

# Sports

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## Sullens, Lumpkin County run past Union County, 44-27

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**Dahlonega** - Union County had no answer for Lumpkin County's ground game, giving up 356 yards rushing on a night that Indians' senior running back Mason Sullens accounted for a career-high 249 yards.

Jenson Goble and the Panthers' passing attack kept the visitors within striking distance for most of the night, with the senior receiver catching 11 passes for a career-best 161 yards in the loss.

"Our pass protection was really good, we just couldn't run the ball on them," Union County head coach Michael Perry said. "I thought Caiden Tanner played extremely well, one of his best games, but our inability to run the ball or stop the run is what killed us."

Despite recovering two red zone fumbles in the early going, Union County found itself facing a 21-6 deficit. But after going three-and-out on its first two possessions, the Union offense started waking up after Goble's 77-yard catch and run led to senior Braylen Rader's 1-yard touchdown.

Later, following Rader's touchdown, the Panthers made it a one-score contest when Goble gathered three catches to move Union inside the red zone with under two minutes left in the half.

Caiden Tanner found Tyler Grasty for 7 yards on first down, and Rader caught a pass for seven on third and 1. Two plays later, Tanner found room around the left side and punched it into the endzone for a 21-13 score with 1:23 left.

Union quickly surrendered momentum on the ensuing kickoff when Sullens returned the Zuriel Mancillias kick to midfield. From there, Lumpkin needed three completions, including a 14-yarder on third down, to set up first and goal from the five. The Panthers limited the damage to a 24-yard field goal as time expired and took a 24-13 deficit into the break.

Union climbed within 24-20 during the third after both offenses sputtered to open the half, but that's as close as the Panthers would get as they played the role



Senior Caiden Tanner accounted for three touchdowns and 332 yards of offense at Lumpkin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

of counter-puncher all night to Lumpkin's punishing run game.

Union punted to start the second half, but the Panthers defense forced a stop on fourth and 3 when senior linebacker Kooper Ashcraft came from the backside to chase down the ball carrier behind the line of scrimmage.

Starting at its own 40, Union moved the chains on a 9-yard throw to Goble and a short gain by Rader. Facing a third and 10 from midfield, Tanner found Ethan McBride in the middle of the field, and the senior receiver won a foot race to the endzone to put the finishing touches on a 50-yard score.

Another lengthy Lumpkin County kick return near midfield put the Indians in the perfect position to answer. Starting at the 46, Lumpkin needed only six plays to increase the lead to 30-20. The back-breaker came on a 38-yard completion to the 1-yard line, two snaps removed from an Indians' third-and-5 conversion.

Tanner and the offense were back on the move until

a costly penalty negated a huge third-and-11 completion to Grasty. From the 27, Goble caught two passes until the Indians dropped Tanner for a 5-yard loss. On third-and-11 from the 40, Tanner hit a streaking Grasty over the middle for 20 yards, but an illegal formation flag forced a Union punt.

Lumpkin County all but put the game away with a 10-play scoring drive, culminating with a 2-yard touchdown run with 8:12 to play. The Panthers shot themselves in the foot with two personal foul penalties on the drive. They also surrendered a costly 19-yard completion on fourth and 7.

Union County responded by going 75 yards on nine plays when Rader caught a 10-yard pass to move the Panthers within 37-27 at the 4:58 mark. One play earlier, Rader took a second-down dump pass from Tanner and rumbled 23 yards down the home sideline. Goble caught three passes on the drive; McBride added another.

Union's defense couldn't get off the field on



Senior Jensen Goble tallied a career-best 161 yards on 11 catches at Lumpkin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

the ensuing Lumpkin drive, giving up a 7-yard bootleg on third and 6. Then, following an Indians penalty, Sullens went 55 yards up the middle on second-and-14 to make it 44-27 with 1:35 on the clock.

"Lumpkin is a very good team, and with their schedule, they will probably go undefeated into the playoffs," Perry said.

The contest opened with a 50-yard run by Sullens, but the drive stalled at the Union County 1-yard line when Lumpkin couldn't se-

ure the handoff and junior Dusty Aaron came out of the pile with the football.

The teams traded punts until the Indians took advantage of a short field, going 45 yards on two plays to grab an early 7-0 lead.

Union answered when Goble took a screen pass 77 yards to the 1-yard line, and Rader made it a 7-6 game when the PAT missed wide.

