

Sports

See the Sports Section at nghanews.com

Panthers secure No. 1 seed in 8-AA, host Region tourney

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Roswell - Union County (20-5) will host the 8-AA boys' tournament as the region's top seed for the second straight year following an 87-39 blow-out victory at Fellowship Christian on Tuesday, Feb. 6.

Last week's rout puts a bow on a regular season that saw the Panthers reach 20 wins for the first time since 2006-07 -- head coach Corey Garrett's senior season at UCHS. Additionally, Union County has clinched a Class AA State Tournament berth for the sixth consecutive year.

The Panthers will open region tournament play vs. 15th-seeded East Jackson on Wednesday, Feb. 14. The Eagles (11-13) stunned 4th-seeded Banks County (14-12) in Saturday's play-in game, denying the Leopards a 10th-consecutive state tournament. Meanwhile, East Jackson advances to state for the first time since 2018.

This week, the Panthers will attempt to terminate a 43-year region title drought that includes five consecutive region championship game losses (1982, 2000, 2001, 2022, 2023).

"It's been a long time since Union County won a [boys region basketball title]," Garrett said. "I told the guys, 'we've done everything we can do to get where we want to be. The goal from day-one was to host the region tournament and put ourselves in the best position to bring home the region championship.'"



Junior Houston Henry had 17 points, 8 assists and 7 rebounds in Union's region-clinching win at Fellowship Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union County and East Jackson tip-off at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday; second-seeded Athens Academy meets 3-seed Providence at 6 p.m. The winners face off for the 8-AA title on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at UCHS. The consolation game is at 6 p.m.

Panthers 87, Fellowship Christian 39 - Needing a win to lock down the region's top seed and homecourt advantage, Union County delivered an abrupt knockout via a 35-8 first quarter en route to a 62-20 halftime score.

Union County's early offensive explosion came on the back of a 71% first-half shooting performance, hitting 22 of 31 overall and 8 of 12

(67%) from long range over the first 16 minutes.

"I was pleased with the way we came out for sure," Garrett said. "I had a feeling we would, but going down there to their place you don't know what to expect."

Junior Hayden Hughes poured in a game-high 25 points on 5 of 8 from 3-point range. Junior Houston Henry had 17 points, 8 assists, 7 rebounds and a pair of steals.

Junior Jude Ellis added 9 points, 4 assists, 4 boards and 3 steals.

Fellowship Christian scored the first basket of the night, but Union County rattled off 12 straight, beginning with a Henry trey.



Junior Hayden Hughes hit 5 of 8 from downtown to finish with 25 points at Fellowship Christian last week. Photo/Todd Forrest

A Dockrey steal turned into a Hughes layup, followed by a triple from Hughes. Later, Henry chased down his own miss and fed freshman Jaxon Totherow inside for 2, and on the next possession, Totherow ran the break and tipped in a Henry miss for a 12-2 score.

An Ellis 3 made it 15-2 before consecutive Paladin buckets, but Hughes knocked down a trey and Dockrey hit a floater in the lane, growing the margin to 20-6.

Two baskets from Hughes and a pair of Henry free throws made it 26-6 at the 2-minute mark. Union pushed the gap to 32-6 courtesy of Hughes' third 3 of the frame, two Kaden Combs free throws

and one by Ellis.

After a Fellowship deuce in the final seconds, Combs put an exclamation point on the opening period, beating the horn with his first trey of the year and second of his career.

The onslaught continued in the second when Dockrey poked away an entry pass and Henry found Hughes up ahead for 2 points. Combs would extend the Panthers' lead to 38-8 with a free throw at the 6:27 mark.

With his team up 45-15, Ellis' steal sparked another Union run out that Henry finished; then Hughes' fourth trey made it 50-17 with 2:32 left in the half. Union continued pouring it on with four-straight

points by Maddox Young and a transition-3 from Ellis before Combs and Young put the finishing touches on the Panthers' 62-20 half.

Union County outscored Fellowship 14-11 in the third and 11-8 in the fourth during a mercy-rule-shortened, 12-minute second half.

