

Sports

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Soccer: No. 3 Union allows two late goals in 2-1 loss at No. 2 Providence

Lady Panthers force 2-2 draw vs. Gilmer, blanked 1-0 at Providence

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Playing without its injured senior goalkeeper Trent Baker, the third-ranked Union County men surrendered two second-half goals in a 2-1 loss at second-ranked Providence on Friday, March 10.

Earlier in the week, Union County cruised past Gilmer in a 4-1 home victory on Tuesday, March 7. Meanwhile, the Lady Panthers, down three starters, dropped a 1-0 heartbreaker at Providence to stumble to 0-2 in Region 8-AA, putting Union in jeopardy of missing the postseason for the first time since 2018. The shorthanded Lady Panthers turned in a heroic effort on Tuesday, forcing a 2-2 tie vs. Gilmer via Lara Turner's late equalizer and an 80th-minute penalty kick denial from backup keeper Avary Smith-Foot.

Lady Panthers 2, Gilmer 2 - Turner knotted the score in the 70th minute, but Union County couldn't convert a pair of corner kicks in the 72nd before missing three shots over the last four minutes.

During the 80th, Gilmer broke into the open field in a 1-on-1 situation, drawing a hand-ball penalty on Union County inside the box. With 40 seconds remaining and the Bobcats a penalty kick away from moving ahead, Smith-Foot deflected the ensuing PK off her right leg, allowing the Lady Panthers to preserve the draw.

Gilmer broke a scoreless tie in the 17th minute after Union missed wide on a free kick in the seventh. Following two Smith-Foot saves, Turner missed wide in the 15th, and senior Italia Salazar's header was unsuccessful.



Union County's senior backup goalkeeper, Avary Smith-Foot, deflects Gilmer's late penalty kick to force a 2-2 tie. Photo/Todd Forrest

ful a minute later. The Lady Panthers couldn't convert a corner kick in the 29th, but Turner put back a miss to even the score in the 35th minute.

Twenty seconds into the second half, Gilmer inched ahead 2-1 -- a score they held for the next 30 minutes. Helton, Salazar and Turner all misfired on potential equalizers, then Union misfired on three shots during the 59th and 60th.

Smith-Foot turned away two Bobcat kicks in the 19th and 13th minutes, respectively, keeping her team within a goal.

Salazar and Zoe Crawford provided one assist each

in the tie.

The Lady Panthers, who out-shot Gilmer 20-9, are still missing a handful of key players -- most notably, Ariel McCarter, Kyra McKechnie and Addison Meeker.

Panthers 4, Gilmer 1 - Third-ranked Union County took control with three first-half goals vs. Class AAA Gilmer, then countered the Bobcats' lone score with a Joel Mendoza goal in the 56th minute.

Senior Wilson Walker put Union on the board in the fifth minute via a Zuriel Mancillas feed. Mancillas set up another score, this one coming on a sliding goal by sophomore Antonio



Sophomore Antonio Solario (14) scores a sliding goal off an assist from junior Zuriel Mancillas during the first half of last week's 4-1 win over Gilmer. Photo/Todd Forrest

Solario, making it a 2-0 game in the 15th minute.

Senior sweeper Isaiah Ortiz scored his first high school goal on a penalty kick in the 28th.

Walker's open-goal shot sailed high early in the second half and Gilmer answered moments later to narrow the gap to 3-1 in the 46th minute. With his team up 4-1 late in the game, Baker denied the Bobcats' final scoring opportunity with a free-kick save in the 76th.

Union County out-shot Gilmer 24-6 and finished with seven corner kicks, compared to zero for the visitors.

Kooper Ashcraft and

Walker added one assist apiece for the Panthers.

Panthers 1, Providence 2 - Second-ranked Providence scored two second-half goals to break open a scoreless tie in a battle for 8-AA's top spot.

With Baker sidelined due to injury, Union County called on Solario and sophomore Eli Chapman to fill the void. And following a 0-0 match at the half, Providence converted in the 57th before adding a late goal to seize control at 2-0.

The Panthers answered courtesy of a whistle drawn by junior Seth Rutan. Moments later, Bohm found the net on the ensuing penalty kick.

Lady Panthers 0, Providence 1 - Union County allowed one second-half goal in Friday's loss in Lilburn.

Up next: Union County hosts Senior Night vs. Banks County on Friday, March 17. The girls game begins at 6 p.m. The Lady Panthers need a win to remain in the playoff picture, while a victory for the men would all but secure another postseason appearance.

