

Sports

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Football: Panthers second at Hayesville tourney despite inconsistency

By Todd Forrest
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Hayesville, NC - Panthers head coach Michael Perry noticed a mixture of improvement and regression last week during Union County's second-place finish at Hayesville High School's 7-on-7 football tournament.

The Panthers edged the hosts in a chippy game-one victory, outlasting Hayesville -- and some hometown score-keeping -- before wrapping up pool play unbeaten with a smothering defensive performance vs. Andrews, NC.

Union County advanced to the championship game by taking care of Andrews for a second time following the Wildcats' stunning upset over Murphy, NC in the previous round. In the nightcap, Franklin, NC used 16 unanswered points to erase an early Panthers advantage and secure the tourney title with a 26-15 win.

"I was really proud of our defense, up until the last game," Perry said. "They played very well until the last game when they played very poorly."

The Panthers limited Hayesville to one late touchdown in the opener while picking off two passes to boot. However, Union somehow still needed a late touchdown and interception to rally for the victory.

Both offenses spun their wheels in the early going with drops plaguing the Panthers' aerial attack. The struggles resulted in a pair of defensive stops and a 4-4 tie when a Union County interception moved them in front 9-4 at halftime. However, both squads left points on the field with a penalty negating an early go-ahead Hayesville touchdown, and time expiring on the Panthers inside the 5-yard line due to a running clock.

A scoring strike from Logan Helcher to Trace Wright



Senior Eli Peugh celebrates his game-clinching interception vs. the host team during last Thursday's 7-on-7 tournament in Hayesville, NC. Also participating were Murphy, NC, Franklin, NC, and Copper Basin, TN. Photo/Todd Forrest

got the second half underway, opening up a commanding 17-4 margin for Union County on Keyton Chitwood's 2-point conversion grab in the back of the endzone.

That's where things took a peculiar turn.

Instead of Union County securing a 13-point advantage, the scoreboard incorrectly read 12-10 in favor of the Panthers. To complicate matters further, Hayesville answered with a touchdown on the ensuing possession that, according to the scoreboard, put the home team on top 18-12 (actually, Union led 17-12).

Believing they were behind in the final minute, the Panthers went into hurry-up

mode resulting in a game-tying connection between Helcher and Chitwood. Union's point-after try fell incomplete and the two squads were even at 18-18 (really a 23-12 Union lead) with 10 seconds remaining.

With the running clock -- that kept the Panthers from tacking on a first-half touchdown -- Hayesville would have time to get off only one Hail Mary attempt. But after the Jackets' first pass fell to the turf, the clock stood still at 7.8 seconds to play.

The Jackets' second desperation heave to the endzone took less than one second off the ticker as the clock froze at 7 seconds flat. Finally, senior Eli Peugh put an end to the drama

by picking off the third-down Hail Mary throw, awarding Union County the official (23-18) win, along with the actual (28-12) victory.

In the second and final pool-play contest, the Panthers jumped out to a 19-0 score over Andrews before coasting home with a 25-4 win. Union received a bye in the first round of tournament competition but opened slow in the rematch vs. Andrews.

Leading 7-6 at the half, freshman Jensen Goble scored his second touchdown of the game, Griffin Young added another score and Peugh recorded his third interception of the day as Union County pulled away 27-6.



Senior Trace Wright hangs on to a Logan Helcher touchdown pass during the second half vs. Hayesville. Photo/Todd Forrest

In the finals, Helcher found Chitwood for an early score, followed by a PAT strike to Caleb John. Out front 7-0, the Panthers had no answer for the Franklin quarterback, who picked apart their defense, resulting in consecutive touchdowns and 2-point conversions.

Down 16-7, Chitwood pulled down a back-corner fade in the endzone as time expired in the half, bringing Union within three at 16-13.

One defensive stop resulted in the Panthers' only 2 points of the second half as Franklin took the 26-15 win.

"Our receivers were just so inconsistent and that's one area that I was not happy

about," Perry said. "Our routes were not crisp and we dropped way too many balls. It really hurt us. The turning point in the championship game was on our second offensive drive when we had two drive-extending first downs that we dropped. Twice Logan hit [the receivers] right in the hands and we just dropped them."

"But I'm really proud of Logan Helcher, his confidence has grown so much compared to where we started," Perry added. "He's worked really hard and done a great job."

Official season practices get underway Monday, Aug. 2. Union visits Southeast Whitfield for an Aug. 13 scrimmage.



Senior quarterback Logan Helcher, who drew praise from his head coach, fires a completion across the middle during Union County's second victory over Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior wide receiver Keyton Chitwood is all smiles after scoring Union County's first touchdown of the day on a sweltering summer afternoon in Hayesville. Photo/Todd Forrest

Softball: Union County opens summer league by winning three of four

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Homer - The Lady Panthers are starting summer league off on the right foot, scoring three wins over opponents that advanced to the State semifinals last fall.

