

Sports

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Lady Panthers can punch ticket to Elite Eight this week

Union County softball finishes undefeated in 8-AA; State tourney begins Tuesday at home

By Todd Forrest
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Union County enters the Class AA State Tournament riding an 11-game winning streak, capping off the regular season with a 9-1 win over Providence to finish undefeated in region play for the first time in 12 years.

The top-seeded Lady Panthers open the postseason Tuesday at home when they host fourth-seeded Murray County at 1 p.m. With a win over Murray, Union County will host the winner of the 3 p.m. game between third-seed Walker and Region 5 runner-up Callaway at 7 p.m.

The four-team double elimination tournament will conclude Wednesday at 5 p.m. with the "if necessary" game at 7 p.m. The last team standing will earn a spot in the Class AA Elite Eight beginning Oct. 26.

Lady Panthers 9, Providence 1 (five innings) - Junior Sierra Burnette doubled and homered during a 2-for-4, two-RBI game while giving up three hits and one earned run over five strong innings in the circle.

Junior Georgia Patton craked two doubles and knocked



Senior Chloe Potts and the Lady Panthers can qualify for their second straight Elite Eight with three wins this week. Photo/Todd Forrest

Senior Sierra Burnette and the Lady Panthers in a pair to finish 2 for 3. Junior Katie Byers turned in a 2-for-2 day, including a triple, a stolen base and an RBI.

Burnette opened the game by reaching on an error, allowing courtesy runner Brooklyn Brown to score

via an RBI single by Jaycee Seabolt.

Burnette made it a 2-0 game with a third-inning homer, followed by a two-run double from Patton that plated Byers and senior Chloe Potts.

Providence got on the

board during the fourth, taking advantage of a leadoff walk with an RBI single.

Senior Caroline Karnes led off the Union fourth with a base hit and scored on Byers' triple. Gladding's two-out double brought home Byers to

build a 6-1 advantage.

The Union fifth saw a Patton double, followed by a single from sophomore Sloane Dyer. Patton came home via Karnes' sacrifice fly, and an error off the bat of junior Jewel Massey scored Dyer for an

8-1 lead.

Burnette ended the game via the mercy rule with an RBI double to left field.

Karnes finished 2 for 2 with a run and an RBI. Gladding walked twice, doubled and drove in a run during a 1-for-1 game. Seabolt's day ended 1 for 3 with an RBI. Dyer went 1 for 3 with a run; Brown, Massey and Potts added one run apiece.

State tournament preview: Union's first opponent, Murray County, is the 4-seed out of Region 7-AA and enters with a 2-16 record. The two squads share a common opponent in Fannin County, who the Lady Panthers defeated 20-5 in August. Murray County edged Fannin by scores of 9-5 and 11-10 (eight innings). Murray County owns a .218 team batting average with no homers and a team ERA north of 10.

The Walker Wolverines are the No. 3 seed from 6-AA with an 11-6 overall record and 9-5 in region play. No additional info was available for Walker.

Callaway enters as the No. 2 seed from 5-AA, sporting a 14-14 mark and a 10-2 region record. The Cavaliers owns a 5.30 team ERA and have scored 116 runs in 28 games.

Volleyball: Union secures 3-seed, State first round Wednesday at Murray

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Union County (17-22) is back in the state tournament for the fifth time in six years following postseason wins over Banks County and Fellowship Christian last week. The Panthers will travel to No. 2 seed Murray County on Wednesday in the opening round of state.

The Panthers enter the Class AA State playoffs as the No. 3 seed from Region 8, thanks to a 2-1 upset victory over Fellowship Christian on Saturday. Union County qualified for state by defeating Banks County 2-0 on Thursday.

Union County failed to reach their fourth straight region title match via a 2-0 loss to eventual 8-AA champion Athens Academy.

Panthers 2, Banks County 0 - Union County took down the Leopards in straight sets, 25-20 and 25-19, for their second win in three matches vs. Banks.

No stats were available by Monday's deadline.

