

# Sports

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## Softball: Lady Panthers open Friday with high expectations

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Union County softball's bid for consecutive region titles and a third straight Elite Eight appearance gets underway in Lumpkin County on Friday, Aug. 4.

The Lady Panthers and second-year skipper Carissa Owenby return six full-time starters off a 20-8 squad that ran roughshod over Region 8-AA in 2022. Union finished the year 9-0 in region play, outscoring the opposition 110-27.

The Lady Panthers ended an 11-year region title drought while notching 20 wins for the first time since 2015. As a result, the program recorded back-to-back Elite Eight appearances for the first time since 2010.

Headlining the 2023 squad is the senior battery of ace right-hander Sierra Burnette and backstop Gracie Gladding. Burnette enters her third year as the team's top arm, while Gladding joins her as another three-year starter behind the plate.

After smacking a clutch home run during the 2021 Sweet 16 that broke Union's six-year Elite-Eight drought, Gladding's late-inning heroics propelled Union to a 3-2 region win in its second meeting vs. Banks County on Sept. 20, 2022. With her team trailing 2-1 in the bottom of the sixth, Gladding belted a two-run bomb deep into the left field parking lot -- all but clinching the Lady Panthers' Region 8-AA title.

Burnette, with her team-leading .453 average in 2022, is no slouch at the plate either and will likely return to the lead-off spot in the Lady Panthers' lineup. Burnette and Gladding proved to be Banks County killers last fall, going a combined 9-for-21 at the dish with 11 RBIs and four homers over



The senior duo of pitcher/DH Sierra Burnette (left) and catcher Gracie Gladding (right) hit six homers each in 2022 to tie for the team lead. Burnette also posted a 2.53 ERA in the pitcher's circle, while Gladding logged a pair of 5-RBI games at the plate. Photo/Todd Forrest



three meetings.

Gladding went on to finish the year with a .423 average and a team-best .554 OBP.

In the circle, Burnette's banner performance came during a one-hit shutout of Providence on Sept. 15, recording 9 Ks in the 9-0 victory. She finished 2022 with a 2.53 ERA and a 1.10 WHIP.

Union County's most glaring question mark is in the infield, where two departing seniors -- 1B/3B Jaycee Seabolt and second-baseman Chloe Potts -- held down the right side of the diamond. The senior duo played a pivotal role in Union's Elite-Eight run a year ago, each homering in a 10-8 come-from-behind playoff victory over Murray County.

However, the Lady Panthers bring back junior corner-infielder Sloane Dyer and senior shortstop Georgia Patton.

Dyer went 4-for-4 with 3 RBIs in Union's Elite-Eight-clinching win over Murray County. Patton, meanwhile, led the way at the plate in Union County's 9-0 win over Providence, going 3-for-3 with 3 RBIs.

Left-fielder Caroline Karnes graduated following a breakout senior campaign in 2022, leaving seniors Katie Byers and Jewell Massey in centerfield and right field, respectively. Sophomore Peyton Grisham also split time with Massey in the outfield.

Byers, one of the best defensive outfielders in north-

east Georgia, took her offensive skills to another level in 2022. During a 14-9 road victory in the third and final meeting with Banks County, Burnette, Gladding and Seabolt during a 3-for-5 performance that included three runs and a stolen base. She finished the year with four homers.

Massey went 2-for-3 in Union's walk-off victory over Dawson County on Aug. 20, 2022. As for Grisham, she opened her freshman year primarily as a courtesy runner but worked her way into a more significant role during September and October.

According to Owenby, the preseason frontrunners to fill the voids left by Karnes, Plott

and Seabolt are senior Brooklyn Brown, junior Makayla Souther, sophomores Grisham and Delaney Moses (Townsend County transfer), plus freshmen Izzy Anthros and Zaidie Diaz.

Backing up Burnette in the pitcher's circle are three underclassmen: Sophomores Ayla Jamison, Jaslyn Roberts and the freshman Diaz.

Others vying for playing time in 2023 are junior Lily Helton, sophomores Zady Ludlum, Zoie Parmley and freshmen Jules Dyer, Ella Akins and McKenna Hood.

Elsewhere in 8-AA, Banks County's run of three-consecutive region titles ended in 2022. After coming within one win of the Elite Eight last year, the Leopards will feature a

new coaching staff in 2023 and must replace eight seniors (six starters), including three-year ace Jacie Ayers and No. 2 arm Lindsey Crawford.

Providence Christian finished a distant third in 8-AA, dropping three contests apiece to Union and Banks. The Storm welcome back their top pitcher in 2023, but the biggest concern will be on offense. The Providence lineup staggered to an anemic .336 OPS against the Lady Panthers, getting outscored 27-2 in three games while finishing 7-for-52 at the plate and slashing .135/.182/.154 vs. Burnette.

