

Softball: Lady Panthers fall 3-2 in thrilling Region 8-AA title game

Union County to host first round of State Tournament beginning Tuesday

By Todd Forrest
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Homer - Union County made its first Region Championship Game appearance in four years, eventually falling 3-2 to No. 1 Banks County on a walk-off single in the bottom of the seventh inning.

“(Banks) is the No. 1 team in the state for a reason and we just couldn’t quite hold on,” Union County head coach Stephen Mitchell said. “But I was extremely proud of our effort and I felt like we grew up a little bit.”

Trailing 1-0 in the fifth and searching for an answer against Lady Leopards’ ace Tybee Denton - who had thrown 11-straight no-hit innings vs Union County - sophomore Ansley Collins led off with a base hit and advanced to second on a Rebekah Kelley sacrifice bunt.

A Miranda Lockaby single put runners at the corners with one down when a wild pitch scored Collins to even the score. On the very same play, an errant throw by the Banks catcher sailed past Denton, who was covering home, allowing Lockaby to come around and give the Lady Panthers a 2-1 lead.

“One of our best qualities is the ability to just grind and stay in it,” Coach Mitchell said. “We don’t get too high and we don’t get too low, we just wait for our moment to capitalize.”

Banks County immediately tied things back up with a one-out, solo homer in the bottom half of the inning. Queen would surrender a base hit to the following hitter but got out of trouble with a ground out and a strikeout, keeping the score all square at 2-2.

Union would go down 1-2-3 in the sixth when the Leopards put the go-ahead run in scoring position with two outs. Once again, the Lady Panthers escaped without damage when Queen induced an inning-ending pop-up.

“(Queen) has been really steady for us all year,” Coach



The Lady Panthers with their second place trophy after taking top-ranked Banks County down to the wire in Homer. Photo/Todd Forrest

Mitchell said. “She has great composure, poise and posture in the circle. She doesn’t overreact when bad things happen behind her or whenever she gives up a hit.

“She gave up that homerun but it didn’t bother her. She just kept on throwing. We talk to (our pitchers) constantly about not being able to control what happens behind you and only worrying about controlling the controllable. And I think they do a great job with that.”

Collins was plunked to put the leadoff hitter aboard in the seventh. Kelley would bunt her to second but the potential go-ahead run was left stranded as Denton slammed the door.

Banks wasted little time putting things away in the bottom of the seventh as a leadoff double and an RBI single gave the Leopards a 3-2 victory.

“I was disappointed in the outcome, but I felt like our kids played really well,” Coach Mitchell said. “Once we finally settled in after the first three innings, we started to play pretty good ball.”

Union County 8, Rabun County 0 - Earlier in the day, Megan Bright tossed five shut-

out innings as the Lady Panther bats pummeled Rabun County, 8-0 in the Region Semifinals.

“We’ve had some struggles at the plate this year, but during (Wednesday’s) games, I noticed some smiling faces,” Coach Mitchell said. “We have a good hitting team, we’ve just struggled and had some tough luck and growing pains. But I think we’re starting to come out of it at the right time.”

After struggling to put Rabun away during a 3-2 victory in Blairsville, two weeks earlier, Union County wasted little time punching its ticket to the Region Championship game. Union scored five in the first, two in the third and one in the fifth to end things via the “mercy rule.”

Three straight Lady Panther singles opened the game, followed by an error, a fielder’s choice and a two-run double by Queen to make it a 5-0 game.

Bright pitched around a leadoff walk in the second and a leadoff single in the third to preserve the five-run advantage.

In the Union half of the third, Hannah Patton singled to open the inning and Lockaby made it 6-0 with an RBI single. Later, Queen would extend the

lead to 7-0 with a sacrifice fly.

The game-ending run came in the fifth when Aubrie Banton beat out an infield single and scored on a two-out hit by Caley Davis.

Having two reliable pitchers in Bright and Queen paid off for Union County during

last Wednesday’s doubleheader, where temperatures climbed into the upper 90s.