Panthers 2, Fellowship Christian 1 - The Panthers



L-R: Seniors Saylor Noe, Sofia Swartz (22), Mattie Brookshire and Kaylee Ashcraft will play in one final State Tournament to finish off their decorated careers. Photo/Todd Forrest

won consecutive sets after dropping the opener 25-23. Union County dominated 25-9 in set two before taking the finale 15-11.

Senior Sofia Swartz tallied a team-leading nine kills

and three blocks in the win. Senior Saylor Noe had six kills, eight assists and 10 digs. Senior Kaylee Ashcraft added four kills, 10 digs and a team-high six aces.

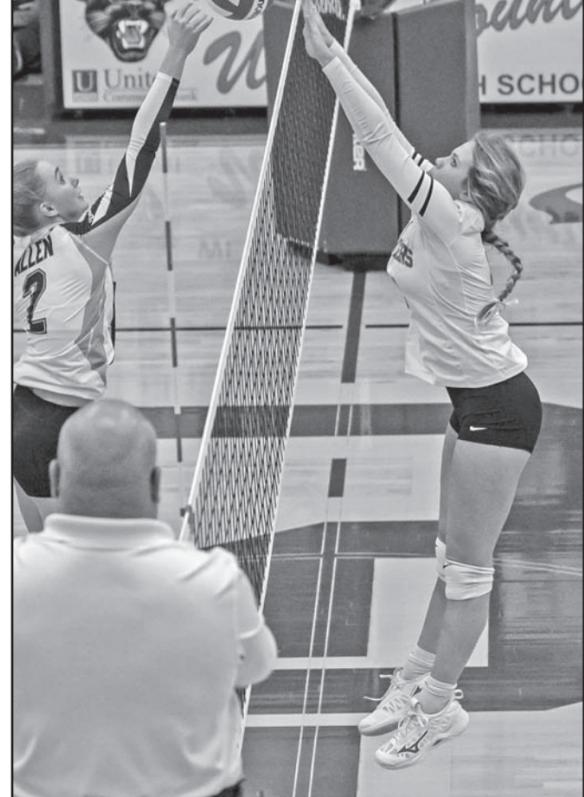
Sophomore Lily Brookshire recorded three kills and nine assists. Junior Addison Cross had two assists and eight digs. Sophomore Charlei Robinson added eight digs.

Panthers 0, Athens

Academy 2 - The Spartans won in straight sets, 25-12 and 25-11.

Swartz led the way with three kills. Swartz and Brown added two blocks apiece for the Panthers.

The winner of Union County-Murray County will likely face top-seeded Mt. Paran Christian (42-6), who owns a 2-0 win over Athens Academy on Aug. 20.



Sophomore Katelyn Brown denies an opponent at the net during a recent match. Photo/Todd Forrest



Addison Cross and Charlei Robinson (standing) led Union with eight digs each vs. Fellowship Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest

Pickling for First Responders Fundraising Tournament

The Pickling for First Responders fundraising tournament is rapidly approaching, this weekend, October 22-23. Businesses and individuals from around the area have been making contributions, both in raffle prizes and monetary donations. "The outpouring of generosity for our First Responders has been awesome", said Blairsville Pickleball Club President John Turcotte. "We've had several large cash donations, along with a wide variety of raffle prizes and smaller donations." In total, 84 businesses

or individuals made contributions. Leading the way, are Platinum Sponsors Mary's Southern Grill, Union General Orthopedic, and Mountain Lakes Business Center.

All proceeds from this fundraiser will go to Union County First Responders, to include the Fire Department, E911 Center, Sheriff's Office, EMS, Blairsville PD, and Union County School PD.

For more information about Pickling for First Responders, call John Turcotte at 678-923-7015 or email blairsvillepickleball@yahoo.com.

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Union County Rec Department October 23rd Youth Hike



Space is limited to 10 kids along with parent. (20)

You must register at the Union County Sports Center by Friday, October 21st, \$5. Bring sack lunch and wear appropriate shoes, no flip flops. Don't miss out on the beauty of Union County!

