

# Sports

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## Hunter third at Region; both XC teams qualify for State meet

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**Athens** - Union County freshman Lola Hunter placed third behind a pair of Athens Academy runners on their home course during last Thursday's Region 8-AA Championships.

Overall, the Union ladies (63 points) placed third behind Athens Academy and Fellowship Christian, finishing seven points back of second-place Fellowship and 40 behind the Spartans. With a time of 20:36, Hunter crossed the finish line 23 seconds behind second-place senior Spartan Sarah Harrison. Athens Academy sophomore Maya Davis took home first at 20:04.

Hunter was able to outlast Athens Academy sophomore Adelaide Ellis by 11 seconds. Union County junior Ellie Adams placed sixth with a time of 22:02, finishing 15 seconds behind Athens Academy sophomore Molly Smith.

The Spartans ended the day with four runners among the top five.

Second-place Fellowship Christian placed six runners in the top 17, finishing seventh, eighth, 12th, 13th, 16th and 17th.



Lola Hunter's 20:36 is among the best region times by a UCHS freshman, putting her in the company of two back-to-back state champions: Zoe Sanchez (20:43) in 2016 and Emma Garrison (19:22) in 2012.

Fourth-place East Jackson rounded out the state qualifiers with 108 points, paced by ninth and 10th-place individual performances.

Union County (93 points) squeaked into the top four on the men's side, edging long-time rival Banks County (94) by one point. The Pan-

thers came within three points of third-place East Jackson (90) but finished 37 back of runner-up Providence (56). Athens Academy took home the top spot with 35 points.

Ninth-place junior Benton Gregory led the way for Union County, clocking in at 18:25.77 to edge Banks



The Union County men squeaked past Banks County by one point to claim the final spot in Saturday's State Championship meet.

County senior Troy Loggins (18:26.33) by less than a second in a 1-on-1 matchup that likely extended Union County's season by nine days.

Junior Wes Seiler placed 14th at 18:58 and junior Zander Rotko finished 18th in another close call. Rotko posted a time of 19:28.75, just ahead

of Fellowship freshman Grant Nolan, who clocked in at 19:29.44.

Junior Anderson Clouse came in 24th at 20:06 and freshman Ty Hogsted placed 28th at 20:03 -- two seconds better than East Jackson senior Jeffrey Fuller (20:05). Sophomore Alec Wilder came

in 38th at 21:36, and senior Ethan Rouse finished 39th with a time of 21:37.

Other Union County ladies were a pair of sophomores in 19th and 21st place, respectively. Hannah Kazmierzak's time of 24:17 was good enough for a top-20 performance, and Noel Hyatt just missed a spot among the top 20 with a time of 24:25.

Junior Natalie Payne came in 23rd at 24:35 and senior Ashley Shipes placed 28th with a time of 25:14.

Union County will travel to Carrollton for the Class AA State Championships on Saturday morning. The men will participate in the day's first race at 8 a.m., with the ladies to follow at 8:45 a.m.

Hunter finished the race as the region's top freshman, with Fellowship's Lily Nolan placing 12th, Providence's Genna Grace Davis in 30th and East Jackson's Gracelynn Moore in 32nd. Gregory and Seiler were the fourth and sixth fastest juniors in the men's race.

Athens Academy, East Jackson and Union were the only schools to qualify both teams for the State meet. Longtime region power Banks County failed to qualify either squad for the first time since rejoining 8-AA in 2016.

## Youth football: Union County 5th grade season ends in league semifinals

By Todd Forrest  
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The Union County 5th-grade Panthers forced four fumbles but failed to recover a single one in Saturday's 14-0 semifinal loss to Pickens at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

On the game's opening series, the Panthers drove inside the Pickens 5-yard line but an endzone interception kept them off the board. Following the turnover, the Dragons drove 92 yards to build an 8-0 lead with 4:18 in the second quarter.

Pickens made it 14-0 in the fourth but Union's ensuing red zone trip came up empty. Union County finished third in the league with a 5-3 record.

Head coach Zach Helton praised his squad's raw talent and believes the only thing missing is experience.

"We're young, and only been together two years, but we've been better than what we show in big games," he said. "We're just not there mentally yet, [but] this group has more talent and speed than I've ever seen Union have."