Playing a doubleheader at Banks County High School on Tuesday and Thursday, Union knocked off defending region champ Banks County each day, and notched a Thursday victory over Class A Public runner-up Commerce.

The week's lone defeat came Tuesday via a 6-0 shutout (6 innings) courtesy of White County.

"At this point of the summer, we're just trying to figure out what everyone is capable of, but I thought we looked okay the first day and a little better the second," said Union County head coach Stephen Mitchell.

Tuesday got underway with a 7-2 win (5 innings) over Banks County in a contest that saw both teams shelve their ace against a region rival.

Senior Tori Tracy got the nod vs. the Leopards and worked 4 innings before giving way to freshman Slone Dyer, who tossed a scoreless fifth.

Leading 2-0, Tracy ran into trouble during the second when a hit batter and an error put two aboard to open the frame. After two more singles, a walk and a passed ball, the Lady Panthers limited Banks to only two runs thanks to a pair of outs at home plate.

Junior Chloe Potts singled and scored after swiping a bag to lead-off the game; Aubrie Banton opened the second with a walk, coming around to score on a Rebekah Chambers full-count, two-out single.

All even at 2-2, the Lady Panthers put a 5-spot on the board in the third when base hits from Emily Byers, Potts and Ansley Collins set the table for Sierra Burnette's double.

Emma Roxbury made it a 6-2 game with an RBI single before coming home on a Kae-Lyn Jones base knock.

Tracy escaped a two-on, one-out jam in the third and fourth innings before handing the ball to Dyer in the fifth.



Lady Panthers players opened the summer by working with local youngsters during last month's youth softball camp. Next week, Union County hosts Midnight Madness on Friday, July 30 to get the 2021 regular season underway. Photo/Todd Forrest

The freshman fanned the first batter on a 2-2 pitch then surrendered a seven-pitch walk with one down. On the first pitch to the ensuing hitter, Dyer induced a tapper back to the circle that initiated a 1-6-3 game-ending double play.

"We played great defense regardless of who was [playing in the field], for all four games" Mitchell said. "We had one mental lapse, but that was because we were put in a predicament that we had not yet [prepared for]. But other than that, we were really solid defensively."

Potts scored twice during a 2-for-3 day at the plate. Collins finished 2 for 2 with a run; Burnette went 1 for 3 and Roxbury 1 for 2. Byers walked, singled and scored. Chambers and Jones each ended their day with a single in two trips.

Burnette toed the rubber in game two and went six innings, giving up four earned runs in the 6-0 loss to White.

After retiring the game's first four batters, command issues flared up as Burnette plunked the second batter of the second frame on an 0-2 count,

then issued a full-count walk. With two on, White County capitalized with a two-run double to grab an early lead.

A Union error to lead off the fourth helped ignite a three-run frame and place the Lady Panthers in a 5-0 hole.

Dyer took over in the sixth and allowed one run on three singles.

Offensively, Union put at least one runner aboard in four of the first five innings but had nothing to show for it.

Banton worked a one-out walk in the first, and Sisum drew a free pass with one down in the second.

The Lady Panthers' best scoring opportunity came in the third when Caley Davis and Collins each singled to put the tying run on base with one down. Unfortunately, a pop up and a fly out stranded both runners allowing White County to blow things open with three runs an inning later.

Trailing 5-0 in the fifth, Sisum walked and Jaycee Seabolt singled, eventually resulting in two runners in scoring position before a strikeout ended the threat.

Potts ended her night 1 for 3 and Sisum drew a pair of walks. Collins, Davis and Seabolt each finished 1 for 2.

"For me it's about good at-bats, and sometimes good at-bats don't always end in runs," Mitchell said. "We're still working on some things but we had a lot of good at-bats."

The Lady Panthers jumped all over Banks County in the early going of a 6-1 Thursday victory (5 innings).

Katie Byers led off with a walk and Collins laced an RBI double to center. Burnette followed with a run-scoring single to left, spotting Union a 2-0 advantage.

Burnette homered with one down in the third, sparking a three-run frame that put the Lady Panthers in command at 5-0.

Seabolt and Georgia Patton each scored during the third; Katie Byers singled and scored in the fourth.

"Banks County's best pitcher wasn't there and she is the equalizer," Mitchell said. "But we still looked good, we played hard and played a lot of kids."

Meanwhile, Tracy scattered four hits over five innings in the circle. Banks' lone run came during the fourth, courtesy of a walk, a hit batter and a single.

Union County closed the week with a 5-4 victory (4 innings) over Commerce as Burnette picked up the win, yielding four hits and two earned runs.

The Lady Panthers scored three in the first when Potts led off with a base hit, Roxbury reached on an error, Banton was hit by a pitch, and Sisum and Chambers each singled.

