

# Sports

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## Football: Panthers rally at Chestatee in 'vanilla' scrimmage

Rader scores twice; Tanner and Goble connect on 49-yard TD

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**Murrayville** - Union County bounced back following a lackluster first quarter during its preseason scrimmage at Chestatee on Friday, Aug. 11 -- an evening that saw head coach Michael Perry dial back the playcalling so as not to reveal his hand ahead of Thursday's opener at rival Fannin County.

"We played it really vanilla on both sides of the ball," Perry said. "And [Chestatee] runs an offense that we're not going to see all year, so we're going to look a lot different when we go to Fannin."

The Panthers' offense sputtered on its first three possessions, while Chestatee's newly-implemented wing-T attack found the endzone on two first-quarter drives for an early 14-0 score.

"Nobody runs that offense anymore," Perry said when asked about the challenges of facing the wing-T. "It's a lot of misdirection and pulling guards, and you don't see that anymore. It's a lot like going against those Paul Johnson Georgia Tech teams. We're just glad it's over with."

Following the defense's first stop of the night, Caiden Tanner and the Union offense got on the board, setting up shop at the 40 with a minute left in the opening frame.

Junior running back Connor Schuknecht rumbled out to midfield on first down, before a screen pass to Zach Taylor went for a yard and the teams traded 5-yard penalties. Facing a second and 9 with the second quarter underway, Tanner went up top and found a streaking Jensen Goble wide open down the middle of the field for a 49-yard touchdown.

"I was really disappointed in how we started," Perry said. "But once we got settled in, we obviously looked a lot better."

Back within a score, the Union defense tightened up after surrendering a 31-yard run on first down, eventually forcing a fourth-and-8 incompletion. Ahead of the turnover on downs, senior Lane Lance blew up a second-down run in the backfield, putting the War Eagles run-heavy offense in



Senior running back Braylen Rader scores from a yard out to tie the score at 14-14 in the second quarter. Rader added the go-ahead score during the third -- punching it in from 15 yards. Photo/Todd Forrest

long-yardage situation. Starting at its own 42, Union County leaned on a pair of seniors in running back Braylen Rader and tight end Tyler Grasty to even the score at 14-14.

Two underneath throws to Grasty went for 10 yards and 9 yards, respectively, then Rader carried twice to bring up third and short. Tanner went back to Grasty for 8 yards, then a short run by Rader and an incompletion brought up third and 8 at the 23. This time, Grasty found a crease downfield for a leaping catch inside the 10 before stumbling down to the 1-yard line.

Grasty lined up in the backfield on the next play, delivering a block that sprung the first of two Rader touchdowns that tied the game following Ethan McBride's PAT.

"We were able to get Grasty going on that drive," Perry said. "He had a big catch

for us. I thought he scored but they ruled him short [of the goal line]. It should have been a touchdown."

A facemask penalty on Jonah Kluth's fourth-down sack extended the ensuing Chestatee drive, but one play later, Lance's strip resulted in a loose ball and a 14-yard loss. With the wing-T knocked off schedule, Union County regained possession moments later with 1:54 remaining in the half.

A quick Panthers three-and-out awarded Chestatee one last crack before the break, but a false start and a shared sack by Kluth and Schuknecht brought up third and long, setting up a sack from Lance on the half's final play.

The Union County defense started flexing its muscle in the third, beginning with a backfield strip by sophomore Cade Dockrey, resulting in another loose ball and a 4-yard

loss. Chestatee's offense continued going backward and punted to Union County on fourth and 22.

Starting near midfield, the Panthers went to the air and McBride elevated to snag a fingertip catch for 33 yards on third and 13. A quick red zone throw to Goble went for five on first down, then Rader gashed the War Eagles on a 15-yard score that saw the senior bounce outside, stiff-arm a defender to the turf and pick up a timely McBride block en route to his team's final touchdown.