A Union penalty advanced Lumpkin's kick return to the 47-yard line, but the Panthers capitalized on an-

other goal-to-go turnover by Lumpkin County. This time, senior Seth Rutan jarred the ball loose and sophomore Cade Dockrey recovered the fumble at the 9-yard line.

Union went back on the move with a 25-yard wheel route to Rader on third and 8, but the drive derailed on a high snap, resulting in a 5-yard loss on third and 2.

Lumpkin turned Union's punt into a 5-play scoring drive, aided by a Union facemask on a 27-yard carry to start the series.

Down 14-6, the Panthers went three and out, but the defense brought up a Lumpkin punt with 6:03 left in the half. Unfortunately, a Union fumble awarded the Indians a short field, and two plays later, they built a 21-6 advantage.

"We didn't do a good job on the snaps," Perry said. "We had one high snap on third down and another time we rolled it back there and it ended in a fumble."

**Stats:** *Passing* - Tanner 19-37, 292 yds, 2 TDs; *Rushing* - Tanner 11 car, 40 yds, 1 TD; Rader 11 car, 35 yds, 1 TD, Schuknecht 2 car, 8 yds; *Receiving* - Goble 11 rec, 161 yds; Rader 4 rec, 65 yds, TD; McBride 2 rec, 54 yds, TD; Grasty 1 rec, 7 yds; Taylor 1 rec, 5 yds.

*Defense* - Lester 15 tkl, 1 TFL; Ashcraft 9 tkl; Heredia 9 tkl, QBH; Rutan 9 tkl, 1 TFL, FF; Schuknecht 9 tkl, 1 TFL, FF; Dockrey 7 tkl, 1 TFL, 1 FR; Lance 7 tkl, QBH, FF; Whitehead 4 tkl; Aaron 4 tkl, 2 TFL, FR; Thompson 3 tkl, PBU; Kluth 1 tkl.

*Kicking* - McBride 3-4 PATs

## Union and Towns to meet 30 years removed from Indians' lone series victory

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Thirty years ago, Towns County pulled off what then-Indians head coach Hosea Collins declared the "greatest victory in Towns County football history" during a postgame interview with the *Towns County Herald*.

The Panthers offense struggled in front of the home crowd for much of the night, and couldn't keep pace with the Indians following senior Mike Gosselin's early field goal.

Union sophomore quarterback Chad Farrell was limited to 7 of 16 for 62 yards and three interceptions. Senior running back Stewart Parson finished with 94 yards on the ground, accounting for nearly half of Union's 217 total yards.

Towns County tallied 21 unanswered points after Union's early field goal, en route to a 27-17 victory.

That one night in 1993 marks the only Indians victory over Union County in 33 tries. Prior to 1993, the Panthers won 11 straight meetings -- seven by way of shutout.

After 1993, the two schools didn't meet until 1996, when Union prevailed 28-19 in Blairsville.

It's been all Panthers ever since as Brian Allison's squad blanked the Indians in the next three meetings.

In fact, only two of the next 21 post-1993 meetings ended with a single-digit margin of victory: An 8-0 win in 2004 when storms washed out the second half, and a 17-14 victory in 2012 when Union's 17-0 early lead turned into a

17-14 final when the Panthers recovered Towns' onside kick in the waning seconds.

This year's meeting features two teams coming off a loss. Towns dropped its second straight contest in a 27-0 loss at Greensboro's Lake Oconee Academy, while Union suffered a 44-27 loss at Lumpkin County.

In the season opener, Towns took one on the chin to rival Hayesville, North Carolina in a 35-2 defeat.

Wide receiver Julian Mosley was one of the bright spots in Towns' loss, pulling down 12 catches for 154 yards.

"We're excited for the opportunity to play Towns County and be part of this rivalry," Union County head coach Michael Perry said. "It's a big game for both communities; we just don't want to see a repeat of 1993."



The Panthers welcomed back senior Lane Lance (69) to the defensive line on Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Panthers welcome Towns County on Friday in the 2023 home opener. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Volleyball: Union County sinks Andrews, NC in home opener

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Union County volleyball edged Andrews, North Carolina, 3-2 in the Panthers' 2023 home opener on Monday, Aug. 21.

The Panthers never trailed in a 25-16 opening set but surrendered four of the last five points in a 25-22 set-two defeat. Union County returned the favor in set three, outscoring Andrews 4-1 down the stretch in a 25-21 win.