The Union County 5th grade Panthers in action during Saturday's semifinal matchup vs. Pickens. Photos by Todd Forrest

## 5th Grade cheer squad first at MAC Bowl competition



The Union County Recreation Department took home first at last week's MAC Bowl Cheerleading competition at Dawson County. The squad qualified via a video submission, marking Union's first entry into the event. Union defeated Lumpkin, Dawson, White, Chestatee and Pickens. Union is coached by Bridget Burgess. The assistant coaches are Autumn Abercrombie and Kristy Rusk.



# Football: Spartans pull away late in Union's first region loss

By Todd Forrest  
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Athens - Athens Academy outscored Union 21-0 over the final 12:41 in a 38-7 home victory, handing the Panthers their first region loss and dealing a significant blow to Union County's bid to host a state playoff game.

"I'm proud of everyone's effort, but when you play a team of that caliber, you have to be excellent in all three phases and we didn't do that," Union County head coach Michael Perry said.

Trailing 17-7 just past the halfway point of the third quarter, sophomore Braden Plott picked off a Spartans pass at the Panthers' 40-yard line, and junior Cayden Tanner quickly moved the offense into plus-territory when he hit junior Jensen Goble on a 13-yard out route on second and 8.

The drive quickly went south when Athens Academy forced a second-down incomplection before swarming Goble on a short throw over the middle. Tanner elected to go deep on fourth-and-6 at the 41, but senior Griff Young couldn't pull down the jump ball while blanketed by two Spartans.

"We had a chance to make it a game but we didn't and things went downhill from there," Perry said. "If it were a one-score game, I would have punted, but being down 10, we needed points."

Athens Academy immediately seized on the momentum and went back to the ground attack, using six straight runs to extend the lead to 24-7, capping the drive with a 17-yard run with 41 seconds left in the third.

On Union County's next play from scrimmage, the Spartan corner jumped a quick out route and returned the interception 24 yards for the touchdown.

Athens Academy's second pick-6 came late in the fourth when a deflected pass ended up in the hands of a Spartans' safety, who went 39 yards for the touchdown and a 38-7 final.

The game opened with Union County stalling at midfield despite a leaping 22-yard catch by Young on third and 12. Athens



Junior quarterback Cayden Tanner rolls outside the pocket during the first quarter at Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest

Academy took over at the 25, and four plays later, the Spartans broke a quarterback keeper up the gut for 58 yards and a score.

Union County's ensuing series moved deep into Athens Academy territory before its fifth sack of the first two drives resulted in a turnover on downs. The possession started with four straight runs that advanced the offense to the 40-yard line. Following a first-down sack, Tyler Grasty's sideline catch went for 15 yards into Spartan territory, then a 22-yard catch-and-run by Goble had Union at the Athens Academy 25.

Two incompletions and a third-down sack dropped the Panthers into fourth and 16, but Union appeared to catch a break with a pass interference call near the Spartans' 10-yard line. However, the 15-yard penalty was changed to a 10-yard defensive holding, bringing up fourth and 6. From the Spartans' 22-yard line, the Athens Academy blitz got to Tanner for another sack and a change of possession.

"The offense just didn't execute and we were off," Perry

said. "But that's not taking anything away from our guys because they gave it their all."

The Union defense forced a fourth-down incomplection, but the offense's pass protection broke down again, yielding a third-and-8 sack at midfield that brought out the Union County punting unit.

The Panthers defense appeared to catch a break of their own when a high snap sailed over the quarterback's head for a 36-yard loss. On third and 45, a QB scramble netted 12 yards, bringing the kicker on to try a 54-yard field goal. The line-drive kick drilled the crossbar and bounced straight into the air before falling to the ground behind the bar, awarding the home team a 10-0 advantage with 6:10 remaining before halftime.

A delay of game penalty on fourth and inches derailed Union County's next series, and the Spartans set up shot at midfield following the Wilson Walker punt. On its first play, Athens Academy went up top and connected on a 51-yard touchdown pass at the 4:55 mark



Seniors Sam Page (14) and Wilson Walker (0) lead a host of Panthers to the football in Athens on Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

of the half.

A first-down catch by Goble was all Union could muster, and the Spartans earned one final possession before the break. After a first-down completion into Panthers' territory, senior linebacker Gage Barnes snuffed out a quarterback scramble in the backfield for a 4-yard loss. Then, senior defensive tackle Elijah Haynes swallowed up an inside-screen pass, resulting in a 3-yard loss and sending his team to the locker room still trailing 17-0.