"We're really proud of [freshman offensive tackle] Easton Shumaker, he played

exceptionally well," Perry said. "Kaden Combs (junior) also played exceptionally well on the offensive line. Jaxon Totherow (freshman) struggled early in pass protection against a very good defensive end, but he settled down and got a lot better. I thought he did really good in run blocking. Our receivers also did a great job blocking for us."

The teams swapped punts on the next two drives before Chestatee's final drive of the third stalled out in Union territory courtesy of junior defensive back Braden Plott, who swatted away a deep pass in 1-on-1 coverage at the 5-yard line.

"That might have been

the play of the game," Perry said. "I thought it was going to be a touchdown pass, but [Plott] was able to get a hand on it and knock it down."

The fourth quarter belonged to the junior varsity, and the War Eagles' offense converted a Union County fumble into a touchdown with two minutes left for the only JV score.

The Panthers now turn their attention to their Hwy. 515 neighbors in Blue Ridge for this Thursday's showdown vs. the Rebels.

Fannin is working with a new offensive coordinator this year, and with the Rebels' scrimmage canceled vs. Stephens County, Perry and his staff are going in blind.

"We have nothing on them," he said. "They didn't even have a scrimmage. So we have nothing. We have no idea what [kind of offense] the new OC runs, so we're just working on the fly. [Fannin is] breaking in some new players on offense so maybe not having a scrimmage will work to our advantage in that regard."

Union County survived last year's thriller in the rain via a late defensive stand in a 14-7 home victory that halted a two-game skid in the series. The Panthers' most recent trip to Fannin County, however, quickly turned ugly in a 34-7 loss in 2021.

A referee shortage has resulted in a rescheduling of the Union-Fannin game to Thursday, Aug. 17 at 7 p.m.

The Panthers own a razor-thin 16-15 edge in the all-time series. Union County football sports a 30-25 series record when adding East Fannin (11-5) and West Fannin (3-5) -- the two schools consolidated into Fannin County High.

"We know they'll be fired up and doing everything they can to beat us," Perry said. "We're excited about the opportunity to go over to Fannin County and we know [this game] is a huge deal for both communities."



Senior Jensen Goble (12) and Connor Schuknecht (26) celebrate Goble's 49-yard touchdown pass to put Union on the board in the second. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore defensive back Cade Dockrey (1) leads a swarm of Panther defenders after he stripped the ball loose on the first play of the third quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Softball: Lady Panthers washed out vs. Lumpkin, Paulding, Fannin

## Union County suffers first loss of 2023 in 3-1 pitcher's duel at White County

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Mother Nature proved uncooperative to Union County last week, with two of its three contests ending early and the third resulting in a 3-1 loss at White County.

Union was scheduled to play Paulding County and Fannin County in a Saturday doubleheader at Blue Ridge City Park until thunderstorms brought the day to an early end. Inclement weather washed out the final four innings of the Union-Paulding game and canceled the Fannin matchup.

**Lady Panthers 4, Lumpkin County 4 (6 innings)** - The week opened at home with a 4-4 rain-shortened tie vs. Lumpkin County on Wednesday, Aug. 9. The Indians scored one in the third, but Union answered back with a crooked number in the bottom half to build a 4-1 advantage.

Lumpkin added one in the fifth and two in the sixth but rain washed things out before the Lady Panthers came to bat in their half.

Georgia Patton tripled, walked and drove in one. Gracie Gladding went 1 for 2 with a walk and an RBI single.

Freshman right-hander Izzy Anthros allowed four earned runs over six innings -- fanning six, walking six and surrendering seven hits.

The Lumpkin third opened with a groundout but a pair of two singles and a wild pitch put Union County in a 1-0 hole. But the Lady Panthers put up four in the bottom half, beginning with a Peyton Grisham



Senior Brooklyn Brown goes 1-for-2 during Tuesday's 4-4 tie vs. Lumpkin County. Brown is slugging a team-best .700 while leading the way with a 1.245 OPS. Photo/Todd Forrest

walk and consecutive hits from Jewel Massey and Katie Byers.