Combs finished with 8 points and 7 rebounds; Young had 6 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists and 3 steals; Dockrey went for 5 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists and 2 steals.

Sophomore Kainen Shirley had 5 points and a steal; Totherow added 6 points and 2 rebounds; sophomore Vince Marevka had 3 points, a rebound and a steal; freshman Hayden Price finished with 2 points and a steal; sophomore Holden Payne had 1 point, 1 rebound, 1 assist and a steal.

Freshman Ethan Hogstedt chipped in an assist and a steal.

Game stats: Union County scorched the nets to the tune of 56% shooting (29-52), 71% (20-28) at the line and 47% (9-19) from downtown. Fellowship made 35% (16-46) overall, 43% (6-14) at the stripe and 10% (1-10) behind the arc.

Union out-rebounded Fellowship 34-25, outscored them 38-28 in the paint and won the turnover margin 24-9.

Now, the Panthers' attention turns to East Jackson where a win sends Union into its third consecutive region title game.

"Just because [East Jackson] upset Banks, by no means does it mean we have the night off," Garrett said. "[East Jackson] beat us at their place so we know it's going to be a tough game."

Lady Panthers reach 15 wins, enter Region tourney as No. 2 seed

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Roswell - The Lady Panthers (15-10) increased their yearly win total for the fourth straight year by surviving another road upset bid at Fellowship Christian on Tuesday, Feb. 6.

Unfortunately, Union County learned that senior four-year starter Lara Turner is likely done for the year due to an injury that cost her the better part of the last three games.

"It's just a tough situation for a great kid," Union County head coach Thomas Nelson said. "She's played such a vital role in our success and we've had to adjust to not having her in the lineup."

"But on the same token, with the 2-seed locked up, we've been able to get some other girls in and give them the opportunity to play these last few games. So it's something we've been able to plan for."

With the No. 2 seed in the upcoming Region 8-AA Tournament, the Lady Panthers have earned a state playoff berth for the fifth consecutive season. Union County opens the post-season vs. 3rd-seeded Athens Academy at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 13 at Banks County. With a win over the Spartans, the Lady Panthers would advance to their first region title game since 2020, where the winner of top-seeded Banks County and 4th-seeded Providence awaits Friday night in Homer. The 8-AA consolation game is at 6 p.m. Friday.

Lady Panthers 60, Fellowship Christian 48 - Union County pulled away from the Paladins following a slow start in Roswell behind 28 combined



Sophomore Paula Robertson led the way with 15 points in Union's win at Fellowship Christian in the regular-season finale. Photo/Todd Forrest

points from sophomore Paula Robertson and junior Ariel McCarter.

"We started off real slow," Nelson said. "Those teams that we blew out early in the year have all improved and I think it takes us some time to adjust."

The Lady Panthers fell into an early 14-7 hole but used an 8-0 run ahead of an 18-16 advantage after a quarter.

Junior Hope Taylor ignited the rally with a putback at the 2:50 mark of the first.

"Hope has come a long way from a player that didn't get to play much last year," Nelson said.

Then, after a Fellowship miss, senior Kamryn Mull started a 3-on-1 break when she fired upcourt to Robertson, who hit a streaking McCarter in stride for a layup.

Junior Katelyn Brown swatted away a pass on the defensive end, resulting in Robertson's step-back jumper on the other end. Robertson put Union on top 15-14 on the ensuing possession with a baseline drive at the 1:17 mark.

Fellowship stopped the run, scoring out of a timeout, but the lead was short-lived as junior Hensley Adams connected from 20 feet for an 18-16 score. Fellowship pushed ahead



Junior Hope Taylor's double-double played a significant role in Union's victory at Fellowship Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest

22-18 early in the second, but McCarter converted a steal into two free throws. Moments later, Robertson sank a pair at the stripe to even the score.

Tied at 22-22 with under 3:30 to play in the period, Union County outscored the Paladins 11-1, closing the half up 33-23. The 10-point swing started with a Mull 3-pointer and an offensive board by Taylor for a 27-22 lead. Brown earned a trip to the line on each of Union's next two possessions, sinking 3 of 4 for a 30-22 lead at the 1:53 mark.