The Panthers failed to put away the visitors in set four, falling victim to a 9-1 run while holding a commanding 21-16 lead. The fifth and final set was all Union County, racing out to a 9-3 lead in a 15-9 victory.

During set one, a Claire Colwell block moved the Panthers out front 4-3 before consecutive aces from Lily Brookshire built an 11-4 advantage. Union extended its margin to 16-6, but Andrews battled back within 18-12 until Brookshire's kill put the visitors on the ropes.

Charlei Robinson served Union County an early 2-0 edge in set two before Andrews raced ahead 7-4. Another Brookshire kill tied the set at 7-7, but the Wildcats quickly opened up leads of 12-8 and 15-10. Two more aces by Robinson moved Union with 15-13, then Reese Jones, Mallory Rouse and Brookshire trimmed



Junior Lily Brookshire was a force at the net and on the serve during Union's win over Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

the margin to one at 18-17 but Andrews scored the next three points.

Jones' ace evened things at 21-21 before the Panthers surrendered four of five.

Union rallied from early deficits of 5-4 and 8-6 in set three to mount a 14-11 advan-

tage. Brookshire's kill kept her team in front 15-13, then her ace made it 17-13. Katelyn Brown (kill), Ashlyn Gates (ace) and Brookshire (kill) helped fend off a late Wildcats rally as Union held on 25-21.

Brookshire and Brown led the way in set four, con-



Junior Katelyn Brown attacks the net during Union County's 3-2 victory over Andrews, NC on Monday, Aug. 21. Photo/Todd Forrest

structing margins of 5-1, 14-9 and 21-16. Andrews raced ahead 22-21 with six straight until Union stopped the bleeding by forcing a momentary tie at 22-22. Unfortunately, the last three points belonged to the visitors.

Brookshire and Brown

continued applying the pressure in the 15-point final set, producing a quick 8-2 advantage. Rouse's ace made it 9-3, and the Wildcats would get no closer the rest of the way in a 15-9 final.

Later in the week, the Panthers dropped consecutive

sets to Murray County in Ellijay in a rematch of last year's first-round playoff matchup, won by Union.

Like last year's meeting, both sets went down to the wire with the Indians surviving the opener 26-24, before taking the finale 27-25 over Union.

## Softball: Gladding's HR propels Union past Pickens; late rally not enough vs. White

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Trailing 5-4 in the seventh vs. White County, Union County left the bases loaded with one away following a promising start to the final frame on Thursday, Aug. 24.

The Lady Panthers entered the bottom half of the seventh trailing 5-3, but the bottom of the order sparked a late rally via hits from Lily Helton and Jewel Massey. An out on the basepaths left pinch-runner Delaney Moses at third with one away for Georgia Patton, who singled home Union's fourth run.

Katie Byers singled to left-center, then advanced to second on the throw home, putting the go-ahead run in scoring position.

Sloane Dyer came to the plate with the bases packed after White County intentionally walked Gracie Gladding with one away. Dyer immediately smacked a hard grounder at the drawn-in third baseman, who fired a one-hopper to the plate to beat Patton, courtesy of a back-handed pick by the Warriors' catcher.

Senior Brooklyn Brown's frozen rope into deep center was snagged for the third out by the deeply-positioned outfielder.

**Lady Panthers 3, Pickens 2** - On Monday, Aug. 21, Gladding and freshman Izzie Anthros led the way in the first of two one-run games last week.

Gladding belted a three-run homer in the third inning, and Anthros fanned 10 Dragons during a complete-game three-hitter.

A leadoff error and a



Gracie Gladding's 3-run homer was the difference in a 3-2 win over Pickens County. Later in the week, White County wisely refused to pitch to the senior catcher with the game on the line. Photo/Todd Forrest

wild pitch in the first allowed Pickens to grab a 1-0 lead. The score stood until the third when Patton and Byers reached on consecutive infield singles, setting the stage for Gladding's bomb to left-center.

Three straight singles loaded the bases on the heels of the three-run blast, but a strike-out and groundout prevented Union from adding on. Pickens made it 3-2 in the fifth when a single and an error led to another unearned run off Anthros. Following Pickens' second run, Anthros retired the final seven Dragons to seal the win.

The freshman went 7 innings, giving up three hits and two unearned runs while punching out a career-high 10 batters and walking two.

