

Sports

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Softball: Pitching shines in wins over Lumpkin, Dawson

By Todd Forrest
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Union County softball was victorious in both outings last week, opening the new season at 2-0 for the third time in four years under head coach Stephen Mitchell.

The 2021 campaign got underway Thursday with a six-inning no-hitter from sophomore Sierra Burnette during a mercy-rule shortened 9-1 victory over Lumpkin County. Then with two games scheduled for Saturday, the Lady Panthers got in only one thanks to the afternoon thunderstorms that washed out their 4 p.m. heavyweight showdown with Commerce. Union County managed to complete the high-noon meeting with Dawson County, however, taking a 5-1 victory behind senior pitcher Tori Tracy's first varsity complete game.

The Lady Panthers traveled to Lumpkin County for a Monday rematch, then return home Wednesday to meet White County. Union visits White on Thursday before participating in a weekend tournament at Heritage Park in Dalton.

Lady Panthers 9, Lumpkin County 1 (six innings) - Union County scored three in the sixth to close out the Indians and improve to 4-0 in season openers under Mitchell.

The Union skipper tabbed sophomore Sierra Burnette as his opening-day starter and the right-hander didn't disappoint, tossing six innings of no-hit softball in the win. After allowing three runners to reach through two-plus innings via two errors and a walk, Burnette retired 12 of 13 (walk) over the final four frames, opening the door for Union's bats to end the contest early by putting a pair of crooked numbers on the board during the fourth and sixth innings.

Senior outfielder Ansley Collins had herself a day, knocking in a career-high four runs, including an RBI double in the sixth to spark the three-run frame.

Senior infielder Caley Davis worked a one-out walk early in the sixth, allowing Collins to bring her around on a two-out double. After a Burnette walk, senior Lexi Sisum scored Collins with a base hit to right-center, setting the table



Sophomore Sierra Burnette opened the season on Thursday by firing a no-hitter vs. Lumpkin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

for senior Emma Roxbury, who ended the contest via an infield single that plated courtesy runner Jewell Massey.

The Lady Panthers' first two runs of the season also came off the bat of Roxbury when her grounder to shortstop resulted in a two-run throwing error that scored junior Chloe Potts and Burnette -- who each drew a base on balls earlier in the frame.

An Emily Byers leadoff walk in the second helped ignite a 3-0 advantage when courtesy runner Georgia Patton came around on back-to-back singles from Potts and Collins.

The only run off Burnette came when a pair of infield errors moved two Lumpkin County runners into scoring position with no outs in the third. With one down, the Indians pushed across their only run with an RBI groundout as Burnette induced an inning-ending pop-up to escape with a 3-1 lead.

"Our [pitching] philosophy is to win two of the first three pitches," Mitchell said. "If we can't get a first-pitch strike, our goal is to win the next two pitches, and we had a little trouble with that during the summer. But we challenged our pitchers and I feel like they

all rose to the occasion last week, even Sloane [Dyer] in the [junior varsity's 8-3 win over Lumpkin]. Sierra is one of those pitchers that gets better as the game goes on. And if we can stay ahead in the count, it limits the pitch count, and that's important during these hot summer months."

Sisum opened the Union half of the third with an opposite-field double and eventually came around to score on Kaelyn Jones' sacrifice fly to extend the margin back to three at 4-1.

"When we're hitting the ball the other way, that tells me we're locked in," Mitchell said. "We're really confident at the plate right now and it shows because everyone seems to have the right approach."

With Burnette and the defense settling into a groove, the Lady Panthers began pulling away with a two-spot in the fourth thanks to three consecutive one-out hits. Davis and Potts set things in motion with a pair of singles and Collins cleared the bases with a two-run double - the first of two RBI doubles on the day for the Union left fielder.

Collins finished 3 for 4, perfectly matching the other three-hit game of her varsity career - a 3-for-4 performance



Senior catcher Emily Byers scoops up a Lumpkin County bunt attempt and fires a strike to first base for the out. Photo/Todd Forrest

vs. Lumpkin in last year's opener.