Providence struck out 21 times in 55 plate appearances and collected only one extra-base hit in the three meetings vs. Union County last fall.

Additionally, the Storm bats went cold vs. Ayers and Banks County, compiling only one run in three matchups.

East Jackson brought up the rear in the four-team region -- Athens Christian and Fellowship Academy don't have softball programs -- going 0-9 in region play while being outscored 169-26 vs. 8-AA opposition. Although, with only three seniors and seven 9th/10th graders on last year's roster, the Eagles should see a vast improvement in 2023.

In other news, Union County hosted its annual Parents vs. Players game (won by the parents, 14-6) on Thursday, July 27. The event featured a cookout and player lock-in.

Union County begins the 2023 season Friday at Lumpkin County. The JV will play at 4:30 p.m. with varsity to follow.

The Lady Panthers host Lumpkin County on Tuesday, Aug. 8, in a special home-opener featuring a meet-and-greet with the players and other fun activities for kids.

Region play opens Sept. 7 vs. Banks County.



Senior Brooklyn Brown is among the frontrunners to take over one of the vacated spots on the infield. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Katie Byers, already a superb defender and base stealer, added the long ball last year, belting four homers in 2022. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior shortstop Georgia Patton hit .392 in 2022 - third highest among returning players. Photo/Todd Forrest



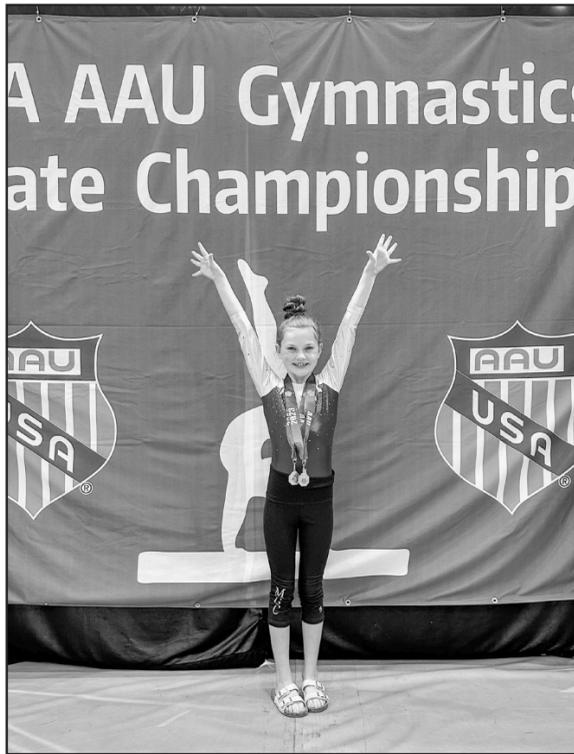
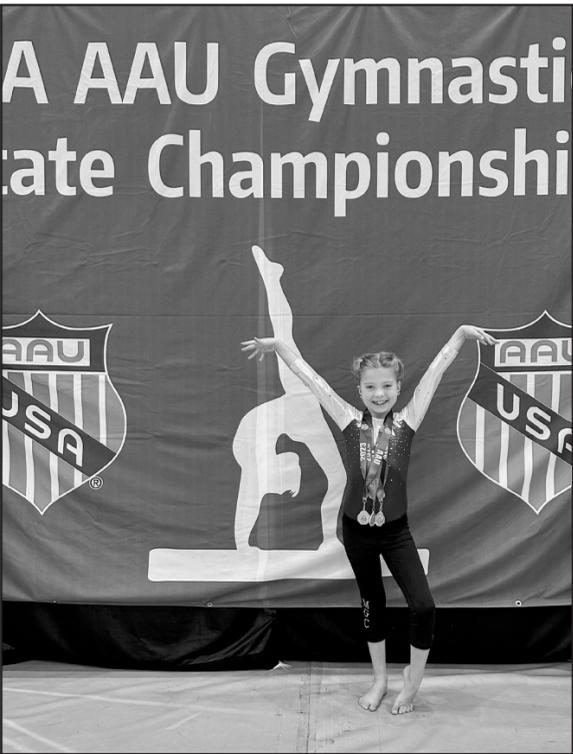
Senior outfielder Jewell Massey is returning to the right-handed batter's box this fall according to Coach Owenby. Photo/Todd Forrest

PANTHER SOFTBALL										
BALL	STRIKE	OUT	BATTER	RUNS						
			21							
GUEST	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	14
HOME	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6



Union County softball parents, coaches and others faced off against the Lady Panthers on Thursday, July 27. Photo/Kelly Helton

# Mountain Gymnastics closes 2022-23 with two State Championships



Mountain Gymnastics Center gymnasts (L-R): Lorelei Whitney, Jaxi-Jule Taylor and Emma Schuette

Mountain Gymnastics Center crowned two AAU Level 2 State Champions, Lorelei Whitney on vault and Jaxi-Jule Taylor on vault, floor and all-around at the AAU State Meet in Carrollton during the spring.