Emily Byers made it a 4-0 game when she singled and scored to lead off the second. She also drove in Union's fifth and final run with an RBI double that scored Jones in the fourth.

Commerce struck for one in the second when a leadoff double came around on an infield error. Trailing 5-1 in the fourth, Commerce added three runs to pull within 5-4, but Burnette slammed the door by inducing a pair of groundouts with the winning run aboard.

"We threw Tori, Sierra and Sloane [last week] and all three of them looked really

good," Mitchell said.

Potts finished 2 for 3 with a run vs. Commerce; Sisum singled and scored during a 1-for-2 performance. Banton went 1 for 1 and Jones was 1 for 2 with a run. Emily Byers singled, doubled and scored during a 2-for-2 evening. Chambers finished 1 for 2.

Union County travels to Carrollton this week for a tournament that includes the defending Class AA State Champion Heard County and the Region 5-AA Champion Bremen.

"It's a really good group of teams down there and that will help us figure out where we are and what we need to work on," Mitchell said.

Additionally, the Union skipper is optimistic he will work in a few innings for his other freshman pitcher Ila Bragg, who missed last week with an ankle injury.

"She's still hurting but we're looking to get her out there [this week]," he said.

Union County will host Midnight Madness on July 30 and the regular season begins at home August 5.



Junior Chloe Potts (top) and senior Ansley Collins (bottom) combined for seven hits in four games last week during summer league competition at Banks County. Occupying the top two spots in the Union County batting order, the duo hopes to provide the spark for a potent lineup. Furthermore, Potts and Collins have the potential to disrupt defenses with their speed and bunting ability. Photos/Todd Forrest

Upward Flag Football and Cheerleading registration



House of Prayer Church is glad to announce that it is once again time for our Upward Flag Football and Cheerleading 2021 season. On-line registration is now open for boys and girls in grades Kindergarten through 8th Grade at www.hopb.org.

The registration is open through August 14th and the price to participate is \$50. Payment plans are available, if needed. Convenient weekly practices commence the week of August 2nd, while 6 games will be played on Sat-

urdays between August 21st and September 25th.

Registrants should attend the one evaluation that will be held on Saturday, July 31st, on a drop-in basis between the hours of 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. on the upper football field by the House of Prayer Family Life Center offices. For more information regarding registration, call the church office at (706) 745-5925.

Established in 1995, Upward Sports is the world's largest Christian youth sports provider designed to give children and their families a positive sports experience by partnering with local churches to share God's love, build character, and teach the ba-

sic knowledge of a sport. It remains unique by providing a substitution system that ensures every young athlete plays, and only requires a one 1 hour practice each week with one game per week.

We recognize the value of each child by offering a safe environment where every participant gets equal playing time in games & an opportunity to get to know Jesus Christ. We believe that it's a race to the heart of every child, and the first one there, wins. Won't you join us in our eternal pursuit?

More information regarding Upward Sports can be found online at www.upward.org.

Union County 2021 Volleyball schedule

2021 UCHS Panther Volleyball Schedule

Date	Location / Opponent	Times
8-14-2021	JV Spiketacular @ North Oconee	Times TBA
8-17-2021	@ Home - Varsity Only	5:00 Union vs Murray 6:00 Murray vs Lumpkin 7:00 Union vs Lumpkin
8-19-2021	@ HOME	5:00 JV vs Dawson 6:00 Varsity vs Dawson
8-24-2021	@ Chestatee - JV + Varsity	6:00 vs Oconee 7:00 vs Chestatee
8-26-2021	@ Dawson - JV + Varsity	5:00 vs Dawson 6:00 vs Hab. Central
8-28-2021	Coal Mtn. Classic - Varsity Tournament	Times TBA
8-30-2021	@ HOME	5:00 JV vs Gilmer 6:00 Varsity vs Gilmer
9-1-2021	@ Banks - JV + Varsity	5:00 vs Banks 6:00 vs Stephens
9-2-2021	@ HOME	5:00 JV vs Fannin 6:00 Varsity vs Fannin
9-9-2021	@ Washington-Wilkes - Varsity	5:00 vs WW 6:00 vs Rabun
9-14-2021	@ Fannin - JV + Varsity	6:00 vs Gordon Lee 7:00 vs Fannin
9-16-2021	@ Oglethorpe - JV + Varsity	4:00 JV vs Oglethorpe 5:00 V vs Oglethorpe 6:00 V vs Commerce
9-23-2021	@ Lake Oconee Academy - Varsity	5:00 vs LOA 6:00 vs Elbert
9-28-2021	@ HOME - Varsity	5:00 vs Putnam 7:00 vs Banks
9-29-2021	@ Gilmer - JV + Varsity	6:00 vs Calhoun 7:00 vs Gilmer