Gladding finished 2 for 3 with a three-run homer. Patton and Byers each scored during a 1-for-3 day; Dyer went 2 for 3 and Brown ended up 1 for 3. Anthros finished 1 for 3 at the plate; Massey went 1 for 3 with a double and a stolen base; sophomore Ayla Jamison drew a walk.

Union County travels to Dawson County on Thursday, Aug. 31.

## XC: Union County runners off to blistering start, dominate at Meeks Park

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Union County swept the cross-country season opener at Meeks Park, collecting individual and team gold in the boys' and girls' races on Thursday, Aug. 24.

Sophomore Lola Hunter set the pace among the girls, finishing nearly two minutes ahead of second place at 21 minutes, 52 seconds. Union County ended the day with four runners inside the top five, with Ellie Adams in third at 24:52, Hannah Kazmierzak in fourth at 25:26 and Natalie Payne in fifth at 25:34. Lydia Wagner came in 12th at 27:07.

During the guys' race, senior Benton Gregory took home first at 19:17, more than 20 seconds better than the nearest competitor. Senior Wes



Benton Gregory

Seiler crossed the line in fourth at 20:36. Senior Zander Rotko's time of 21:13 was good enough for sixth; Ty Hogsed placed



Lola Hunter

seventh at 21:19. Anderson Clouse rounded out Union's top five with a 15th place finish (22:39).



Union County's girls placed four runners in the top five at Meeks Park. XC photos by Todd Forrest

## Woody Gap XC refuses to settle, seeking new ways to improve in Year Six

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Earlier this month, the North Georgia News reached out to Woody Gap Cross Country coach Robert Hill to discuss the program's sixth season.

**NGN:** What is the biggest difference/changes/improvements you've seen compared to year one? What's been your favorite memory; what are you most proud of?

**RH:** The biggest improvement over the years for the program is the structuring of the workouts to achieve the highest rate of improvement for conditioning and strength. This year we are adding in more flexibility elements to help with athlete recovery and life long wellness.

I am most proud when the athletes start to work together by competing with one another at practice. This competition really pushes everyone to get better. The structure of the workouts are more detailed and you've seen compared to year one

**NGN:** What has been the biggest challenge in building the XC program at a small school like Woody Gap?

**RH:** The biggest challenge is sharing available ath-



L-R (bottom): Coach Robert Hill, Jaxson Parks, Michael Dempsey, Ryan Marsh, Elijah Miller and Matthew Chapman. (Top) Melvin Tritt, Lili Dempsey, Mia Roberts and Alissa Cantrell

letes and not monopolizing their time. All fall programs have to work together and allow students the flexibility to participate in other after school activities during the season.

**NGN:** Last year you discussed gaining a greater understanding of helping athletes improve their weaknesses. How is that going?

**RH:** With a smaller program we can target more individual weaknesses. I try to stay dynamic with all activities and welcome any suggestion from the athletes.

**NGN:** What are practices like and when did they begin? Anything different this year compared to year's past?

**RH:** We practice daily

in the 3:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the weight room, gym, field and half-mile track around the school. The students are on their own to run over the weekends. The team's favorite practice is to run a trail in Suches named Buzzards Roost that offers challenging terrain and beautiful views.

**NGN:** Any new runners this year that didn't participate

in years past? Anyone that has stood out?

**RH:** We have several new runners this year mainly in the middle school program. Michael Dempsey (8th grade) is working very hard with great effort and attitude.

**NGN:** Do you have any team or individual goals for this fall? In year's past you would

participate in the Run Above the Clouds, are you still able to get the kids to participate in that event in the spring? Anyone you would like to thank or recognize? Anything you would like to inform the community about, like the Indian Summer Festival?

**RH:** All Cross Country athletes are highly encouraged to participate in the Spring Run Above The Clouds Race. The Run Above The Clouds does a great job in helping provide scholarships for Woody Gap.

Another giant thank you goes to the Union Co. Board of Education, Superintendent John Hill, Woody Gap Principal Wendy Reynolds, the parents of the athletes, and our bus drivers Tim Eigel and Bill Coker.

I would like to thank the Sports Club for all their support for Woody Gap athletics.

Woody Gap will hold our annual Indian Summer Festival on Oct. 7-8 from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. The sports club will be selling delicious whole smoked butts and BBQ plates. The Gaddistown Homemakers will also be selling a wide variety of delicious pies during that time. There will be live music, an auction, and a wide variety of vendor booths for all ages to enjoy.

Please come out and support Woody Gap.