

XC: Sanchez blisters the field; both UC teams second at 8-AA Championships

By Todd Forrest
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LEXINGTON - For two years, close-but-no-cigar was the story for Union County junior Zoe Sanchez, who was punching above her weight class in Region 7-AAA.

Back where they belong in Region 8-AA, Sanchez and the Union County Cross Country teams found themselves in the hunt for a championship during last week's Region meet at Oglethorpe County.

At the end of the day, both teams placed second, securing a spot in Saturday's State Championships in Carrollton. Individually, Sanchez blistered the Region 8-AA course as she claimed her first Region Cross Country Championship -- the program's first since 2015.

Sanchez led wire-to-wire in the girls race, jumping out to a 35-second lead after one mile before cruising to a 95-second victory over Banks County's Destinie Martin.

"That was my plan, to get ahead early so I wouldn't have to worry about it later on," said Sanchez when asked about going for the lead right away. "After I got out front, I really wasn't paying attention to how big my lead was. I didn't even know until I heard a coach tell me and I was like, wow!"

With a time of 19:56, Sanchez was the only runner to break the 20-minute mark. Fellow junior, Sadie Underwood turned in a fifth place performance for Union County, clocking in at 22:19 -- fending off Rabun County's Hannah Cannon by 2.48 seconds.

The duo of Sanchez and Underwood, however, wouldn't be enough to lead the Lady Panthers to a team championship as Banks County took home first place. With four runners in the top 8, the Lady Leopards finished with 32 points -- 26 points better than Union's 58.

Placing third in the team



L-R: Zoe Sanchez crosses the finish line 95 seconds ahead of second place.

standings was a tie between Rabun and Elbert Counties with 94 points. The tiebreaker went to Rabun but both squads still qualify for the state meet.

The boys race, however, was much closer, beginning with a photo finish between Rabun County's Guy Gober and Banks County's Griffin Stephens for the individual region title.

Gober's late pass of Stephens helped Union County in the team standings but it still wasn't enough. Banks edged the Panthers by one point, 43-42 despite six Union runners crossing the finish line before Banks County's fifth place runner.

Luke Gambrell paced the Panthers at 17:37 -- good enough for third.

"Those (top two) guys took off after the first half-mile and I couldn't catch back up with them," Gambrell said. "The main thing now is just getting ready for state.

"My goal for state is a top 5 (finish) but I just want to try my best to help our team get a top 3 (finish). We've all worked

really hard this year. "Last year we were running against schools that were bigger than us so it feels pretty good to be one of the top teams (in the region)."

Hunter Hartzog placed eighth at 18:02; Steven Seiler was ninth at 18:15 and Malachi Patrick came in 10th at 18:40.

In 13th place was Gauge Shumaker at 18:56 while Thomas Mellendorf rounded out Union's top six with a 16th place finish at 19:08.

"I wanted to finish sixth but it wasn't meant to be," Seiler said. "Hopefully we can come back and get first or second at state. In order for that happen, I think I'll have to finish in the top 10."

Meanwhile, Banks County's No. 5 runner came in 18th and its No. 6 placed 25th.

The difference was at the top as the Leopards placed two runners in the top 4 and three in the top 6.

Union County only put one runner in the top six.

Oglethorpe County placed



Luke Gambrell eyes the finish line and third place. Photos/Todd Forrest

third and Putnam County fourth in the team boys standings to join Union and Banks at Saturday's State Championship race.

With the State Championships just days away, Union County Cross Country Coach Paige Dyer is confident the second place finish will serve as a wake-up call and motivate the boys squad to potentially claim a Class AA State title.

"We raced Banks County three times before region and beat them all three times," Coach Dyer said. "But we're not going to let one race define our entire season and I hope we can learn and grow from it.

"At state I expect both of our teams to do really well. I expect our boys to come back determined not to lose to Banks County again. Having Fall Break the week before region didn't help but it is what it is."

One advantage Coach Dyer believes her teams will have at Carrollton is the course setup. The state course features more hills than region, which

will favor Union County.

"We tend to do better on hilly courses, which should help us out at state," she said. "I really believe that we're going to perform very well at state. I think we're focused and we know what we have to do. We have a full week of practice before so that will help us."

Sanchez is also feeling confident and believes she has something to prove at state.

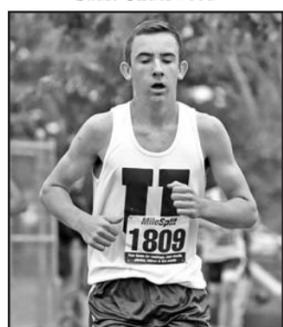
"I feel like I have to get a good time (at state)," Sanchez said. "Otherwise I'll feel like this region title didn't mean as much. It's a great title to have but I just hope I can back it up at state.

