so many different sports going on, it seems like the main thing is just going from one event to another, making sure everything runs smoothly. But first and foremost, I think (the AD) is an advocate for the coaches and the student-athletes, making sure the interests of the student-athletes are put first and taken care of. You also have to remember that the athletic director is in charge of all sports, so I feel the emphasis should on balancing the importance of every student-athlete.

NGN: Is the overall growth the most significant change you've witnessed to the school system and its athletic program?

MH: When I was in school, (the current) UCHS building didn't exist; it was nothing but trees over here. There was no bypass. There wasn't even a road.

When I first began teaching, Union County's only middle school programs were basketball and football. So as the programs grew at the high school, the programs also grew at the middle school, and that's around the time I became athletic director at the middle school.

Another thing is the facilities and how much they've improved. Safety is another area where we've gotten better as the world has changed.

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College signings: Kait McCarter

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During the coming weeks, the North Georgia News will spotlight all the local student-athletes who signed college scholarships during the COVID-19 quarantine.

Between March and June, multiple UCHS students received athletic scholarships with little to no fanfare.

This week, the NGN will focus on Union County basketball star Kait McCarter, who recently signed with Gainesville's Brenau University. After announcing her decision in late-February, UCHS planned a signing ceremony for McCarter in March. Unfortunately, the school closed its doors less than a week before the scheduled function.

The North Georgia News was able to chat with McCarter last week to reflect on her college decision, her four years at UCHS and more.

The full transcript of the interview is included below.

McCarter will join Brenau after four years of significant contributions to the UCHS basketball program. Her potential was evident from the get-go, and as a freshman, she was chosen as an honorable mention on the 7-AAA All-Region team.

Despite playing for three different coaches in four years, McCarter closed out her career with a bang, helping the Lady Panthers win their first Region title in 11 years and advance to their first State Elite 8 since 2001.

One of the most consistent players in program history, McCarter leaves Union County with more than 900 points and 800 rebounds.

NGN: Take me back to the beginning of the timeline: How did you find yourself on Brenau's radar? What do you remember about how they discovered you?

KM: The first contact that I remember was (the coach, Kris Stewart) started following me on Twitter when



Kait McCarter (5) pulls down a rebound during Union County's state playoff victory over Therrell in February. Photo/Todd Forrest

I was playing travel-ball in Raleigh, North Carolina, last summer.

Then, fast-forward a little bit, I was in Atlanta at another travel-ball tournament and he was there. He said he was going to come to watch me the next day but I had to take a college final that morning, so I missed that game.

NGN: When you finally met him, what was your first impression? Did you know right off the bat that he was someone you could spend the next four years playing for?

KM: Absolutely. He was very nice and seemed actually to care about me. He's just a really good guy.

NGN: Did you visit the school? What was your main takeaway from the visit? Was that the tipping point that put you over the top?

KM: After that Atlanta tournament, he contacted my travel ball coach and invited me to the campus for a visit.

I really enjoyed the family atmosphere, and it's a small school so I liked that a lot. All the girls are really nice. They all seem to know each other and are extremely close. That's important to me.

NGN: Did you consider any other schools, or were you locked in on Brenau?

KM: I talked to Augusta (University) a bit, but it's too far from home and I want to stay close.

NGN: What are your goals for year-one? How much do you hope to contribute as a freshman?

KM: I hope to get some playing time and just help the team improve their (win-loss) record any way I can.

NGN: Looking back over your four years at UCHS, you played for three different coaches. What is something that you learned from each one, and do you think the constant changes in high school

College signings: Wright Hogsed

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Earlier this month, outgoing Union County senior Wright Hogsed announced that he would attend Virginia's Emory & Henry College on a football scholarship, becoming the fourth member of the 2019 Panther football team to sign at the next level.

Following teammates Pierson Allison, John Mancuso and Kyle Morlock to the college ranks, Hogsed will attend the private Division III school in Emory, Va., located in the Blue Ridge Mountains between Bristol, Tennessee and Blacksburg, Va.

Last week the North Georgia News chatted with the newest member of the Stinger football team regarding a multitude of topics. The complete transcript of Hogsed's interview is included below.

Entering the 2019 season, Hogsed was considered one of the top offensive tackles in northeast Georgia. However, the 6-foot-4, 320-pound senior suffered a season-ending ACL tear in game three at Fannin County.

Forced to watch the remainder of the season from the sidelines, Hogsed took on more of a leadership role with his teammates. Now, looking back, he believes the injury helped him look at the game from a different perspective, which will ultimately make him a more polished player at the next level.

NGN: After your injury, what did you learn from the outside looking in? Was there something you saw from the sideline that you wouldn't have noticed as a player on the field?

WH: Oh yeah, I definitely learned a lot. I got to help Coach (Wade) Hodges, especially with helping Nathan Brooks, who took my spot. It showed me how much I wasn't focusing on the little things, and there were so many things that I realized I could have done better to help the team.

It really hurt me watching it in the playoffs. I was so happy for us, but at the same time, it hurt me to know that I



Senior right tackle Wright Hogsed during the 2019 season opener at East Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest

couldn't be out there helping my teammates. But looking back, I learned a lot during that time.

NGN: Were there any other positive takeaways from your injury?

WH: I've realized that (my injury) could have probably been much worse. There were so many things that could have gone wrong and I believe it was God that kept those bad things from happening. But it really just showed me that if you want something, you have to work for it. I've had other injuries, but this one taught me how much I love football and how much I want to continue playing the game.

NGN: Has it made you consider the coaching profession?

WH: Yes, it's definitely made me think about it. I still want to major in physical therapy, but if I don't like that, I could see myself going into coaching. I'll probably just play it by ear, but I really do love coaching.

NGN: How often do you replay the injury in your head, wondering if you could have done anything differently?

Maybe cut right instead of left, zig instead of zag, that kind of thing?

WH: Every. Single. Day. I have the video on my phone and I watch it every day. It was my first play at Fannin, but I still played the rest of the half. I think about what could have happened all the time. If I did one thing differently, I could have played the whole season. At the same time, I'm glad I was able to stay in the entire half at Fannin because that was a close game early on before we eventually pulled away.

NGN: What advice would you give to this year's offensive lineman, who have to prepare with limited practice time? During your four years, you protected Cole Wright, and then Pierson (Allison). So, what would you tell the guys this year who are adjusting to a new QB without much preparation?

WH: It's not going to be easy this year. You're going to have to put in a lot of extra work. If they want to be one of the best teams to come through Union County, which they have

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