Register now for the next hike to Preacher's Rock on Sunday, October 23rd at 1:30 PM guided by the one and only Dustin Rogers! This hike will be 2 miles round trip. Enjoy scenic views and fall color! Kids ages 7-13. Parent or legal guardian must accompany child.

Football: Panthers secure postseason berth in wild shootout

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Union County (6-1, 2-0) needed a program-record 735 total yards to survive a frantic comeback bid from Providence Christian (2-5, 0-2) during a 56-49 thriller on a chilly evening at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium Friday night.

"I knew what [Providence] was capable of, if you look at their schedule, every team that beat them was very good," Union head coach Michael Perry said. "I also knew coming in they would be the first team we play that wasn't limited in their passing game."

Junior quarterback Cayden Tanner tallied career highs of seven total touchdowns and 403 yards passing. Additionally, he added four touchdowns through the air, completing 24 of 31 attempts with one interception. Although, it was the final hookup that carried the most weight among his two-dozen connections.

With the Panthers clinging to a 56-49 lead with under two minutes left and facing third-and-27 at their 42-yard line, Tanner took the shotgun snap and rolled left to escape inside pressure. Throwing across his body with a defender in his face, Tanner found a wide-open Jensen Goble near the Providence 40, where the junior receiver advanced down the Union sideline, picking up 39 yards after getting pushed out inside the 20.

Goble's day ended with eight catches and 130 yards, both career highs.

According to Perry, there was no playing the field-position game on third-and-27, the offense was going for broke.

"We were going for the first down because we knew things would get ugly if we had to give the ball back to Providence," he said. "Fortunately for us, the defender covering [Goble] fell down and [Tanner] made a great play because they had pressure. That was defi-



Junior Jensen Goble puts Union on the board with a first-quarter touchdown grab from Cayden Tanner. Photo/Todd Forrest

nitely the play of the game." From there, Union County put away the Storm with a steady dose of junior running back Braylen Rader, who moved the chains with gains of 6 yards and 4 yards, sending the Panthers into victory formation.

Rader churned out a career-best 210 yards to go with a touchdown on 17 carries, along with 35 yards and a score through the air. Senior Griff Young recorded 162 yards of total offense, hauling in eight passes for 138 yards and two touchdowns, plus 24 yards rushing on five touches.

Junior tight end Tyler Grasty ended with career highs of five catches and 100 yards. "I'm really proud of our offense because it took everybody to get the win," Perry said. "There were so many different guys that made an impact on offense, and that's how we were able to overcome and win."

During the first half, the Panthers appeared poised for their fifth-straight blowout

win, racing ahead to margins of 28-0 and 35-7. But things quickly went south following a three-and-out to begin the third quarter. The Storm blocked Wilson Walker's punt attempt, scooping up the loose ball and racing 10 yards for the easy score.

On the ensuing series, Union advanced to midfield when a penalty and an interception return awarded possession to Providence at the Panthers' 28. One play later, the Storm found the endzone through the air, slicing the Union lead to 35-21 less than three minutes into the third.

The Panthers scored on its next two possessions, extending the margin back to 28 points at 49-21. The first touchdown came via Tanner's 5-yard keeper, set up by a 50-yard catch-and-run by Grasty. Later, Young came down with a 17-yard completion on third and goal with 2:52 left in the frame.

Providence quickly responded with a 53-yard comple-



Junior Braylen Rader finished with a career-high 210 yards, which included an early touchdown catch for a 14-0 lead. Photo/Todd Forrest

tion, followed by a 10-yard scoring strike with 1:41 on the clock. The point-after try failed and Union County held a 49-27 edge.

The ensuing Panthers' drive stalled despite a Providence personal foul penalty and a 10-yard run from Rader. The Storm took over at their own 18 and needed six plays to move 82 yards and trim the deficit to 49-34.

