

Softball: Union hosts No. 1 Banks on Tuesday with 8-AA's top spot on the line

By Todd Forrest
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The Lady Panthers (7-7) improved to 4-0 in Region 8-AA with an 8-0 victory at Social Circle -- the defending Class AA state champion.

In the win, Trinity Queen recorded a one-hit shutout while the Union County offense pounded out 11 hits in support of its junior right-hander.

Leading the way for the Lady Panthers were Miranda Lockaby, Hannah Patton, Emma Roxbury and Lexi Sisum, who recorded two hits apiece.

Rebekah Kelley, Mary Wischmeyer and Queen all chipped in one hit as Union County ended a 10-game losing streak (dating back to 2013) to the Lady Redskins.

The Lady Panthers ended things after five innings, thanks to three runs in the third and five in the fourth. Union County played error-free defense while Queen didn't surrender a walk.

Social Circle issued two walks and committed two errors.

Earlier in the week, the Lady Panthers hosted Lumpkin County in a non-region contest and came out on the wrong end of a 3-0 score.

Senior pitcher Megan Bright kept Union in the game but Lady Indians' senior ace Natalie Robinson silenced the Union bats, allowing her offense to manufacture enough offense to seal the deal.

This week, the Lady



Union County assistant Kaitlyn Payne is fired up while greeting the defense after turning a 6-4-3 double play to get out of trouble against Lumpkin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Panthers will face another tough test when they host top-ranked Banks County -- the defending State Runner-Up.

The Lady Leopards are currently 13-2 overall despite entering last weekend 11-0, where Banks County finished 2-2 at the Veterans Memorial Softball Tournament in Watkinsville.

After opening with a 1-0 loss to Locust Grove on Friday, the Lady Leopards responded with a 7-5 win over

East Jackson and a 7-1 victory over Oconee County.

In the finale, they would fall 4-0 to Grayson, who is currently ranked No. 3 in Class 7A, Georgia's largest classification.

In four region games, Banks County has outscored the opposition 35-1. Meanwhile, Union County has won its four games by a combined margin of 27-1.

Regardless of Tuesday's outcome, the Lady

Panthers will need to quickly regroup as they have another gigantic region clash on Thursday when they visit third-place Oglethorpe County.

The Lady Patriots (10-5) currently sit 2-2 in region play, but should move to within a game of second place, regardless of the Banks-Union outcome.

Oglethorpe hosts last-place Putnam County on Tuesday and will more-than-

likely be 3-2 when they host Union County, later this week. And since the loser of Banks-Union will fall to 4-1, Oglethorpe will find themselves just one game back of second place in Region 8-AA.

Tuesday's region clash is scheduled for a 5:30 p.m. first pitch. Thursday's trip to Oglethorpe County is also set for 5:30 p.m.

Over the weekend, Union County will travel to

Carrollton for a tournament at West Georgia. The Lady Panthers will face Heard County in a rematch from last year's State Tournament at 11 a.m. Saturday. They are also scheduled to take on Newnan at 1 p.m.

Union County will meet Madison County at the University of North Georgia on Monday before hosting Rabun County on Tuesday, Sept. 17.

Cross Country: Union runs against Banks, Rabun at NH Invitational

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Clermont - The top-ranked Union County boys cross country team got its first look of the season at its toughest region competitor during last week's North Hall Invitational.

Despite taking the rematch in the State Championship last fall, the lone blemish on Union's postseason resume was a second place finish to Banks County at the Region 8-AA Championship.

The rubber-match of the series was held last week at North Hall with the Panthers getting the upper hand with a fifth-place finish -- 82 points better than ninth-place Banks.

In head-to-head matchups, Banks' Griffin Stephens placed ninth with a time of 17:32. His Panther counterpart, Luke Gambrell came in 12th, eight seconds behind Griffin with a time of 17:40.

Union's Hunter Hartzog placed one spot back of Banks' No. 2 runner Buck Ledford, who placed 16th with an 18:03.

Hartzog was 17th at 18:11.