Each girl competed at their level against girls in their age division from the entire state of Georgia. MGC had other placers at State as it wrapped up the AAU season that weekend.

On May 5-6, MGC traveled to Fort Lauderdale, Florida for USAG Xcel Regionals and qualified three: Addison Harkins (Xcel Gold),

Shaylynne Davis (Xcel Gold), and Emma Schuette (Xcel Platinum). Regionals follow state because the girls are competing against a region of the United States. These girls competed against gymnasts from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida and Georgia.

Harkins and Davis both had fantastic meets with Harkins tied for seventh on floor, and Davis finishing tied for ninth on bars and fifth on floor.

Schuette qualified for the Georgia State Team -- the first from MGC to qualify for

a State Team. She competed against the best of the best from the eight states. There were eight gymnasts on the Georgia State Team. The top four scores from those gymnasts on each event counted toward the overall team score. Schuette's vault, beam, and floor scores were all counted toward the Georgia State Team score. Georgia placed third overall as a team and Schuette also placed in each event out of the top 32 of the senior division in the team competition. She placed tied for eighth on vault and bars, tied for seventh on beam and tied for 13th on floor -- good

enough for fifth all-around. This is such a huge accomplishment for Emma.

We had a fantastic 2022-2023 season at MGC and are already working hard for another great season to come. Individual scores are as follows.

AAU State Level 2: Taylor - vault 9.235 (1st), bars 8.65, beam 8.825, floor 9.275 (1st), all around 36.075 (1st). Austen Garrett - vault 9.2 (T-4th), bars 8.95, beam 9.4 (T-4th), floor 9.1 (5th) all around 36.65 (5th).

Scarlett Munn - vault 9.075, bars 9.05, beam 9.275 (T-5th), floor 9.15, all around

36.55 (6th). Hope Wright - vault 8.9, bars 8.6, beam 8.9, floor 9.0 (3rd), all around 35.4 (9th). Whitney - vault 9.225 (1st), bars 8.825, beam 8.425, floor 8.9 (4th), all around 35.375 (10th).

Mattie Kate Alexander - vault 8.7, bars 8.4, beam 9.275 (4th), floor 8.75 (6th), all around 35.125 (11th). Sophia Beaver - vault 8.475, bars 8.65, beam 8.475, floor 8.65, all around 34.25 (12th).

Aria Beaudoin - vault 8.85 (8th), bars 8.9, beam 8.7, floor 7.875, all around 34.325 (14th). Camilla Duello - vault 7.8, bars 8.4, beam 8.525, floor 8.425, all around 33.15

(15th). AAU Xcel Silver: Lucie Burgess - vault 8.85 (T-10th), bars 9.15, beam 9.35 (6th), floor 9.05 (T-9th), all around 36.4 (T-11th). Madelyn Primeaux - vault 8.7, bars 9.325, beam 9.3 (T-7th), floor 9.05 (T-9th), all around 36.375 (12th).

Ellenore Perrone - vault 8.6, bars 9.25, beam 8.725, floor 9.05 (T-9th) all around 33.825 (T-12th). Baylor Sullivan - vault 8.525, bars 7.95, beam 8.575, floor 8.775 (5th), all around 33.825 (14th).

Caroline Thomas contributed to this article.

## Union County Football's annual Meet the Panthers Thursday at 6 p.m.

Get excited Union County! It's that time of year and we all have FOOTBALL FEVER! Come out on August 3rd and show your Panther Spirit in support of our football players, cheerleaders, and band! This year we have Nana & Papa's Ice Cream (\$5), Southern Sips Lemonade (\$5), & Kona Ice (\$4)! There will be free hotdogs for all who attend and inflatable slides for the kids! Featuring performances by the UC cheer squad, UC band, & other events that you do not want to miss! We look forward to seeing our community pack the stadium on August 3rd at 6:00pm at UCHS stadium!

### UCHS 2023 Softball Schedule

August 4	@ Lumpkin	JV/V
August 8	Lumpkin	JV/V
August 12	@Fannin vs Paulding	Varsity
August 12	@Fannin	Varsity
August 10	White	JV/V
August 15	Commerece	JV/V
August 21	Pickens	Jv/V
August 24	@ white	JV/V
August 31	@Dawson	JV/V
September 7	Banks	V-Region
September 12	@East Jackson	V-Region
September 14	@ Providence	V-Region
September 19	@ Banks	V-Region
September 26	East Jackson	V-Region
September 27	@ Pickens	JV/V
September 28	Providence	V-Region
October 3	Banks	V-Region
October 5	@ East Jackson	V-Region
October 10	@ Providence	V-Region

## Local Racing: Tri-County hosts Schaefer Oil Southern National Series

By Blake Lynch  
Racing Reporter  
North Georgia News

There was racing under the lights Thursday night at Tri-County Race Track.

