

# Sports

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## Football: Panthers use 28-point second quarter to sink Towns

### Union aims to match 2021 win total Friday at unbeaten Armuchee

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**Hiwassee** - Dealing with rain showers for a third straight week, Union County used 35 unanswered points to break the contest wide open in a 49-7 victory at Towns County, marking the program's highest road point total in three years.

Junior running back Braylen Rader topped the century mark for the first time, piling up 125 yards rushing and two scores on 18 carries. Overall, the Panthers' ground attack rolled to 178 yards and three touchdowns while averaging 5.7 yards per carry.

Despite the offense putting up a season-high 368 yards on Friday, the Union special teams were the unit responsible for dealing the knockout blow right before halftime.

Ahead 28-7 with 19 seconds before the break, the Union defense brought up a fourth-and-1 at the Towns 30-yard line, where the Indians were content to run out the clock. But Panthers head coach Michael Perry burned a timeout to extend the half, hoping to benefit from a blocked punt or a Jensen Goble return in the final seconds.

But the Panthers wouldn't need either as the Indians awarded the visitors six points heading to the locker room. The snap sailed high over the punter's head and rolled to a stop near the 5-yard line, resulting in a free-for-all that amounts to catching a greased pig on a slip-and-slide.

Junior Kooper Ashcraft eventually pounced on the loose football in the end zone, and Ethan McBride's point-after opened up a 35-7 halftime advantage.

"The special teams were a big reason why we won that game," Perry said. "Coach [Mark] Wade did a great job getting all our special teams guys ready to play. We had great field position after kick returns for most of the night and getting that touchdown right before halftime was huge. So special teams played a very significant role in our victory."

The Panthers' defense forced a quick three-and-out to begin the third, and the offense fumbled the football at the Towns County 6-yard line, concluding a 10-play, 48-yard drive.

Fresh off Union's goal-to-go struggles one week earlier vs. Lumpkin County, the third-quarter turnover marked Union County's only red zone trip that didn't result in a touchdown in Hiwassee. The Panthers scored touchdowns on four of their five trips inside the Towns County



Braylen Rader takes defenders on a ride during an 18-yard run, lugging a pair of Indians inside the 5-yard line ahead of Union's third touchdown of the second frame that compiled a 28-7 advantage. Photo/Todd Forrest

Starting the second series from deep in plus-territory, Rader gashed the Indians for 12 yards up the gut on second-and-10 before getting chopped down after a short gain on the next play. A pair of incomplete passes brought up a fourth-and-8 at the 12, but Perry wasted no time demonstrating his faith in Union's much-maligned red zone offense. A quick throw over the middle to senior Griff Young drew a pass interference penalty at the goal line, resulting in a fourth-and-2 from the six. (Pass interference isn't an automatic first down in high school, and being inside the 20 made it a half-the-distance-to-the-goal penalty.) Needing two yards to move the chains, Union County kept it on the ground where Rader picked up the necessary six feet, bouncing outside and lunging to the 4-yard line.

Schuknecht took the first-and-goal handoff across the goal line for a 7-0 lead, planting his foot in the turf at the four before cutting inside and splitting a pair of defenders.

The Indians answered by moving inside the Union County five after hitting a third-and-8 wheel route for 33 yards and coming down with a 24-yard jump ball at the 10-yard line. Faced with fourth-and-goal from the five, Towns yanked its 22-yard field goal try wide left due to a low snap.

The Panthers handed possession back at midfield when a dropped pass over the middle popped up in the air and into the

hands of an Indians' defender. However, junior defensive tackle Lane Lance made a big play of his own, dropping Towns quarterback Connor Chastain for a 7-yard loss on second-and-15, leading to another Indians punt two plays later.

On the fourth play of the ensuing Panthers' possession, Tanner went deep over the middle to Goble on third-and-7, resulting in a 55-yard touchdown when the junior receiver ran under the throw at the 25 and outran the defensive back to the end zone.

"Honestly, we just saw something on that play," Goble said after the game. "I looked over at coach [before the touchdown catch] and said 'hey, we got the post in the middle of the field.' We ran it and it ended up working out for us."

According to Perry, the Indians' cornerbacks played tight coverage on the outside against Union, which was a departure from their previous outings.