Union's final score came on its next play from scrimmage when Rader broke loose up the middle for 64 yards with 7:55 remaining. The Storm needed only one snap to match the Panthers, hitting a 59-yard completion for a 56-41 score.

Three flags derailed Union's opportunity to answer, followed by a high punt snap that handed the ball back to Providence at the Panthers' 41-yard line. Three plays later, the Storm were in the endzone, and the 2-point conversion made it a 56-49 game at the 3:58 mark.

Union's game-sealing drive began at the 30 where

two gives to Rader moved the Panthers inside the Providence 40-yard line. But a slip in the backfield by Tanner resulted in a 4-yard loss, then an end-around to Young was dropped for a loss of 12, bringing up third and long. A false start resulted in third and 27 when Tanner found Goble for 39 yards.

Goble opened the scoring with an over-the-shoulder, 24-yard grab with 8:14 in the first quarter. Rader added a 6-yard touchdown catch just over three minutes later, then a Braden Plott interception at the seven, set up a 20-play drive that concluded with a 16-yard throw to Young with 8:30 left in the second.

Providence fumbled the kickoff and Tanner eventually found paydirt from 6 yards out, building a 28-0 advantage just shy of the quarter's halfway point.

After the defense forced a turnover on downs, a Union fumble at midfield led to the Storm's first touchdown - a

51-yard touchdown on the next play. Tanner stretched the Panthers' lead to 35-7 via a 10-yard run with 57 seconds left in the second period.

"At halftime, even up 35-7, our offensive staff knew that we were going to have to keep scoring points," Perry said. "We knew they were capable of scoring in just one or two plays and that 35 points wouldn't be enough. We've had some injuries in the secondary and really struggle [against the pass], so we knew it was going to be up to our offense to keep putting up points."

Up next: Union County hosts East Jackson (4-3, 1-1) with a chance to all but lock up a top-three seed in 8-AA. The Eagles own wins over common opponents Banks County (55-24) and West Hall (26-0).

"[East Jackson is] predominantly a run team, but I'm sure after watching the Providence game, every team we play will want to throw the ball against us," Perry said. "They have a good running back and do a lot of option stuff. We have to make sure we play assignment football and get better in the secondary - we have to."

Region 8 is matched with Region 7 in the first round of State, so securing a top-three seed will prevent a trip to likely region champ Rockmart.

As it stands in 7-AA, Fannin County, Model and North Murray are all tied for second with one loss each. Haralson County, Murray County and Gordon Central have three losses apiece.

Mountain High Hiking weekly schedule

Mountain High Hikers offer three hikes each week: Tuesdays, a long hike from 8 to 14 miles; a short hike from 5 to 8 miles; and a Thursday leisure hike from 3 to 5 miles. We also do trail maintenance on Thursday and some outside events. Check us out on our website: mountainhighhikers.org.

UCMS claims league championship with 28-6 victory at White County



UCMS head coach Neil Setzer receives an ice bath following Union's title game win. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County's middle school football team celebrates its semifinal victory over Gilmer earlier this month. A week later, Union County stunned undefeated White County 28-6 during the league championship game in Cleveland. The title is believed to be Union County's first middle school championship in more than a decade. The North Georgia News will feature a complete game story from White County, additional photos and a Coach Setzer interview in a later edition. During the win at White, UCMS quarterback Chetley Cox connected on three touchdown passes - two going to Robert Thompson and one to Paxon Legatt. Brandon Lynch added a first-quarter scoop-and-score and Kevin Kilpatrick had a third-quarter interception.

UCRD football concludes regular season, 5th grade advances to playoffs



The Union County 5th graders in action at White County on Saturday. The 5th grade Panthers are the lone UCRD squad moving on to the postseason. Union will host all semifinal games on Oct. 29. Photos by Todd Forrest



L-R: In a display of sportsmanship, Union County and White County 4th graders meet at midfield for a postgame prayer. The 4th grade wrapped up its season at White County on Saturday. Photos by Todd Forrest