Sisum doubled, scored and drove in one during her 3-for-4 evening. Potts went 2 for 3 with a pair of runs; Davis also scored twice during a 1-for-2 game.

Roxbury finished 1 for 3 while knocking in and scoring a run. Burnette walked twice in four at-bats, and Massey scored twice as a courtesy runner. Byers drew a walk and Patton scored a run. Jones went 0 for 2 with an RBI fly-out.

"Kaelyn Jones has hit the ball hard every time she's been at the plate," Mitchell said. "She may not have a lot to show for it, but she's given us some really great at bats."

Burnette gave up one run, fanned two and walked two during her six-inning start. And after Lumpkin pushed across a run in the third, Burnette allowed just one Indian to reach base - a one-out walk in the fifth.

Despite her efficient pitching performance, Burnette still relied upon some superb defense behind her, most notably a diving grab from centerfielder Katie Byers with two down in the fifth and a runner on second. The defensive gem kept Lumpkin off the board and

denied an extra-base hit when the sophomore outfielder laid out to make a backhanded catch on a sharply-hit line drive destined for the gap in left-center.

Lady Panthers 5, Dawson County 1 - Tracy struck out five Tigers en route to her first complete game while Collins, Potts and Sisum continued to rake for the second-straight outing.

Aided by two Dawson County fielding errors, Union County put up a two-spot in the first and never looked back as Tracy limited the visitors to six hits scattered over seven innings. Davis brought home the first run of the game via a Lady Tigers' error, then Jaycee Seabolt made it 2-0 with an infield single.

After two quick outs to start the day, the Lady Panthers' lineup began jumping on the first-pitch fastball, resulting in five straight hitters reaching base during the two-run first.

"I'd love to be able to take credit for that, but I can't," Mitchell said. "[Dawson grooving a first-pitch fastball] was something our first two batters noticed and [the players] have done a very good job making adjustments at the plate. That comes from being able to better use the information gathered by

teammates, so the credit goes to our upperclassmen and our first two or three hitters for picking up on that and passing that on to the rest of the lineup."

Potts singled in the second inning and came around on Collins' third double in six plate appearances.

Leading 3-0 in the sixth, Tracy gave up what appeared to be a harmless, two-out single to center until the outfield had trouble corralling the soft flare and the Tigers took an extra base on the miscue. The heads-up baserunning decision helped Dawson crack the scoring column when another base hit plated the runner from second. A line-out to Roxbury limited Dawson to only one run and Union County answered with two on back-to-back sac flies in the bottom half of the frame.

"There's going to be errors in high school, the important thing is to not panic and limit them to only one run so our offense can try to get it back," Mitchell said.

With Burnette already aboard via an infield single, Sisum beat out a bunt to put two on with nobody out. After both runners advanced a base, Burnette tagged and scored on a fly ball to right field off the bat of Roxbury. Sisum scored moments later when Davis lined out to right, spotting the Lady Panthers a 5-1 advantage that held up after Tracy worked around a seventh-inning fielding error.

"Tori is that type of kid that shows up every day and does exactly what she's asked to do and never takes a play off," Mitchell said. "She did a very good job on Saturday. She is going to see the fruits of her labor this year and no one deserves it more than she does. She's a leader for our team, an ambassador for the program and does an all-around great job."

Potts went 1 for 4 with a run and two stolen bases, Collins also finished 1 for 4 with an RBI at the plate. Burnette scored twice during a 2-for-4 afternoon; Sisum went 2 for 3 with two runs. Roxbury ended her day 0 for 1 with a walk and a sac fly. Davis went 0 for 2 with an RBI sacrifice. Seabolt drove in one run while going 1 for 3.

Wednesday's JV/varsity doubleheader gets underway at 4 p.m. Varsity begins at 6 p.m. Thursday in Cleveland. Friday's tourney starts at 4 p.m. in Dalton.



