

Sports

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Baseball: Panthers suffer heartbreak at the hands of Lovett

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A controversial base runner interference call against the Panthers during the sixth inning of game one proved to be a rally killer.

The ruling severely crippled Union's comeback bid during a 4-3, game one loss to Lovett, who ran away from Union in the second game by a score of 12-2.

The sixth inning of the first game began with the 4th ranked Lions breaking open a 2-2 tie and turning it into a 4-2 advantage, thanks to a pair of Union defensive miscues. However, Union quickly responded by loading the bases with no outs in their half of the sixth, and appeared to have scored the tying run before the interference ruling negated the run and awarded Lovett another out.

With the bags full and nobody out, Candler Colwell grounded to the shortstop, who tossed to second for the first out, but when attempting to turn the double-play, his throw to first sailed high and over the fence – allowing two runs to score.

At least that's what everyone thought.

That's when a base umpire decided it was time to make his presence felt during the late-innings of a State playoff game, with a Final Four berth at stake.

While sliding into second, it was determined that the Union base runner slid into the Lovett second baseman to break up the double-play (something that frequently happens at all levels of baseball, each time the infield attempts to turn-two).

As a result, Candler Colwell, along with Dyer, were ruled out and RJ Banton, who should have scored the fourth run to tie the game, was sent back to third base.

Instead of having runners



RJ Banton singles to center field in game one to bring home Chayton Schafer, who was called out at the plate. Photo/Todd Forrest

on second and third with one out in a tied game, Union was left with a runner on third and two outs, still trailing 4-3.

Lovett was able to get out of the inning then put two runners in scoring position during the top of the seventh, but senior Joseph Mancuso pitched his way out of a jam with a pair of Ks. A balk call gave Lovett a runner on second and third with one out until Mancuso got the second out on a called strike three and third out on a swing-and-miss at strike three.

With two outs in the bottom of the seventh, senior Andrew Brown left the visitors holding their collective breaths when he nearly tied the game with one swing, but his deep fly ball down the left field line hooked foul at the last minute. Two pitches later the game was over and the

Panthers found themselves in unfamiliar territory – down 1-0 in the best-of-three series.

The visiting Lions posted two early runs in the top of the first inning following a leadoff walk by University of Georgia commit Aaron Schunk, a one-out double by Georgetown commit Freddy Achecar, a hit batter, and an RBI single by Morehouse commit Austin Jeter.

Lovett was on the verge of stretching its lead to 3-0 in the third until Brown provided his team a much-needed lift with some defensive heroics. With two down and a runner on second, a Lions single to left field was scooped by a charging Brown, who came up firing and cut down the runner at the plate for the third out – keeping Union within two runs.



Andrew Brown (far left) celebrates with teammates after throwing out a base runner at home. Photo/Todd Forrest

Continuing to ride the momentum from Brown's throw, the Panthers put two aboard in the bottom of the third and Lance Rich laced a two-out double to left field to knot the score at 2-2. Chayton Schafer entered as Rich's courtesy runner and Banton followed with another two-out hit when he lined a single to center, but Schafer was called out at home on a very questionable call after the tag was applied near the shoulders as he slid feet-first into home plate.

The game would remain tied at 2-2 until the controversial sixth inning after Lovett was unable to take advantage of a leadoff single in the fourth, and the Panthers couldn't capitalize on a Cole Davis base hit to lead off the bottom half of the fifth.

Mancuso tossed a com-

plete game, allowing 2 earned runs, 7 hits, while fanning seven and walking one.

The Lovett pitching staff that had shown pin-point accuracy throughout the State Tournament didn't allow a walk or a hit batter in game one. Schunk got the start for Lovett and struck out four in 5 innings of work. The UGA commit surrendered 4 hits and 2 unearned runs. Junior Thomas Murray replaced him to open the fifth and went 3 innings with 3 strikeouts, while giving up 2 hits and one unearned run.

Banton was the only Panther to finish with a multi-hit game – going 2-for-3. Rich was 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs, while Mancuso, Dawson Groves, and Davis each went 1-for-3.

Sophomore Patrick Baggett finished 1-for-4 with a run

while Candler Colwell drove in a run. Schafer and Brown also scored runs for the Panthers.

In the second game, Lovett scored four in the first thanks to three singles, two hit batters, and a walk. Union got two runs back in the second when Dyer doubled to left, scoring Banton and courtesy runner Ean Harkins.

The Lions added a run in the bottom of the second following of a one-out single and a two-out hit batter. Rich was one strike away from escaping the inning without any damage but the 1-2 pitch was singled into left field – making it a 5-2 game.

The Panthers (19-9) were able to put two on with two outs in the third but were unable to deliver a two-out hit.

Davis took the mound in the third inning and allowed a one-out RBI double. A sacrifice fly made it a 7-2 game with two outs, then a passed ball put Union in an 8-2 hole.

The Panthers put two aboard in the fourth but once again, were unable to manufacture any runs. Later, Banton was left stranded following a one-out walk in the fifth and Lovett ended the game with four runs in the bottom half of the fifth.

Dyer's second inning two-run double was Union's only hit of the game. Baggett walked and reached on error. Banton walked once and was hit-by-a-pitch twice.