Tied at 1-1, Patton's sacrifice fly put the Lady Panthers on top, followed by Gladding's RBI single. Byers came around to score on a passed ball to mount a 4-1 lead through three innings.

A quiet fourth inning gave way to a leadoff triple by Lumpkin in the fifth. Anthros limited the damage to one run despite allowing a one-out single and a two-out walk.

A pair of walks to begin Union's half of the fifth went for naught and Lumpkin quickly evened the score with a single, followed by a triple that turned into a score via a throwing error. Anthros navigated two more Union County errors during the sixth -- keeping things knotted at 4-4.

Unfortunately, the steady rain turned into a downpour, forcing a cancellation before the Lady Panthers' final two at-bats. Byers finished 1 for 2



Senior catcher Gracie Gladding rips a Paulding County pitch on Saturday afternoon at Blue Ridge City Park. Gladding's .583 OBP currently tops the team while her .500 average is tied for the team lead and her 1.083 OPS is second. Photo/Todd Forrest

with a run; Brooklyn Brown went 1 for 2; Massey scored once during a 1-for-2 game; Sloane Dyer drew a walk; Jules Dyer swiped a bag and Grisham walked and scored.

**Lady Panthers 4, Paulding County 0 (3 innings)** - The opener of Saturday's doubleheader in Fannin County came to a premature halt when severe storms rolled through the area during the third inning.

Anthros limited Paulding to one hit over two innings

after the offense put up three in the top of the first - courtesy of the freshman pitcher's two-run, two-out single.

Sloane Dyer and Brown each singled, scored and drove home one. Gladding finished 1 for 2 and Massey singled and swiped a bag in her only plate appearance. Byers added a steal for Union County.

**Lady Panthers 1, White County 3** - The Lady Panthers visited White County on Thursday, Aug. 10 but were done

in by a three-spot in the fifth after Sloane Dyer singled home Byers in the third.

Anthros allowed five hits and two earned runs over six innings, striking out three and walking two.

White County limited Union to only three hits on the day -- two coming from Sloane Dyer and the other courtesy of Gladding. Byers and Grisham each drew a walk in the loss.

Union hosts Commerce on Tuesday, Aug. 15.

# Volleyball: Union drops three of five in scrimmage at Hiwassee Dam, NC

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**Hiwassee Dam, NC** - The young Lady Panthers had their moments in a Thursday, Aug. 10 scrimmage at Hiwassee Dam, North Carolina, but ultimately fell in five sets to the seasoned Lady Eagles.

The new-look Union County squad shined early and often, dominating the first set 25-13 after racing out to a 12-5 lead.

Union maintained control for the entirety of set one with advantages of 14-8 and 16-8 marking the narrowest margins of the set.