"Against everyone else, the corners played 10 yards off, but against us they were jumping everything really quick," he said. "That's why early on, we were doing some quick passes and they were jumping it, right from the first play of the game. That was something we didn't expect, so we decided if they're going to play that way then we'll have to beat them over the top."

The Indians responded by going 74 yards on nine plays to slice the lead in half. Towns County went 3-for-3 on third downs during the drive, including a 6-yard touchdown carry on third-and-1. The Panthers rattled off 35 straight points to put things out of reach, but not before the Indians pressed Tanner into another timely third-down throw.

Young returned the Towns County kickoff to the 45-yard line, where Tanner immediately hit McBride for 13 yards. Later, on third-and-7 from the Indians' 38, Young put the finishing touches on a drive he initiated, blowing past the cornerback and running wide open down the seam. Tanner hit him stride at the 5-yard line to open up a 21-7 advantage with 5:10 remaining in the second quarter.

A shanked punt, coming on the heels of another Towns County three-and-out, gifted the Union offense possession at



Senior Griff Young (6) and junior Jensen Goble (12) celebrate Young's second-quarter touchdown catch. The duo combined for 10 catches, 163 yards and two scores at Towns. Photo/Todd Forrest

the 26 with 3:26 on the clock. Rader continued battering away at the Indians, dragging a pile of defenders inside the five on second-and-five. An offensive pass interference call erased Goble's second touchdown grab, but Tanner regained most of the penalty yards when he slipped out of trouble and scrambled for 13.

On third-and-goal from the six, Tanner bought time by rolling to his left, eventually finding junior Zach Taylor in the back of the end zone to open up a 28-7 margin at the 2:09 mark of the half.

With wins over its two neighboring rivals, Goble said Union's goals are to remain grounded and not start looking too far ahead.

"This win feels great, but we just need keep moving forward, taking it one game at a time and trying to get better each and every week," he said.

**Stats:** Tanner completed 20-of-29 with 190 yards and a career-high three touchdowns. For the second straight week, Goble recorded a career-best yardage total with 88 yards and a score on five catches. Young caught five passes for 75 yards and a touchdown; Taylor had 14 yards and a score on two receptions. McBride finished with 13 yards on one catch.

Schuknecht rushed seven times for 28 yards and one touchdown. Tanner had 17 yards on four carries, while senior Liam Cone added 8 yards rushing.

Helton led the defense with 12 stops, three tackles for loss (TFL) and two forced fumbles.

"Elijah Helton's tackle on the quarterback was one of the best hits I've ever seen in high school football," Perry said. "I think it was during the second quarter, but he got him good. It was a great tackle."

Junior Taylor Whitehead tallied a career-high nine tackles; junior Seth Rutan had eight tackles, three resulting in a loss, and a fumble recovery.

Senior three-year starters Gage Barnes and Wilson Walker recorded seven stops apiece, with Barnes making three tackles behind the line and Walker securing two.

With six tackles, three TFL, one sack and seven QB hurries, Lance proved problematic for the Indians' offensive line. In the secondary, senior

Sam Page and junior Nolan Thompson were both responsible for six tackles. Junior end David Heredia delivered five stops with two TFL; senior tackle Elijah Haynes had three tackles and a fumble recovery.

**Extra points:** Historically, winning at least two of three to open the year has been Union County football's recipe for success. One must go back to 1982 to find the last time Union began 2-1 or better and ended with a losing record. Meanwhile, the 1988 season marks the last time Union started 1-2 or worse and rallied to five or more wins.

\*In seasons where the Panthers begin at least 2-1 after three outings, they've averaged 7 wins a year dating back to 1975. On the flip side of that coin, they average 2.7 wins when starting 1-2 or worse.

\*Union County is now 32-1 vs. the Indians with a 17-0 record in Hiwassee.

\*This year marks the 10th anniversary of the last one-possession game between the Panthers and Indians - a 17-14 Union victory at Towns County to open the 2012 season.

\*As mentioned earlier, Union's 49 points marked the highest scoring output on the road since its record-setting 74-57 win at Putnam County on Sept. 27, 2019. The Panthers also posted their highest non-overtime point total under Perry, matching last November's 49-48 overtime win vs. Gilmer at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

\*During Perry's 54 games over five-plus seasons as a head coach, his teams have scored at least 49 points on eight different occasions, the most coming in a 70-42 win over North Atlanta while leading Centennial during the 2018 season.