Senior right-hander Tori Tracy limited Dawson County to one run over seven innings on Saturday afternoon. Photo/Todd Forrest



Ansley Collins' contributions weren't limited to the plate as demonstrated by her running snag on a deep fly to left field. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County softball's 2-0 start has the Lady Panthers and their senior shortstop Emma Roxbury walking on air. Photo/Todd Forrest

Football: Meet the Team returns; Panthers prep for Friday's scrimmage

By Todd Forrest
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A Union County High School tradition returned in all its glory with last Thursday's Meet the Team event at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

Hosted by the Panthers football team and cheer squad, Meet the Team has allowed the community to offer well wishes to Union County High School's young men and women ahead of each season on the gridiron.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 pulled the plug on last year's event, and when you combine that with a new coaching staff this fall, the Meet the Team event remained very much up in the air as recently as last month. But now that first-year head coach Micheal Perry has experienced the annual get-together first hand, the former Gainesville offensive coordinator intends on continuing Union County's August institution.

"It was really cool and a really neat experience," Perry said. "I've never done that before and it was really neat and I had a great time."

The Meet the Team also saw the return of the wing eating competition that was won by junior defensive back/receiver Wilson Walker, which drew a laugh from his head coach.

"From what I've heard, the offensive lineman rarely win [the wing-eating contest], which is crazy," Perry said. "You wouldn't expect a skill position guy to win it, but [Wilson] finished off 18 wings and



Panthers fans of all ages were able to mingle with the team and cheerleaders and even get an autograph or picture from their favorite athlete during the annual Meet the Team last Thursday, Aug. 5 at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Photo/Todd Forrest

we all had a great time. It was a really cool experience for me and all the new [coaches]."

This week, Perry and the Panthers will take on a more serious tone as they prepare for Friday's preseason scrimmage at Southeast Whitfield in Dalton.

According to Perry, the contest will resemble a normal game on offense and defense, but special teams action will not be live. Additionally, Perry noted that fans can expect to see the junior varsity squads take over during the third quarter.

Two focal points on Friday will be the play in the trenches and at the running back position. With the Pan-

thers primarily seeing 7-on-7 competition this summer, the offensive and defensive lines, as well as the running backs have spent most of the summer competing against their own teammates.

"[Friday] is going to tell us a lot about our team," Perry said. "We're finally going up against another team and it can get a bit monotonous going up against yourselves all the time. We've had some guys stand out this summer and we want to see if they can continue to stand out. And hopefully, we'll have a few surprises [with other players stepping up]."

Throughout the summer, Perry has heaped praise



upon senior Eli Peugh, who transitions to running back after graduation and injuries depleted the position. Peugh received the majority of his snaps as a defensive back over the past two seasons, but Perry has high expectations for not only Peugh, but the entire offensive backfield.

[Peugh] has done a really good job for us at running back," Perry said. "We also have Liam Cone, Elijah Helton and Caleb Rogers, they've all done a really good job and have provided some bright spots."

Furthermore, Perry has witnessed progress on both the offensive and defensive lines, where he expects the majority

of his big guys to play both ways this season.