The Panthers' depth began to take over as the No. 3 match-up went to Union's Malachi Patrick, who took home 42nd with a time of 18:59.

Banks County's No. 3 runner, Patrick Angel, came in 58th place, while finishing 26 seconds slower than Patrick at 19:25.

Union's Gauge Shumaker and Thomas Mellendorf also crossed the line before Angel, placing 50th and 51st with times of 19:13 and 19:15, respectively -- swinging the advantage in favor of the Panthers.

Rounding out the Union County top-seven was 59th place Trevor Guild at 19:33 and 70th place Marcus Forrester at 19:42.

Banks County's No. 4 runner came in 73rd at 19:46, while its No. 5 was 98th at 20:30. The Leopards' final two runners were 143rd and 146th, respectively.

As for the other Region 8-AA opponent, Rabun County came in next-to-last (22nd) with 591 points. The Wildcats' top runner placed 97th with a time of 20:29. The next four were 106th, 116th, 135th and 137th, respectively.

The top-10 boys teams went: North Hall, Chestatee, Hart, Jefferson, Union, Dawson, Clarke Central, Flowery Branch, Banks and Lanier.

Individually, North Hall's Andrew Jones took home first with a time of 16:07. In second was Jefferson's Riley Thornton at 16:33; third went to Hart's Samuel Garringer (16:45); fourth was Chestatee's Luke Gaddis at 16:58.50 and fifth was Tallulah Falls' Evan Prince at 16:58.80.

Habersham's Thomas Hotard was sixth at 17:06; sev-



enth went to Hart's Matthew Brown at 17:12; Ben McGinnis of Dawson was eighth at 17:20; Stephens placed ninth and Jefferson's Matthew Schroeder placed 10th at 17:34.

Jonathan Torres Cruz of Chestatee came in 11th at 17:35, edging Gambrell by four seconds.

The eighth-ranked Lady Panthers and defending State champion Zoe Sanchez also got a look at Banks and Rabun, but didn't fare as well with the Lady Leopards coming in ninth, three spots better than Union.

Banks County, who didn't put a runner in the top-30, ended up with 254 points, 35 points better than Union (289). Individually, Sanchez remained impressive with a second place finish at 20:45. North Hall's Caylee Wagner placed first with 20:08.

Jefferson took home third and fourth with Caitlyn Schroeder placing third at 20:57 and Katherine Law right behind her at 20:58.

Clark Central's Lucy Yeoman rounded out the top-five with a 21:01.

Things began to spread out after the first-five as Flowery Branch's Bella Brick was sixth at 21:20, White County's Ellie Gearing placed seventh at 21:38, Clark Central's Lena Cook was one second back in eighth, White's Sydnee Nix was ninth at 21:42; in 10th

was Winder's Matilee Rogers at 21:51.

The top-10 in the team standings went Jefferson, White, Dawson, Lanier, Clarke Central, Chestatee, Tallulah Falls, North Hall, Banks and Flowery Branch.

In 11th was Madison County -- just 10 points better than 12th place Union.

Union County's next six runners went: Sadie Underwood in 30th at 23:50. Lexi Ochoa in 63rd at 25:18. Allison Vincent in 96th at 26:56. Jessie Holbrook in 98th at 27-flat.

In 105th was Campbell Chambers with a time of 27:25. Rachel Reid was 125th, clocking in at 29:09.

Banks County's next six runners were as follows: In 44th Jenna Reeves (24:29); 48th Destinie Martin (24:49); 52nd Anna Parker (25:00); 77th Taylor Cochran (26:11); 107th Alli Clark (27:25); 114th Sophie Black (28:10).

In 16th place was Rabun County with 362 points. The Lady Cats placed 45th, 54th, 78th, 79th, 106th, 120th, and 126th. Their top-runner, Molly Jo Wright finished 45th with a time of 24:32.

Up next for Union County Cross Country is another loaded field when they visit West Hall on Thursday at 5:30 p.m.



Cross Country photos by Todd Forrest