**Up next:** Union County travels to Rome on Friday for its first-ever meeting with the undefeated Armuchee Indians out of Region 7-A. A Panthers' victory would equal last season's win total (3-7).

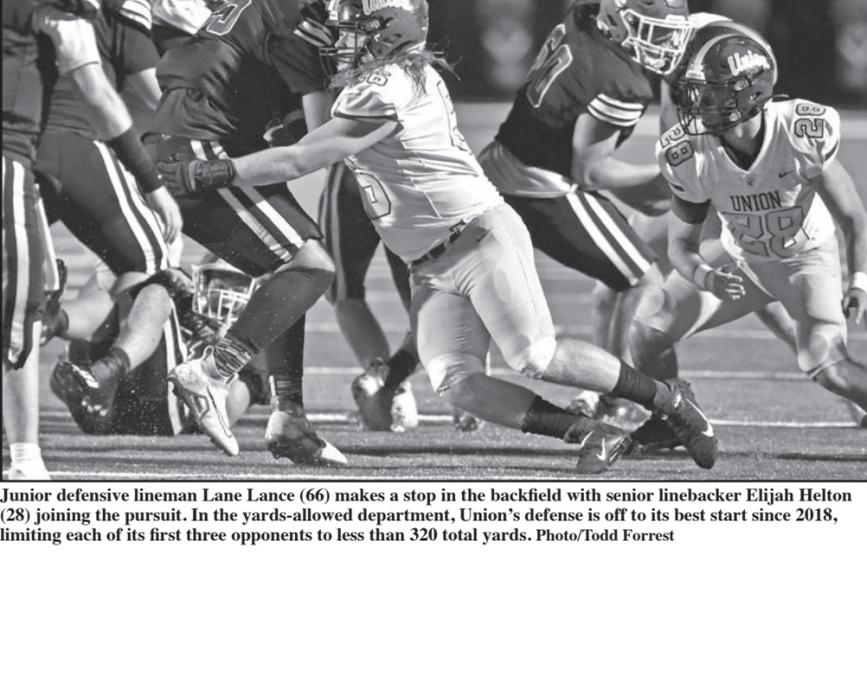
Armuchee is 2-0 with two narrow victories on its resume: A 17-14 win over Gordon Lee (1-3) and a 10-6 victory over winless Gordon Central. Last year, Armuchee opened with four straight wins, including a 31-14 home victory over Towns County, before limping across the finish line at 5-5.

Despite the late drop-off, Armuchee's five wins were the most in a decade, while coming within a game of the program's first playoff berth since 2009.

Senior quarterback Chandler DeSanto returns under center for his fourth year as starter. But elsewhere, the Indians lack experience with only five seniors on the roster. Armuchee graduated four receivers from 2021 and will lean on a trio of juniors this fall. The Indians' defense returns a pair of all-region selections at linebacker and cornerback, but their most potent weapon may be a member of the special teams. Junior kicker Grayson Perry is an all-state candidate and booted a game-winning 40-yard field goal during the final seconds vs. Gordon Lee.

"They are 2-0 and it's a long road trip, but we're looking forward to the challenge of facing an unbeaten team at their place," Perry said. "They haven't seen much of the spread offense this year so we hope that's something that works in our favor."

Armuchee's H.A. Lindsey Stadium is located on campus at 4203 Martha Berry Hwy, Rome, GA 30165. Kickoff is at 7:30 p.m.



Junior defensive lineman Lane Lance (66) makes a stop in the backfield with senior linebacker Elijah Helton (28) joining the pursuit. In the yards-allowed department, Union's defense is off to its best start since 2018, limiting each of its first three opponents to less than 320 total yards. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Volleyball: Panthers down Fannin, open region play Thursday

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In its final non-region tune-up match, Union County (7-5) rallied to win three-straight sets over Fannin after dropping the first, 23-25.

The Panthers begin Region 8-AA competition on Thursday when they travel to private-school powerhouse Athens Academy - the defending Class A-Private State runner-up.

During the 3-1 (23-25, 25-19, 25-13, 25-23) victory on Thursday, Sept. 1, Union County watched first-set advantages of 19-11 and 23-18 evaporate into a 25-23 Rebels win.