"Brown does everything we ask her to do and is the glue that holds the team together," Nelson said

Later, Brown's offensive board allowed Mull to find Robertson for a trey and a 33-22 advantage before a Fellowship free throw reduced the halftime difference to 10.

The Lady Panthers grew their lead to 45-28 during the third and maintained a 51-34 edge entering the fourth.

Sophomore Mady Adams kicked off the second-half scoring with a short jumper, but Fellowship moved within nine at 45-36 with 4:40 left in the third.

Three free throws by Taylor and one from Robertson increased the Union advantage to 39-28. The lead grew

to 17 near the 2:15 mark on Mull's fast-break layup. McCarter's coast-to-coast bucket and Brown's putback.

McCarter added three free throws on the next two possessions to push the gap to 48-30, then a Hensley Adams free throw and a 15-footer by freshman Nomi Nelson sent their squad into the fourth up 17.

The Paladins narrowed the deficit to 51-39, but Brown immediately fed a cutting Robertson under the basket for a 3-point play. However, a Fellowship trey moved the home team within 56-46 at the 3:37 mark, and then a Paladins floater had the margin at 8 points inside of 2 minutes.

McCarter knocked down two free throws with 1:21 to play, and Mull's strip on the defensive end sealed the victory.

Robertson scored a team-high 15 points with 8 rebounds, 4 assists and a steal. McCarter had 13 points, 8 rebounds, 2 assists and 4 steals.

Taylor finished with 11 points, 10 boards and 2 steals; Mull had 8 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists and 2 steals; Brown scored 5 points with 5 rebounds, 2 steals and an assist.

Hensley Adams had 4 points, a rebound and an assist; Mady Adams added 2 points and 2 rebounds; Nelson chipped in 2 points and 2 boards. juniors Aubrie AKins and Sloane Dyer pulled down 3 rebounds apiece; freshman Izzy Anthros and Ragan McCarter both collected 2 boards; freshman Regan Trlica had 2 steals.

"I'm really proud of the kids' effort and the support we've gotten from the fans and the community," Thomas Nelson added.

Wrestling: Union sends seven to State Championships

Legatt brothers place first at Sectionals, enter State as No. 1 seeds

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

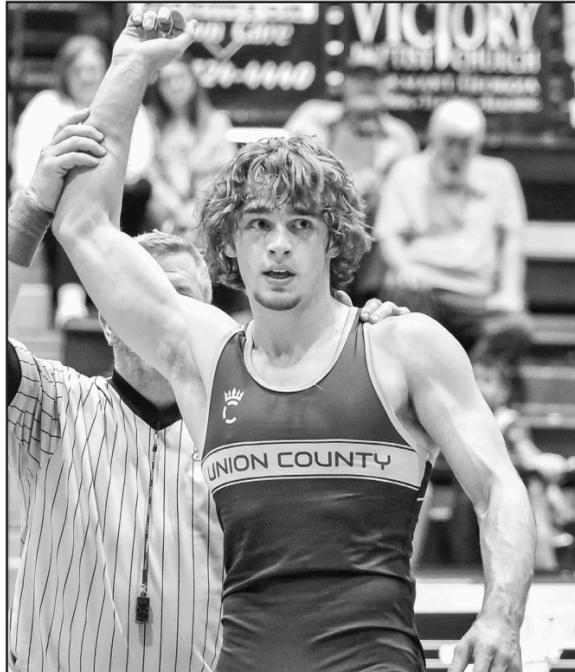
Rockmart - Union County qualified seven of its 13 wrestlers at Sectionals for this weekend's Class AA State Championships, headlined by Paxon Legatt and Payton Legatt, who both took home first place and earned a No. 1 seed at State.

Senior Anderson Clouse (138 lbs) and junior Asa Smith-Foot (175) each placed second. Senior David Heredia (190) and freshman Eli Flowers (106) came in third; junior Beau Webster (285) placed fourth at the Saturday, Feb. 10 Sectionals tournament.

