

Sports

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Football: Panthers kickoff 2019 with first scrimmage on Friday

What to expect Friday night; Panthers volunteer with youth and new stadium entrance recommendations

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Fall is still a few weeks away but the Union County edition of Friday Night Lights will make its 2019 debut this week.

The Panthers host the Class AAAA Chestatee War Eagles at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Friday, Aug. 9 to provide coaches and fans will an early preview on what to expect when the regular season opens later this month.

According to Union head coach Brian Allison, this Friday night's scrimmage contest will likely feature one half of varsity action, one quarter for the reserves and one for the junior varsity. While nothing has been officially agreed upon between the two coaching staffs, Allison believes the contest won't see any live action on special teams and no score will be kept.

According to Allison, there are two players that will miss Friday night's preseason contest due to minor injuries, but as of this writing, he doesn't expect them to have a major impact on the regular season.

The biggest concern for both coaches is to remain healthy. After that, there are a few schematic issues and positional battles that Coach Allison will keep an eye on Friday night.

"Two areas I'll for sure be watching are the secondary and the offensive line, those will be two of the key positions," Allison said. "We're also hoping to establish a little bit of a ground game. How well we're able to move the ball on the ground will also coincide with how well the offensive line is playing."

"On top of that, another key early on will be our ability to stop the run considering all the passing [that our defense has faced] over the summer."

"The third thing I'll be watching will be our blitz protections, which is something we've been practicing but it's kind of hard to work on in the summer."



Union County Football shared the field with its future football stars last week, providing local youth with one-on-one tutelage from Panther players and coaches. Photos/Todd Forrest

The Panthers and War Eagles met during spring scrimmages in 2017 and 2018, along with numerous 7-on-7 tournaments, camps and shared practice sessions. This past summer, Union County and Chestatee practiced together on multiple occasions and faced off at the Habersham Central 7-on-7 tournament in June.

The War Eagles and Panthers have become well-acquainted with each another in recent years and that familiarity extends beyond the gridiron. Chestatee is led by head coach Shaun Conley - a Union County alum. Also joining Conley's staff this year

is former Panther player and assistant coach Luther Jones, who played for Allison from 2010-13 and served as an assistant at UCHS in 2018. Additionally, Ben Corley, a former Union County head basketball coach (1998-2002) and assistant baseball and football coach has served as the Chestatee High School Athletic Director since 2014.

But when Friday night finally rolls around, Coach Allison is optimistic that Union County is as anxious for football as his team currently is.

"I hope to see everyone on Friday night, and I hope the community comes out to support this

team," Allison added. "They are a great group of kids and they've worked really hard this summer. I'd love to see as many people as possible come out and support us. I also want to thank Quarterback Club and all of our sponsors for everything they do to make all of this [run smoothly]."

Kickoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Friday night and this is the first of two scrimmage games this month for the Panthers.

The second will be Friday, Aug. 16 at Habersham Central, followed by the annual Meet the Team event on Aug. 23.

The regular season opens Aug. 30 at East Hall.

Panthers volunteer with youth teams - Last week, Union County players and coaches assisted with local youth football teams.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, July 30, Union County's youth teams were welcomed to Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium, where coaches and players from the high school were on hand to help out with practice.

The younger players were divided by age and position groups and received specialized advice and tips from their high school counterparts on everything from tackling drills for the defense, and passing drills for

offense.

"We are grateful that the Union County Recreation Department invited us to help the youth program," Coach Allison said. "It is very important since our youth are the future of Union County football. It was a lot of fun and we enjoyed working with all of those guys."

Changes to Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium - With the updates and recent renovations, Panther fans are encouraged to use the home entrance this season. A map is included on the following page.

See Football, Pg 3C

Year Three of Union County volleyball gets underway at home on Thursday

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Union County Volleyball's bid to improve on a memorable 2018 season begins on Thursday with a tri-match vs Dawson County and Gilmer.