"At state, I'm hoping for a (time of) 19:45, but looking at (my region time of 19:56) we'll have to wait and see if that will happen."

Rounding out the Union County girls top six were 17th place Lexie Ochoa with a time of 24:13; 20th place Latty Ryals at 24:33; 25th place Rachel Reid with a time of 25:10 and 29th place Jessie Holbrook at 25:29.



Sadie Underwood



Hunter Hartzog

Other runners were Campbell Chambers in 38th at 27:47 and in the boys race, Marcus Forrester was 24th at 19:42.

In the JV races, Nolan Bachman was second in the guys race and Katelynn Rash was eighth for the girls. The boys JV was first in the team standings while the girls were second.

Behind Bachman, the Union boys claimed the next five spots with Elliot Stepps in third, Nathan Cobb fourth, Lawson Harkins fifth, Milo Bauman sixth and Hunter Payne seventh.

Cesar Velador was 10th, Brady Guild 11th, Sam Cockerham 12th, Daniel Griggs 16th, Thomas Allison 20th, Matthew Patrick 26th, Bryson Baker 30th, David Van Pelt 36th, Devin Gasaway 38th, Reece Patterson 40th and Preston Perren 55th.

Meanwhile, Sara Steele was 11th, Emily Frizzell 12th, Sahory Salazar 14th and Alexis Whittemore 17th in the girls race.

Region Championship... continued from 2B

reverse a recent trend vs ranked teams in general. Since 2001, Union has lost 20 straight games vs ranked opponents with its last win coming in 2000 vs No. 9 Dawson County. In fact, Union County hasn't been competitive vs a ranked team since the 2001 season finale at GAC when the 9-0 Panthers took an early lead but couldn't keep pace in a 56-35 loss.

Since that night in Norcross 17 years ago, Union County's average loss to a ranked opponent has been by a completely one-sided margin of 46-9. To find a road victory vs a ranked team, you have to go back 51 years to 1967 when Union defeated No. 7 Lumpkin County 27-7 in Dahlonega.

Against teams ranked in the top 5, the Panthers have fared even worse. Union has never defeated a top 5 team on the road and the only home victory came in 1976 vs No. 3 Buford by an 8-6 score.

Despite the Panthers recent struggles vs quality competition,

this team is well aware that most of those losses weren't under Coach Allison. In fact, Union's last win vs a ranked team was with Brian Allison at the helm. And Coach Allison also understands that many of those teams weren't as talented as his current group.

"I feel like we can compete with (Rabun)," he said. "However, I feel that we need to bring our A-game if we want to win it. But we don't need to talk about it too much. The guys know where we're at and what's at stake. They know what's going on so I don't think we're going to need a whole lot of motivation. If you can't get fired up for this ball game, then you can't get fired up for anything."

On the opposing sideline Friday night will be a team that's celebrating its Senior Night, so Coach Allison knows his squad will need to withstand an early wave of emotion.

"There's no way to really prepare for that besides just talking to the guys and having a

conversation with them," he said. "We'll just tell them that they need to weather that early storm. At Elbert, we came out playing a little tight early on so I don't think I need to push that envelope too much. Our guys know what they need to do."

Kickoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Friday night but the parking lots will fill up quickly so arrive early if you plan on making the trip.

To avoid Clayton and cut a few minutes off the drive, turn right onto Davis Gap Rd. (approximately 4.4 miles past the Lake Burton bridge on Hwy. 76 East).

After 0.9 miles, Davis Gap ends. Turn left at the stop sign onto Bridge Creek Rd and after 2.2 miles you'll come to a 4-way stop sign where you'll turn right onto Old Hwy. 441.

The road will fork after 3/4 mile where you'll take a left (Hollifield Connector). At 0.6 miles the road becomes Wildcat Hill Dr. and will take you directly to Rabun County High School.

Union County High School Band thanks supporter



Jacky Jones Ford of Hayesville, NC have sponsored the UCHS Band this year and have provided a truck to pull our equipment trailer to all of our parades, games and competitions. This is a huge deal for our program and we are very thankful to Jacky Jones for supporting the band!

MACA Volleyball is GCAA State Champs



The MACA Lady Lions finished the season with a 24-1 record behind the senior leadership of Courtney Marr, Madelyn Savage, Abigail Knight and Genesis Tercero.