At 144 lbs, freshman Paxon Legatt won the sectional tournament by earning a convincing 8-1 decision over Banks County's Evan Mullins, whom Paxon Legatt defeated in the Area 8 finals.

During the semifinals, Paxon Legatt pinned Cook's Maliq Vickers after a narrow 4-2 decision over Murray County's Caleb Blair in the quarters. His day started with a 24-second pinfall over Jeff Davis' Chaz Wood.

Paxon Legatt's older brother, junior Payton Legatt, took down Cook's Jed Roundtree in the finals via a third-round pinfall at 157 lbs. Payton Legatt recorded a 10-5



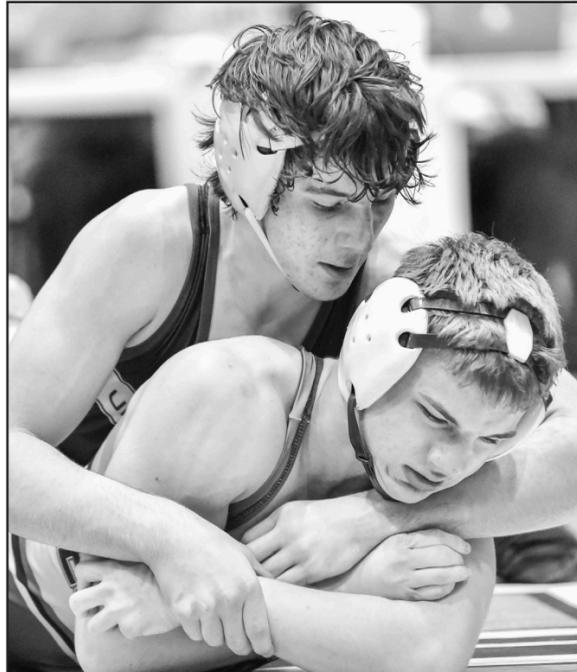
Junior Payton Legatt was victorious in all four 157-lb matches during the State Sectionals at Rockmart. Photo/Todd Forrest

decision over Berrien County's Matthew Lopez during the semis. Payton Legatt pinned his first two opponents, Northeast Magnet's Haneef Royster in his opening bout and North Murray's Cody Wheat during the quarters.

As a No. 1 seed, Paxon and Payton Legatt earned a first-

round bye at the State Championships. The tournament is Feb. 15-17 at the Macon Centerplex and features the top 12 wrestlers in each weight class.

Clouse placed second at 138 lbs, falling in the finals to Rockmart's Garrett Pace via a 15-5 decision. Earlier, Clouse notched a 16-5 decision over



Freshman Payton Legatt (top) at Sectionals during his 144-lb final bout vs. Banks County's Evan Mullins. Photo/Todd Forrest

Cook's Logan Kennedy in the semis and a 14-1 decision over Northeast Magnet's Mekelle Watson. Clouse opened by pinning Jeff Davis' Dakota Heath in under 2 minutes.

Smith-Foot suffered a pinfall to Rockmart's undefeated Nazhir Turner during the finals. After a first-round bye,

Smith-Foot pinned his way to the finals, taking down Gordon Central's Andon Bailey in the quarters and North Murray's Blake Griffin.

Heredia also earned a first-round bye due to a forfeit but fell by pin to Model's Riley Davis during the semis. Heredia pinned Haralson County's Jacob

Starling in the quarters.

Heredia bounced back with two consolation wins, both by pin, over Southeast Macon's Thari Williams and Banks County's Christian Holcombe.

Flowers pinned Model's Matthew Navarro to start the day and pinned Northeast Magnet's Ternez McCoy in the quarters. The Union freshman fell via pin to the eventual champion, Rockmart's Eli Bowman, during the semis.

Flowers earned a 2-0 sudden victory over East Jackson's Charlie Wheeler to punch his ticket to the consolation finals, where he dominated Cook's Tyson Daniels in a 13-0 decision. At 285, Beau Webster lost his opening match but battled out of the consols to finish fourth. After losing to Model's Emmanuel Almaraz, Webster pinned Xavier Reyes of Jeff Davis, Cortrell Scott of Northeast Magnet, Bryson Sanchez-Ramos of Murray County and Xavier Bailey of Rutland.