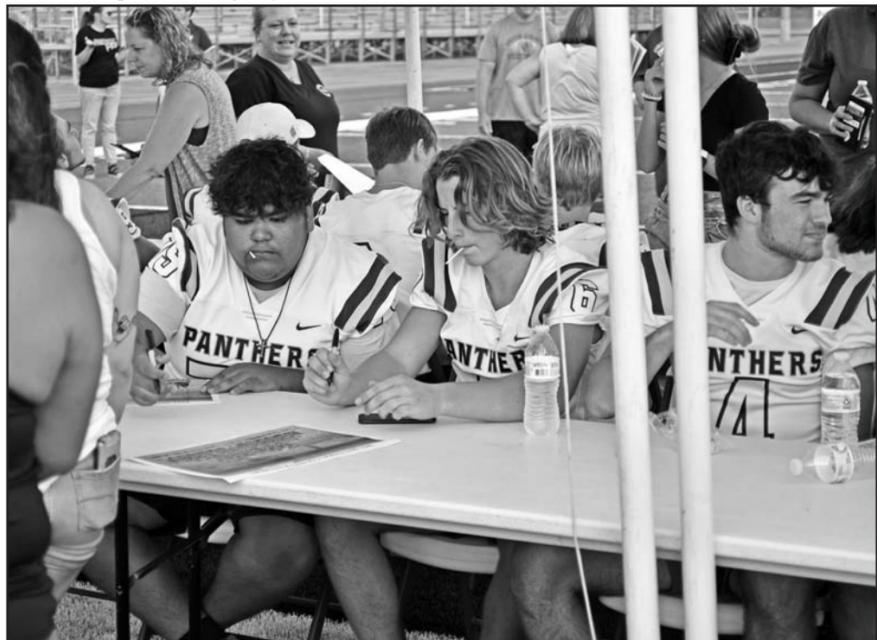
"[Junior] Elijah Haynes has great potential and we're trying to just find some consistency from him," Perry said. "Pretty much if you start on offense, you're going to start on defense and we're just trying to manage that as best we can."

In recent years, the football schedule normally included a two-week gap between the final tune-up contest and opening night. Unfortunately, after Friday's trip to Dalton, the Panthers jump right into rivalry week as they visit hostile territory on Aug. 20 to take on Fannin County. Union will look to avoid back-to-back losses to

the Rebels for the first time in over a decade.

"I'm used to having a week in between so the biggest thing this week is just staying healthy," Perry said. "The other thing we want to see is how well we execute our schemes. We want to get everyone home safe and healthy on Friday, but we're also looking at execution."

Kickoff is 7:30 p.m. Friday night in Dalton. The school is located at 1954 Riverbend Rd, Dalton. Riverbend Rd. is directly off the South Dalton Bypass (Hwy. 41), approximately 3.5 miles from the Hwy. 76 intersection.



The 2021 Meet the Team attracted a solid turnout of UCHS football fans last week after the 2020 edition was canceled. Photos by Todd Forrest



Local Racing Report: Tri-County

By Blake Lynch
Racing Reporter
North Georgia News

Roger Beaver came in second. No. 11 Jacob Hamby was third. No. 81 John Howard came in fourth place. No. 56 Colton Berrong came in fifth.

Tri-County hosted racing on Friday Aug. 6. The next race will be Back to School Night on Aug. 20.

FWD: No. 4 Shannon Jones took home the win. No. J3 Josh Deese took home second place. No. A1 Stephen Godfrey was third. No. 192 Robby Lynch was fourth. Fifth went to No.1 Matt Cordon.

The Aug. 6 results are as follows.

Limited: No. 12w Daniel Wilson took home the win. No. 7 Jason Deal was second. No. 4 Randy Dillard was third. No. 88 Rick Smith was fourth. No. 26 Trevor Parker placed fifth. No. 88 Ricky Smith had the fastest qualifying time.

Pony: No. 4M Marty King took home the win again this week. No. C10 Julius Cross came in second. No. 44 Dylan Hannah came in third place.

Street Stock: It was another win for No. 7 Lynn Burchfield. No. 21 Troy Turner came in second. No. 73 CD McKinnon came in third. Fourth was No.01 Jacob Lynch. No. 69 Jim Weller came in fifth.

No. 95 Alex Vance received the award for driving the farthest distance to race.

Beginner 602: No. 117 Dylan Beaver was the winner. No. 22 Tucker Anderson was second. No.100 Copper Twiggs was third. No. K3 James Klauke was fourth. No. B7 Ethan Fleming came in fifth.

Modified: No. 44 Bobby Elkins got the win. No.1

'The Legends' take 8v8 fundraising soccer tournament



'The Legends' were victorious earlier this month at the 8 vs. 8 fundraising soccer tournament benefitting UCHS soccer.