The Union County defense continued to impress in the third frame, forcing three straight incompletions that led to the Spartans' first punt. The series' defensive highlight came via a de-cleating third-down hit by freshman cornerback Cade Dockrey, who dislodged the football when he leveled the receiver close to the first-down marker.

The Panthers' lone scoring drive began at their own 35 with a 5-yard throw to Young, followed by a third-down strike to junior Ethan McBride for 11. Three plays later, Goble came down with a juggling catch for

27 yards, moving Union County to the Athens Academy 12.

On third and 2 from the four, Tanner kept it himself and blasted his way up the middle for a Panthers' touchdown. McBride's extra point trimmed the Union deficit to 17-7 with 7:41 left in the third.

Once again, Panthers defense had Athens Academy on the ropes when Plott came down with an interception on third and 14.

The Spartans' defense limited Union County to a season-low 225 yards of offense - 13 yards under the previous low of 238 yards vs. Fannin County. Tanner finished 16 for 30 with 160 yards and two picks.

Goble caught six passes for 68 yards; McBride and Young added four catches and 35 yards apiece. Grasty had two grabs for 19 yards and Schuknecht hauled in two receptions out of the backfield.

Schuknecht led the Panthers with 50 yards rushing on 11 touches. Rader added 22 yards on eight carries.

"Everything is fine with

Rader, but Schuknecht has been running the ball really well lately and it's a matter of going with the hot hand," Perry said.

Athens Academy senior quarterback Sam Bush scored twice, piling up 104 yards rushing and 79 yards through the air. Senior running back Tre Hawkins had 79 yards rushing on 14 carries. The Spartans finished the game with 315 yards of offense.

**Up next:** Union County wraps up the regular season with a rare Thursday night contest with the region's only unbeaten squad, Fellowship Christian. With a win, the Panthers can force a three-way tie for first in 8-AA alongside Athens Academy and Fellowship.

Fellowship owns a 28-0 win over Athens Academy.

Fellowship is led by senior quarterback and University of Houston commit Caleb McMickle. The three-star recruit is listed as the nation's 64th ranked quarterback in the Class of 2023 by 247Sports.com.

McMickle chose Houston over Arkansas State, Mercer, Samford, Tulane and William & Mary. He also drew interest from Minnesota, Virginia and Wake Forest.

If the Panthers fail to overtake Fellowship and Athens Academy for the No. 1 seed, their likely first-round opponent will be either Fannin County, Model or North Murray from Region 7-AA.

Although, Fannin County could miss the playoffs altogether if they fall to fifth-place Haralson County on Friday. Meanwhile, North Murray could lock up the No. 2 outright if they upset first-place Rockmart, who has secured the No. 1 seed. Barring any upsets, Fannin County, Model and North Murray will come down to a tiebreaker to settle the final three spots in 7-AA, where according to Coach Perry, the No. 2 seed will probably go to Model based on tiebreakers.

Thursday night's kickoff is at 7 p.m.

"At this point, the important thing is to get into a rhythm so we're ready to rock and roll in that first round playoff game," Perry said.

# Swimming: Union County opens 2022-23 campaign at Tallulah Falls

## UNION COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL MASQUERADE MEET HIGHLIGHTS

October 29 @ Tallulah Falls

<p><b>100 IM</b> 2nd place - Isabel Hoover</p> <p><b>50 Freestyle</b> 1st place - Andrew Nushtayev 3rd place - Isabel Hoover 3rd place - Ian Lander 4th place - John Tippens 6th place - Ava Wheeler 7th place - Ella Fisk</p> <p><b>50 Fly</b> 2nd place - Kimberly Simpson</p> <p><b>100 Freestyle</b> 2nd place - Wyatt Chandler 2nd place - Clara Kazmierzak 3rd place - Ian Lander 5th place - Logan Tercero</p>	<p><b>50 Breaststroke</b> 1st place - Andrew Nushtayev 2nd place - Clara Kazmierzak 2nd place - Logan Tercero 3rd place - Ava Wheeler</p> <p><b>200 Free Relay</b> 1st place - Wyatt Chandler, Ian Lander, Logan Tercero, Andrew Nushtayev</p> <p><b>50 Backstroke</b> 2nd place - Kimberly Simpson 3rd place - Wyatt Chandler 4th place - John Tippens 5th place - Ella Fisk 10th place - Isabella Reuter 10th place - Grayson Shadden</p>
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## UNION COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL MASQUERADE MEET HIGHLIGHTS