**Set two (25-19):** Tied at 12-12 in the second set, the Panthers opened up some breathing room at 15-12, beginning with a block from sophomore Lily Brookshire. Moments later, with Union clinging to a 15-14 advantage, two unforced Fannin errors helped the Panthers build a 19-15 margin.

Senior Kaylee Ashcraft recorded a kill at the net, followed by an ace, to mount a 21-17 edge before the two squads traded service errors. Senior Saylor Noe's late dagger secured the set and a 25-19 win.

"Our blocking was amazing tonight," head coach Megan Brown said after the



Senior Saylor Noe was a force at the net and on the serve during Union's 3-1 win over Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

"Our passing was great, our defense was great and we just played really strong tonight. We stepped it up when we needed to."

**Set three (25-13):** It was all Union County in set three, cruising to a one-sided 25-13 win and moving the home team within a set of taking the match.

The Panthers jumped

out to leads of 4-1, 7-2, 11-3 and 12-4 before a 5-0 Fannin County spurt sliced the margin to 12-9.

Three kills from Noe and one by senior Sofia Swartz allowed Union to regain control at 19-11. There would be no late Rebels rally this time as kills by Ashcraft and Swartz, followed by a block from sophomore Katelyn Brown put



Senior Kaylee Ashcraft serves during the second set of last week's non-region contest vs. Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Fannin County away.

**Set four (25-23):** With the match on the line, the Rebels refused to go down without a fight, erasing their early 5-2 deficit to hold leads at 8-7, 9-8 and 11-10.

Union raced back in front to stay at 12-11, but the win wasn't without its share of late drama. The Panthers appeared to seize control when kills by

Ashcraft and Noe opened up an 18-13 advantage. But four of the next five went to Fannin before Ashcraft stopped the bleeding at 20-17.

A Presley Berry ace made it 21-17, but once again, the Rebels clawed their way back into contention at 22-21.

The Panthers claimed the next two points to bring up match point, where Fannin

scored two of its own to remain within a point. With her team up 24-23, Brookshire's bump set fed Noe for the game-winning kill on the left side of the Union County net.

**Set one (23-25):** Despite controlling most of the opening set, a late Union hiccup allowed Fannin to race ahead and stun the Panthers 25-23.

Union County found itself in an early 6-3 hole when two aces from Swartz and an Ashcraft kill highlighted an 8-0 Panthers' run.

Union maintained control at 16-9, 18-10 and 19-11 when Fannin rattled off five straight. A Noe kill and two Fannin service errors pushed the lead to 23-18 when Fannin used its second timeout.

Out of the stoppage, the Rebels stunned Union County with a 7-0 run to finish off the set.

"Fannin County is very tough and they came to win, but our girls stepped it up when they had to," Brown said.

Thursday's visit to Athens Academy will get underway at 5 p.m.

"We're giving the girls a couple days off to rest," Brown added. "Nobody is really injured but we've got some girls bruised up and they need some time to rest."

"Then we're going to come back and start getting ready for region and build on what we did tonight [vs. Fannin]."

# Softball: Lady Panthers' late rally falls short in 8-5 loss to Pickens

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Union County's comeback bid proved too little, too late following an 8-1 deficit through five innings vs. Pickens on Wednesday, Aug. 31.

The Lady Panthers (6-5) tightened the contest during the late innings, scoring three in the sixth and one in the seventh before eventually falling to Pickens for the second time in eight days.

Sophomore Sloane Dyer got the start for Union County, going 2 2/3 innings before giving way to freshman Jaslyn Roberts to finish the third.

Sierra Burnette entered in the fourth, tossing four scoreless innings of one-hit softball in relief, aided by stellar defensive play that featured a diving snag courtesy of junior centerfielder Katie Byers.

Byers and junior Gracie Gladding both singled to start the sixth. An error off the bat of Seabolt scored Byers and a single by senior Chloe Potts loaded the bases with no outs.

Dyer's base hit made it an 8-3 game, going to the opposite field to drive in Seabolt. Senior Caroline Karnes cut the lead in half at 8-4 when she brought home Potts from third on a fielder's choice.

A Burnette triple to lead off the seventh accounted for Union's final hit of the night. She later scored via Byers' sacrifice fly.