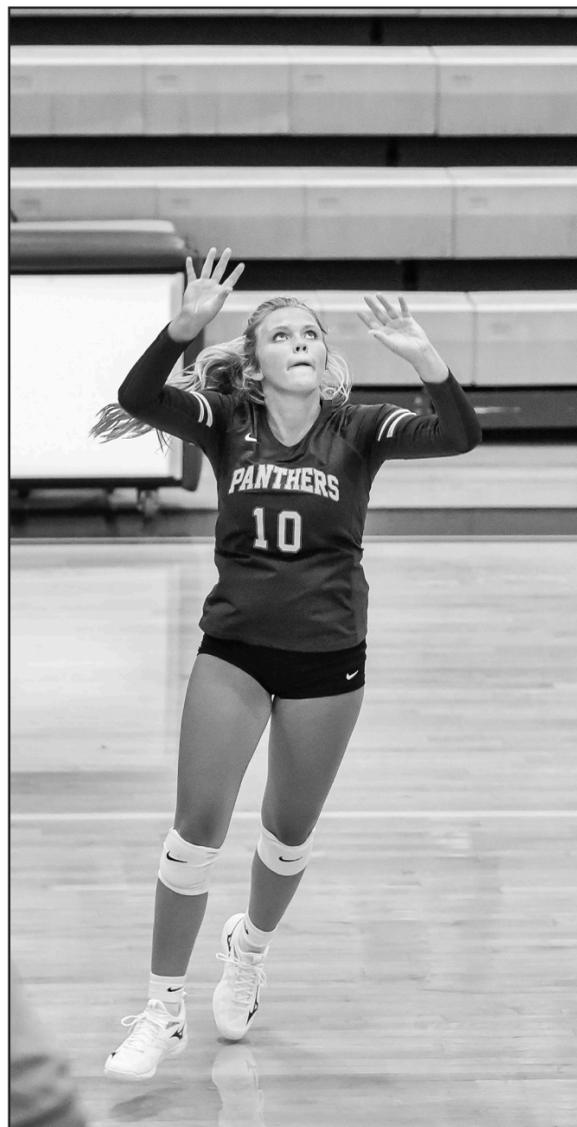
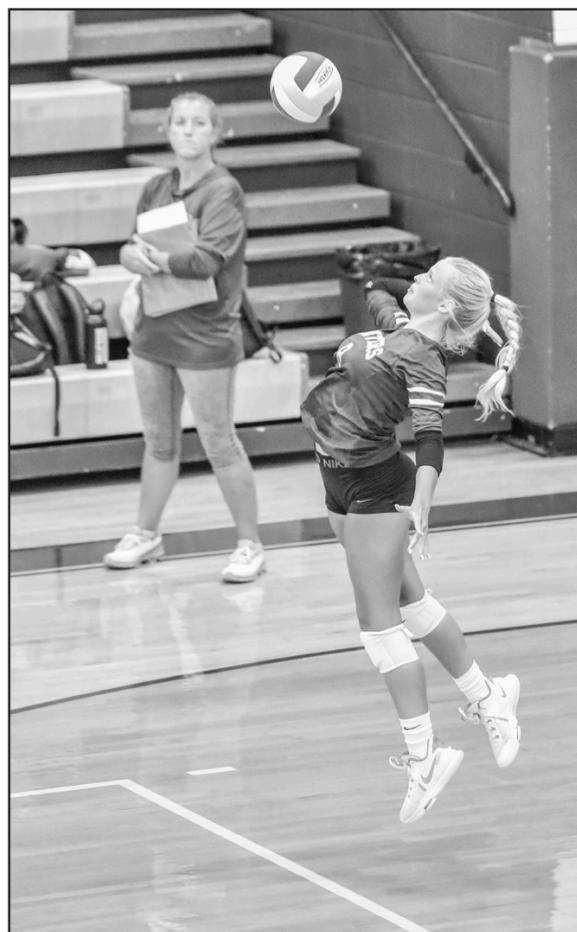
The second set opened as a see-saw affair until the Eagles broke open a 15-15 tie with six of the next seven points to take the 25-20 victory.

The Lady Panthers returned to form in the third set, taking a 23-14 win by scoring 11 of 12 following a 12-11 deficit.

Union controlled most of the fourth set but couldn't close out Hiwassee Dam, who rallied from a late 24-22 margin. The Eagles denied the visitors on four consecutive match points to secure a 26-24 win.

Hiwassee Dam took it to Union in the final set, grabbing an early 9-2 lead, eventually locking down the victory by a 15-7 score.

Fannin County postponed last weekend's season-opening tournament, as a result, Union will begin 2023 on Tuesday, Aug. 15 at Dawson County, where they will face Dawson and East Forsyth.



Union County volleyball hosted its annual pancake breakfast fundraiser at Longhorn's Steakhouse on Saturday, Aug. 12. Plates were \$5 each and the proceeds went to the school's volleyball program.

Union County at Hiwassee Dam volleyball photos by Todd Forrest