During the consolation finals, Webster suffered a pinfall loss to Cook's Kyle Terrell.

Senior Zander Rotko (150) placed seventh to earn an alternate spot. Other Union County competitors at sectionals were Riley Mortenson (120), Landon Bell (126), Thomas Gary (132), Andrew Engle (165) and Dusty Aaron (215).

Soccer: No. 3 Panthers overwhelm No. 10 Lumpkin Co.

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Coming off a final-four berth in 2023, Class AA's third-ranked Union County returned to the pitch last week by going 1-1 at home against two of Class AAA's top programs.

On Tuesday, the Panthers opened the season by dropping a controversial 3-2 decision to the defending Class AAA State Champion and No. 1 ranked Coahulla Creek (Dalton). Later in the week, Union jumped out to an early 3-0 lead during a 4-1 victory over No. 10 Lumpkin County.

The shorthanded Lady Panthers, still missing several key players due to basketball, dropped a pair of 10-0 contests to No. 10 Coahulla Creek and No. 4 Lumpkin County.

No. 3 Panthers 4, No. 10 Lumpkin County 1 - Junior Antonio Solario notched a hat trick in Union's decisive victory over Lumpkin at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Friday, Feb. 9.

The Panthers struck early courtesy of its two senior pre-season All-State selections: Evan Bohms and Zuriel Mancillas. The duo hooked up 32 seconds into the contest when Bohms fielded a long-range through pass from Mancillas and beat the sliding keeper, netting Union's first goal.

Solario got in on the scoring during the 6th minute, finishing off Mancillas' corner kick with a header into the back-right corner.

But Solario and the Panthers weren't content with two. Just moments removed from senior Seth Rutan's open-



Junior Antonio Solario celebrates his hat trick vs. Lumpkin County on Friday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

goal hustle save, keeping the shutout intact, Solario's second header goal found the net via senior Benton Gregory's feed from the corner during the 27th minute.

Lumpkin County got on the board in the 46th, but Solario put the game away in the 57th, blasting a shot over the keeper from 10 yards out courtesy of senior Wes Seiler's sliding assist.

No. 3 Panthers 2, No. 1 Coahulla Creek 3 - Union County gave the defending AAA State champs all they could handle in last Tuesday's season opener, eventually falling on a questionable late penalty kick.

After Coahulla Creek found the net early, Union answered before the intermission via Mancillas' left-footed equalizer from 15 yards in the 36th

minute.

Early in the second half, Coahulla responded with a well-placed shot over the fingertips of senior keeper Ethan McBride. Moments later, Bohms snuck a free-kick equalizer from just outside the penalty area past the diving keeper.

But in the 51st minute, Coahulla was awarded a debatable penalty kick just inside the box on an incident the Panther faithful deemed, at worst, an unmistakable flop; at best, a play-on situation. Regardless, the converted penalty proved the difference in the 3-2 final.

Union County travels to Pickens on Tuesday, Feb. 13, and then Gilmer on Friday, Feb. 16. The girls get underway at 6 p.m. both nights with the guys to follow.

UCRD: 14U boys first at MAC tourney



Union County's 14U rec team won the MAC Tournament earlier this month. The team is coached by Greg Wilson and Daniel Shumaker. Players are Jacob Brown, Bryson Brooks, Parker Deal, Oliver Hillman, Christian Mullin, Easton Shumaker, Grant Smith, Brayden Torres, Parker Vinez and Charlie Wilson.

Swimming: Nushtayev ends season as State Runner-Up in 100 Freestyle



Junior Nicholas Nushtayev attended the GHSA State Championship Swim Meet Wednesday, Feb. 7 at Georgia Tech. He competed in the preliminaries and earned his way to the finals in both the 50 and 100 free. Nicholas placed 13th in 1-3A and seventh in AA for the 50 freestyle and 10th in 1-3A and second in AA for the 100 freestyle. Coaches Kelly Helton and Megan Foster are proud of Nicholas for this accomplishment and look forward to next year's season.