One year ago, head coach Megan Swanson took over the program and turned the upstart second-year squad into playoff contenders, eventually placing fourth in the Area Tournament after a third-place finish in the regular season standings.

The fourth-place showing was enough to earn Union County its first State Tournament appearance, gaining valuable experience in its first round loss at the eventual State Runner-Up, Elite Scholars Academy.

ESA, who defeated Union in straight sets (3-0), would cruise through the Class A/AA playoffs, defeating two of its next three opponents in three consecutive sets. After knocking off Pepperell 3-1 in the second round, ESA blanked both Woodville-Thompkins in the Elite 8 and Harlem in the Final Four before falling 3-1 to Coosa in the finals.

This year's Panthers squad features seven seniors



Union County has been working all summer to prepare for the upcoming volleyball season. Photo/Todd Forrest

including All-Area selection Adelia Pyle, who recorded 18 of her team's 32 kills in 2018. There will also be a handful of new faces -- some brand new, some returning after taking a year off -- that should provide an immediate boost.

Other returners to watch are seniors Jordan Swanson and Izzy Zamora. Meanwhile, sophomores Riley Allison, Molli Kay West, Emma Whicker and Maci Williams

were all key contributors as freshmen and their growth will play a vital role in how far the Panthers go this fall.

In all, nine underclassmen contributed to Union County's success in 2018, so there are other names to watch this fall as potential breakout candidates for Coach Swanson's Panthers.

Fans will be introduced to all of the new faces and future stars, as well as getting

reacquainted with the returning Panthers on Thursday beginning at 5 p.m.

The junior varsity will be in action at 5 p.m. as Union County hosts Dawson and Gilmer at the middle school. (Union will host most of its matches at the high school this year with the exception of the tri-matches, which will be held at the middle school gym.)

The varsity will take the floor at the conclusion of the

Date	Opponent	Time	Location
8/8	Dawson Co. / Gilmer Co.	J/VV - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
8/13	Fannin Co. / Murray Co.		Away - Fannin
8/15	Andrews, NC		Home
8/19	Hiwassee Dam, NC	C/JVV - 4, 5, 6	Home
8/20	Gilmer Co. / Stephens Co.		Away - Gilmer
8/22	Fannin Co. / Stephens Co.	J/VV - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
8/27	Pickens Co. /		Home
8/29	East Hall/ Johnson/ Eastside	V - 5:00, 6:00 & 7:00	Away - East Hall
9/3	Lumpkin / Prince Avenue Academy		Away - Lumpkin
9/5			Home
9/9	Hayesville, NC	J/VV 5:00 & 6:00	Home
9/10	Lumpkin Co. /	J/VV - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
9/12	White Co. / East Hall	J/VV	Away - White Co
9/16	Hiwassee Dam, NC	C/JVV	Away - HD
9/17	Dawson Co. /		Away - Dawson Co.
9/19			Home
9/24	Oglethorpe/Washington Wilkes*	V - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
9/26	Rabun/Putnam* - Tri-match	V - 6:00 & 7:00	Away - Rabun
9/30	Hayesville, NC	J/VV	Away - Hayesville
10/1	Lake Oconee Academy*	V - 5:00 & 7:00	Home
10/3			Home
10/8	Region Tournament***		
10/10	Region Tournament***		TBA

JV matches and is slated to begin at 7 p.m. However, the length of the JV matches could influence the start time of the varsity, forcing them to begin a little later or earlier than the scheduled start of 7 p.m.

On Tuesday, Aug. 13, Union County will travel to Fannin County for a tri-match with Fannin and Murray Coun-

ty. Following the trip to Blue Ridge, the next two matches will be at home with Andrews, North Carolina at the high school on Thursday, Aug. 15 and Hiwassee Dam, NC on Monday, Aug. 19. The JV and C-Team are also scheduled for action vs Hiwassee Dam, beginning at 4 p.m.