Josh Nachtrieb and Groves each drew walks, while Rich and Crawford Colwell were also hit-by-pitches in the second game.

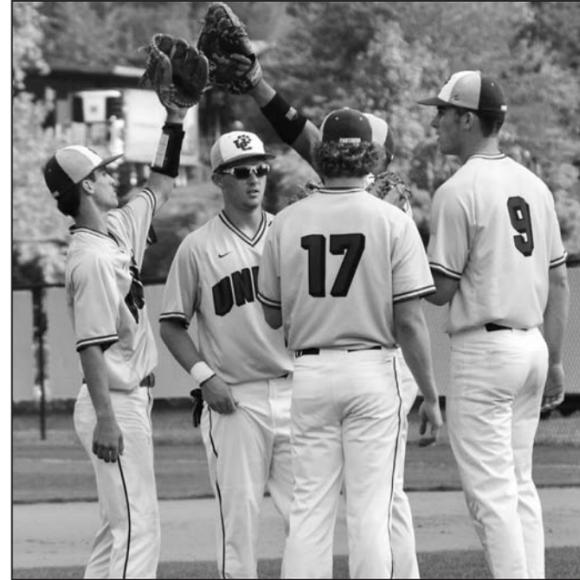
Rich started game two on the mound and allowed 5 earned runs over two innings. Davis worked 1/3 of an inning, walking three and giving up two earned runs. Nachtrieb surrendered 3 earned runs in 2 innings and senior Will King threw nine pitches in the bottom of the fifth before Lovett ended the game with a 10-run lead.



Lance Rich exits the field for a courtesy runner following his two-run double to tie the game. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Dawson Groves singles to left field during the second inning of game one. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Union County infield huddles around pitcher Joseph Mancuso prior to the start of an inning during game one. Photo/Todd Forrest

Three UCHS student-athletes headed to the next level



Maddie Garrett (second from right) with family.

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Maddie Garrett, Knox Kiernan, and Maggie Plott will be extending their athletic careers after signing with their respective colleges earlier this month.

Garrett will play softball at Piedmont College in Demorest. Kiernan will follow his father Mike and Union County Head Football Coach Brian Allison when he suits up to play football at Furman University in Greenville, SC.

Plott will go to school just down the road when she joins the Young Harris College cheer team, fresh off a Peach Belt Conference Championship and a third place finish at Nationals.

Plott was a member of the

competition cheer and football cheer squads for four years at Union County High School.

She received the Panther Pride Award twice and was voted Most School Spirited by her senior class. While cheering at UCHS, her team finished second in 8-AA. She also cheered for the basketball team for one year.

Garrett spent three successful seasons in the Lady Panthers' outfield where she earned First Team All Region honors after her junior year. Entering her senior campaign she was converted into to a catcher, but moving to the toughest position on the field didn't prevent her from claiming First Team All Region honors for the second-straight year in 2015.

Garrett played in four State Tournaments, capping off her

high school career with a 3-for-4 game that included 5 RBIs and a 3-run homer during her final game as a Lady Panther at the Elite 8 in Columbus.

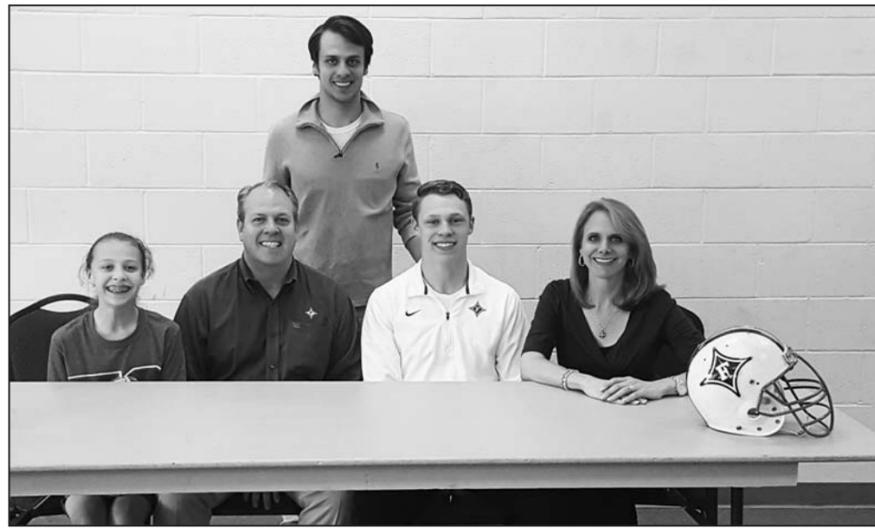
She finishes her Union County career in the top 10 in four major offensive categories: fifth in RBIs with 79, sixth in home runs with seven, ninth in hits with 96, and tied for ninth in doubles with 17. She also posted a career batting average of .295.

Last fall, Kiernan, the future Paladin kicker connected on 44-of-47 point-after attempts and made three field goals. He also sent nine kickoffs into the endzone for a touchback.

During his junior season, he made 57-of-61 PATs and 2 field goals to go with three touchbacks. As a sophomore, he made 15-of-16 PATs and one field goal.



Maggie Plott (front row - middle) with family and YHC coach.



Knox Kiernan (second from right) with family.