“It definitely helped us and I think it will continue to help as we move on into these playoff series,” Coach Mitchell said. “Having Megan and Trinity is like having co-number one

Chatuge Dam 5K Run/Walk to benefit Haven Project of Georgia

The inaugural Chatuge Dam 5K run/walk will be held October 19th at 8:30 AM at Clay County Recreation Park in Hayesville, NC to benefit Haven Project of Georgia. The race will start and end at Pavilion #1 at the Clay County Recreation Park (47 Clay Recreation Park Road, Hayesville, NC) and will include a beautiful out-and-back across Chatuge Dam. Runners, walkers, wheelchair users, strollers, and dogs are welcome.

To register, go to www.active.com and look for The Big Dam Run 5K Run/Walk or see Haven Project’s website (www.havenprojectga.org) for a paper registration form. Participants with disabilities can register for free by emailing havenprojectofga@gmail.com.

Race t-shirts are guaranteed to those who register by October 4th and will be given to later registrants as long as supplies last.

Awards will be given for the overall male and female winners, overall masters male and female winners, and three deep in ten-year age groups from 10 and under to 70 and over.

This race will benefit Haven Project of Georgia, a non-profit organization that serves individuals with disabilities and their families in north Georgia and western North Carolina by offering free education, advocacy, and respite programs. Haven is neighbors helping neighbors get access to the programs and services they need to live their best lives.

pitchers.

“Megan has done a great job for us all year long but she’s had some tough luck losses. For us to have two kids as talented as they are, we are really lucky.

“They have worked really hard to get where they are and now we’re seeing the fruits of their labor.”

State Tournament - Union County will host a state playoff game for the first time since 2015 when they take on Therrell in a Tuesday doubleheader, beginning at 4 p.m.

Should the two teams split, the “if necessary” game will be held at 5 p.m. Wednesday.

The Therrell Panthers (13-4) hail from the Greenbriar area of southwest Atlanta and enter as the No. 3 seed in Region 6-AA.

“We don’t know a whole lot about them right now but we’ll spend the next few days learning all we can,” Coach Mitchell said. “But I believe if we come to play the way we’re capable of, I think we’re going to be just fine.

“When we have Trinity and Megan in the circle, we are confident that they’ll always give us a chance to win.”

UCHS Cross Country; Run Above the Clouds

Last week, Union County High School participated in White County’s annual meet at Unicoi State Park. Then, over the weekend, the Run Above the Clouds 10K race was held in Suches.

Run Above the Clouds race results were unavailable as of press time Monday so articles and photos from both races will be held until next week’s newspaper.

Union County High School will be in action Thursday when they compete at Elbert County. That will be the final race before the Region Meet at Oglethorpe County, later this month.

Volleyball: Union edges LOA on Senior Night; host Area semifinals Tuesday

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Union County volleyball secured the No. 2 seed in this week’s Area Tournament with a 2-1 victory over Lake Oconee Academy on Senior Night.

Things got off to a rocky start as Union faced early deficits of 13-9 and 18-13, before eventually falling 25-19 in the first set.

Trailing 14-12 in the second set, the Panthers stormed ahead 19-14 before LOA tied things up at 22-22. Union County would close with three of the next four points to take a 25-23 victory in set two.

The third and final set was all Union as they jumped out to an 11-2 advantage. LOA made things interesting by pulling

within striking distance at 13-9, but it was too little, too late as Union prevailed 15-10.

With its ticket already punched to state, Union County will host the Area Semifinals on Tuesday at 6 p.m. vs the winner of Oglethorpe County and Washington Wilkes, who will play the 5 p.m. game at UCHS on Tuesday.

The winner of Tuesday’s 6 p.m. match will face either Rabun or LOA on Thursday for the Area title. The losers will meet in the consolation match, also on Thursday.

This week’s matches will be the best-of-five sets.

Following last week’s win over LOA, Union County volleyball paid tribute to its five seniors: Kaitlyn King, Kait McCarter, Adelia Pyle, Bella Rosales and Izzy Zamora.



Senior Kaitlyn King with family.



Senior Kait McCarter with family.



Senior Adelia Pyle with family.



Senior Bella Rosales with family.



Senior Izzy Zamora with family.