North Georgia News Sports Special

The Mountain Area Christian Academy Lady Lions Volleyball team won the Georgia Christian Athletic Association State Championship this past week.

MACA entered the tournament as the Region 1 Champions and the top-seeded team. Their

first match was against Appling Christian from Baxley and they won 2-0. The Lady Lions then played Bible Baptist from Hampton and came away with another 2-0 win to find themselves in the Championship Game against Covenant Christian of Cumming.

The Rams from Covenant Christian were the Lady Lions' only regular season loss and the

championship was a hard fought game with the Lady Lions coming out on top with a 3-1 win.

Senior Madelyn Savage was named tournament MVP and was selected along with fellow senior Courtney Marr and Sophomore Kaitlyn Helton on the All-Star team.

The Lady Lions finished the season with a 24-1 record.

Passing	Comp/Att	Yds	TD	Int	Long
#17 P. Allison	9 / 11	341	4	-	77
#8 L. Helcher	1 / 4	2	1	1	2
Rushing	Att	Yds	TD	Long	Fum
#34 J. Daniel	10	103	-	44	-
#40 K. Williams	1	27	-	27	-
#24 C. Buzzard	3	21	-	14	-
#17 P. Allison	3	19	1	9	-
#8 L. Helcher	5	8	-	7	-
#5 M. McCombs	1	-6	-	-	-
Receiving	Rec	Yds	TD	Long	Fum
#84 K. Morlock	3	101	1	77	-
#4 K. Hemphill	3	86	1	36	-
#21 S. Drake	1	74	1	74	-
#20 C. Rich	1	52	1	52	-
#2 C. Schafer	1	28	-	28	-
#82 Z. Ross	1	2	1	2	-

JV Football team finishes 6-0

The Union County junior varsity football season wrapped up its season earlier this month with a 6-0 record.

The final game of the year was a 28-14 win at Fannin County on Oct. 18. The Panthers had a make-up game scheduled for Oct. 25 but White County canceled due to injuries.

The junior varsity season got underway on Aug. 30 with a 38-29 victory over White County.

The Panthers were back on the road two weeks

later with another game vs Class AAAA competition. Once again, Union County throttled the opposition, this time, a 34-0 shutout was the result.

The Panthers traveled to Lumpkin County on Sept. 27 and left victorious, 31-12.

On Oct. 11, Union County took care of Rabun County 21-7 before capping off its perfect season at Fannin County a week later.

The win at Fannin wasn't without drama as the Panthers fell behind 14-0 but stormed back with 28-0 unanswered points.

Youth Football: 9U Panthers fall one game short of Super Bowl

By Blake Lynch
Staff Writer
North Georgia News

The 9U Panthers took on the Gilmer County Bobcats with a trip to the Super Bowl on the line. Unfortunately, Union County fell short, 13-6.

No.31 Kevin Kilpatrick scored a touchdown but the extra point was no good. Later, No.11 Alan Godinez recovered a fumble but the Panthers couldn't get anything going offensively.

Here are the players for the 9UPanthers: No. 00 Lassiter Windsor, No. 1 Brandon Lynch, No. 3 Michael Davis, No. 5 Jaden

Lee, No. 8 Kyler Juracka, No. 9 Graham Crosby, No. 10 Brayden Ball, No. 11 Alan Godinez, No. 13 Camden Kendrick, No. 15 Haze Burnett, No. 18 Karter Conley, No. 20 Easton Shumaker, No. 21 Bradley West, No. 22 Jaxon Totherow, No. 25 Kasch Smith, No. 27 Sam Quillion, No. 30 Kingstorn Jones, No. 31 Kevin Kilpatrick, No. 34 Isaiah Stepp, No. 35 Austin Hughes, No. 40 Jax Dillinger, No. 41 Tate Harkins, No. 44 Chetley Cox, No. 48 Gunner Franklin and No. 88 Micah Wallace.

They are coached by Levi Kendrick, Kevin Conley, Rusty Cox, Derick Dillinger, Kevin Kilpatrick and Daniel Shumaker.

Blairsville Pickleball Club members bring home gold!

The Towns County Pickleball Complex was the venue for an exciting 3-day tournament held October 5th-7th. In a tough match of mixed doubles, Janet Bush of Blairsville and Blake Harper of Young Harris won the first place gold medal. Players and spectators from across the USA enjoyed watching skilled athletes compete. Playing categories included ages from 10 years old through 70+years. Visit YouTube to view the how the game is played. NT0c61210CA



(L-R): Janet Bush and Blake Harper compete. Playing categories included ages from 10 years old through 70+years. Visit YouTube to view the how the game is played.