Tri-County Race Track welcomed the Schaefer Oil Southern National Series. This series has had to fight with rain at many tracks and Tri-County was no different.

Super Late Model: No.

20 Jimmy Owens took home \$7,553 and the win. No. 7 Ricky Weiss was second. No. 79 Donald McIntosh. No. 93 Carson Ferguson was fourth. No. 17M Dale McDowell placed fifth.

Open Wheel: The winner was No. 22 Matt Sandifer. No. 55 Brad Sosebee was second.

Crown Vic: The winner was No. 62 Chuck Sisum. No. 11 Ricky Dyer was second.

No. 18X Lucas Beaver was third.

602 Late Model: No.117 Dylan Beaver was the winner. No. 50 Charles Devine was second. No.56 Colton Berrong third. No.100 Copper Twiggs was fourth. No. 44 Bobby Elkins came in fifth.

Unfortunately, then the rains came, so FWD and Street Stock will race for double points and money at the Aug. 11 race.

### UCHS Volleyball 2023 schedule

Date	Time	Opponent	Location	Level
Aug 10		Preseason scrimmage at Hiwassee Dam	Hiwassee Dam	Varsity
Aug 12		Rally on the Ridge	Fannin	Varsity
Aug 15	5:00 PM	Dawson Co	Dawson Co	JV/Varsity
	6:00 PM	East Forsyth	Dawson Co	JV/Varsity
Aug 17	5:00 PM	Pickens Co	Pickens Co	JV
	6:00 PM	Pickens Co	Pickens Co	Varsity
Aug 21	5:00 PM	Andrews	HOME	JV
	6:00 PM	Andrews	HOME	Varsity
Aug 24	5:00 PM	Gilmer Co	Gilmer Co	JV/Varsity
	6:00 PM	Murray Co	Gilmer Co	JV/Varsity
Aug 29	6:00 PM	Rabun	Rabun Co	JV/Varsity
	7:00 PM	BASA - Barrow Arts and Science Academy	Rabun Co	JV/Varsity
Aug 31	5:00 PM	Hiwassee Dam (NC) SENIOR NIGHT	HOME	JV
	6:00 PM	Hiwassee Dam (NC)	HOME	Varsity
Sept 5	5:00 PM	White Co	White Co	JV/Varsity
	6:00 PM	Habersham	White Co	JV/Varsity
Sept 6	5:00 PM	Dawson Co	HOME	Varsity
	7:00 PM	Providence Christian	HOME	Varsity
Sept 7	5:30 PM	Stephens Co	Stephens Co	JV
	6:30 PM	Stephens Co	Stephens Co	Varsity
Sept 11	5:00 PM	Andrews	Andrews	JV
	6:00 PM	Andrews	Andrews	Varsity
Sept 12	5:00 PM	Fellowship Christian	FCS	JV/Varsity
	6:00 PM	Third team	FCS	JV/Varsity
Sept 14	5:00 PM	Providence Christian	Providence Christian	Varsity
	6:00 PM	Whitefield	Providence Christian	Varsity
Sept 19	5:00 PM	Banks Co	HOME	Varsity
	7:00 PM	Rabun Gap	HOME	Varsity
Sept 21	5:00 PM	Gainesville HS	Gainesville HS	JV
	6:00 PM	Gainesville HS	Gainesville HS	Varsity
Sept 26	6:00 PM	Athens Academy	Banks Co	JV/Varsity
	7:00 PM	Banks Co	Banks Co	JV/Varsity
Sept 28	5:00 PM	East Jackson	East Jackson	JV/Varsity
	6:00 PM	Athens Academy	East Jackson	JV/Varsity
Oct 3	5:00 PM	Fellowship Christian	HOME	Varsity
	7:00 PM	East Jackson	HOME	Varsity
Oct 12	TBA	AREA TOURNAMENT		Varsity
Oct 14	TBA	AREA TOURNAMENT		Varsity

### UCHS 2023 Football Schedule

Regular season		
08/18	A	Fannin County (Region 7-AA)
08/25	A	Lumpkin County (Region 7-AAA)
09/01	H	Towns County (Region 8-A Division II)
09/08	H	Armuchee (Region 7-A Division I)
09/15	A	West Hall (Region 7-AAA)
10/06	H	● Banks County
10/13	A	● Providence Christian
10/20	A	● East Jackson
10/27	H	● Athens Academy
11/02	A	● Fellowship Christian

This schedule does not include Union County's scrimmage game at Chestatee on Friday, Aug. 11