October 29 @ Tallulah Falls

<p><b>200 Medley Relay</b> 2nd place - Courtney Foster, Lily Helton, Reese Jones, Grace Cook 4th place - Andrew Farmer, Eli Gwynn, Andrew Nushtayev, Nicholas Nushtayev</p> <p><b>50 Freestyle</b> 1st place - Nicholas Nushtayev 2nd place - Courtney Foster 6th place - Grace Cook 8th place - Lilly Collins 8th place - Eli Gwynn 9th place - Sophia Licavoli</p> <p><b>100 Freestyle</b> 1st place - Lily Helton 2nd place - Nicholas Nushtayev 4th place - Grace Cook 6th place - Olivia Loyd 10th place - Delilah Hernandez</p>	<p><b>100 Breaststroke</b> 2nd place - Lily Helton 5th place - Reese Jones 6th place - Olivia Loyd 9th place - Sophia Licavoli</p> <p><b>200 Free Relay</b> 1st place - Courtney Foster, Grace Cook, Reese Jones, Lily Helton 4th place - Nicholas Nushtayev, Andrew Farmer, Eli Gwynn, Andrew Nushtayev</p> <p><b>100 Backstroke</b> 2nd place - Eli Gwynn 3rd place - Reese Jones 4th place - Courtney Foster 5th place - Lilly Collins</p>
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# Softball: Union drops first two games in Columbus

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Columbus - Union County went 0-for-2 during last week's trip to Columbus for the Class AA State Championship, falling 7-2 to Pierce County in the opener before dropping a 5-0 contest to ACE Charter on day two.

**Lady Panthers 2, Pierce County 7** - Union County allowed three runs each during the first two innings, falling into a 6-2 hole after two frames.

Pierce County added a run in the third to conclude the scoring in the Lady Panthers' opening-round loss.

Union County grabbed a 1-0 lead in the first when Sierra Burnette walked and Katie Byers reached via a bunt single. A one-out base hit by Jaycee Seabolt scored Byers, but Union County ended the inning with two runners aboard.

Two walks, a double, an error and a sacrifice fly helped Pierce build a 3-1 advantage, but Sloane Dyer walked and scored in the second to trim the deficit to 3-2 in the second.

Pierce mounted a 6-2 lead in the bottom half, using four singles and another Union County error during the three-



Seniors Jaycee Seabolt, Chloe Potts and Caroline Karnes exit as Union's second class to go out with consecutive trips to Columbus. Photo/Todd Forrest

run inning. The Lady Panthers failed to take advantage of an error during the third and Pierce added an insurance run during its half of the frame.

Union stranded the lead-off hitter in the fourth before Pierce County retired 11 straight Lady Panthers to end the game.

Byers and Seabolt each went 1 for 3, Dyer walked and scored and Burnette went 0 for 2 with a walk. In the pitcher's circle, Burnette allowed 10 hits

and four earned runs over six innings, striking out five and walking three.

**Lady Panthers 0, ACE Charter 5** - Union County was limited to only one hit as ACE Charter grabbed a 1-0 lead in the first and never looked back.

ACE scored in the bottom of the first before adding two runs in the third, one in the fifth and another in the sixth. Burnette went 1 for 2 with a walk and Chloe Potts drew a

walk during an 0-for-2 game.

Union County committed four errors in the loss as Burnette gave up seven hits and two earned runs in six innings. The junior fanned three and didn't walk a batter.

Jeff Davis claimed the Class AA State title, defeating Mt. Paran Christian Academy in the finals. ACE Charter finished third and Pierce County came in fourth.

Union County's year ends with a 20-8 record.

## 1st Annual Panther Hoopfest

**FEATURING:**

- UCHS BASKETBALL TEAMS
- UCHS CHEER SQUAD
- UCMS BASKETBALL TEAMS
- UCMS CHEER SQUAD

ATHLETE INTRODUCTIONS

**DO NOT MISS IT!**

BASKETBALL COMPETITIONS

COACHING STAFF INTRODUCTIONS

CHEER PERFORMANCE

**WHEN: FRIDAY, NOV 4TH**

**5:30PM - 7:30PM**

**WHERE: UCHS GYM**