On the verge of putting



Junior Brooklyn Brown attempts to fire up the Union dugout after scoring on Jaycee Seabolt's first-inning double vs. Pickens. Photo/Todd Forrest

up a crooked number in the first frame, Pickens' frame closed with only one run when Potts snagged a line drive headed for centerfield and stepped on second for the inning-ending double play.

Union tied things up in the bottom of the first when Seabolt's RBI double plated Brown, who entered for Gladding.

Gladding finished 2 for 4 and Seabolt went 1 for 4 with a run and an RBI.

Burnette scored a run and tripled while going 1 for 4. Dyer and Karnes each went 1 for 3 with an RBI; Potts scored once during a 1-for-3 game.

Karnes added a stolen base for Union County.

**Lady Panthers 2, Ware County 8 (Aug. 27) - Union**



The Union County infield gathers around the pitcher's circle as freshman Jaslyn Roberts (3) warms up ahead of her home varsity debut against Pickens on Aug. 31. Photo/Todd Forrest

County dropped the finale of the Oconee County tournament, allowing five in the second frame and three in the third.

Seabolt and junior Georgia Patton each finished 1 for 2 with a run. Dyer and Karnes drove in one run apiece during the second inning, capping a pair of 1-for-2 afternoons.

Potts ended her day 1 for

1 with a walk.

Roberts was charged with five runs, four hits and six walks over 1 2/3 innings. Patton made her high school debut in the circle, lasting 2 1/3, allowing one earned run on four hits and two walks.

The Lady Panthers visit Commerce (5-7) at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 6 before opening Region 8-AA ac-

tion at Banks County (8-6) on Thursday, Sept. 8 at 5:30 p.m.

The Leopards have won five straight following a 3-6 start to the year. Meanwhile, Union County opened 2022 at 4-0 but have dropped five of seven since Aug. 20.

The Lady Panthers visit Rabun County on Monday, Sept. 12 at 6 p.m.

## Local Racing Results: Tri-County

By Blake Lynch  
North Georgia News  
Racing Reporter

**Brasstown, NC** - Tri-County Racetrack recently hosted Fan Appreciation Night with grandstand tickets available for \$5. Additionally, track promoter Ray Cook allowed fans on the track to view the race cars.

**Crate:** Once again, No. 7 Jason Deals took on the win. No. 12 Daniel Wilson took home second. No. 22 Tucker Anderson was third. No. 51 Randy Dillard was fourth. Rounding out the top five was

No. 17 Brent Shook.  
**Modified A:** No. 03 Dante Curtis was the winner. No. 44 Bobby Elkins was second. No. 81 John Howard was third. No. 100 Copper Twigg was fourth. No. 5 Johnny Anderson placed fifth.

**Modified B:** No. 3L Mark Ledford was the winner. No. 7 Keith Rollins was second. No. 30 Josh Wooten came in third. No. 3F Floyd Self was fourth. No. 28 Roy Hardman was fifth.

**FWD:** No. J3 Josh Deese was first. No. 59 Matt Cordin placed second. No. J32 Shan-

non Jones was third. No. 106 Kyle Gilbert came in fourth. No. 32 Jim Exum was fifth.

**OPEN WHEEL:** No. 108 Chuck Southard was the winner. No. 95 Steve Clark was second. No. 55 Brad Sosebee took home third. No. 37 Michael Barnett was fourth and No. 51 Mark Roxane was fifth.

**Street Stock:** No. 14 Charles Devine took home the win. No. 7 Lynn Burchfield was second. No. 01 Jacob Lynch finished third. No. 04 Erick Ray was fourth. No. 69 Jim Wheeler was fifth.



Fans get an up-close look at the cars on Tri-County's Fan Appreciation Night.

## XC: Benton Gregory leads Union men to victory in Meeks Park makeup race



With their No. 2 runner Wes Seiler unavailable, the shorthanded Panthers took home first place at last Tuesday's makeup race at Meeks Park (originally scheduled for Aug. 25). Union County junior Benton Gregory (front left) took home individual gold to pace the field. No individual times were available by Monday's deadline. Both Union County cross country teams return to their regularly-scheduled action on Thursday, Sept. 8 at North Hall. Photo/Todd Forrest