Throw-ins: Fresh off Friday night's victory over Union County, Providence is Class AA's new No. 1 boys team. The Panthers dropped two spots to No. 5 after spending a week at No. 3.

Baseball: Gilmer takes two from Union; Region 8-AA action starts Tuesday

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Union County dropped both meetings of a home-and-home matchup vs. Gilmer, losing an 11-4 contest in Ellijay on Tuesday, March 7, followed by an 11-0 home loss on Friday.

The Panthers open Region 8-AA action this week against Class AA's second-ranked Fellowship Christian. Union travels to Fellowship on Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. before hosting the Paladins in a Friday doubleheader at 4 p.m.

Panthers 4, Gilmer 11 - Union scored one in the first, but Gilmer answered with 10 unanswered runs, including six in the bottom of the third, to take a 10-1 lead into the fifth.

Union added a run in the fifth inning and two in the seventh. The Bobcats tacked on one in the sixth.

Sophomore Kaden Combs went 3 for 4 with 2 RBIs, while fellow 10th-grader Hayden Hughes knocked in one during a 2-for-3 day.

Freshman left-hander Maddox Patton tossed two innings in the start, allowing four hits, four earned runs and three walks. Senior Hunter Fleming yielded five hits and five earned runs in 1/3 of an inning; freshman southpaw Gunnar Akins went 1 2/3, allowing four hits, two walks and one run.

Combs worked the final two frames, allowing three hits and a run.

Patton sparked Union's

run-scoring first with an infield single, then moved to second on Fleming's sacrifice bunt.



Hunter Fleming works the second inning of last Friday's loss to Gilmer. The senior toed the slab in both of last week's games. Photo/Todd Forrest

Combs brought him around with a one-out single to center, and Hughes' base hit put two Panthers aboard with only one away. A passed ball moved both runners into scoring position, but a strikeout and an inning-ending groundout limited the Panthers to only one run.

Patton tossed a perfect bottom half, but Akins was left stranded in the second inning

following a one-out walk.

Patton recorded two quick outs in the home half before three singles, three walks and a passed ball resulted in three Gilmer runs.

Hughes' two-out single went to waste in the third and things went south when five Bobcats reached to start their half of the frame. With one away, Gilmer added to the

damage via two singles, a walk and a hit batter to mount a 9-1 advantage through three.

Two singles, two walks and a double made it 10-1 in the fourth, but Akins escaped without further damage via an inning-ending strikeout.

Union's half of the fifth showed promise when senior Jordan Gilliam and Patton drew walks to open the inning. Flem-

ing loaded the bags with a base hit to center, and Combs plated Gilliam courtesy of an infield single. But Union left runners at the corners following consecutive strikeouts.

Akins kept the sixth inning alive with a two-out double, but an inning-ending strikeout kept Union off the board. Gilmer's two-out double in the bottom half plated a run

and extended its lead to 11-2.

Patton and Fleming walked to leadoff the seventh, and Combs loaded the bases with a single. Hughes' scored Patton with a sacrifice fly, and Moses Stevens followed with another run-scoring flyout before Eli Gwynn kept the inning going with a two-out hit to left field.

The Panthers' seventh finally ended with a bases-loaded grounder to shortstop.

Fleming and Hughes stole a base for Union County.

Panthers 0, Gilmer 11 - The visiting Bobcats broke things open with five in the fifth as Union County mustered only three hits in Friday's five-inning loss.

Sosensky and freshman Lane Haney went 1 for 2; Akins finished 1 for 1 and tossed a scoreless first.

Fleming allowed two hits, two hits and a run during the second. Patton allowed three runs (one earned) in the third; Duncan gave up two hits and two earned during the fourth. Combs surrendered six hits and five runs over 2/3 of an inning. Hughes gave up a single and logged a three-pitch strikeout to close the fifth.

Duncan and Fleming added a stolen base.

Up next: The winless Panthers face a step-up in competition as they open a three-game set vs. No. 2 Fellowship Christian on Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. in Roswell.

The series shifts to Blairsville on Friday, March 17 where Union County hosts the Paladins for a 4 p.m. doubleheader.

Track: Union County racks up 10 gold medals at Fannin County

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Blue Ridge - Union County collected 10 first-place finishes during last week's two-team meet at Region 7-AA's Fannin County.

The 10 gold medals were split evenly between the guys and girls teams, with senior Mattie Brookshire winning two in the shot put (28 feet, 11 inches) and discus throw (75-11).

Junior Taylor Whitehead came first in the 100M and 200M races; junior Zander Rotko placed first in the 400M, and the 4x400 relay team was victorious at 3 minutes, 58.53 seconds. Junior Tyler Grasty placed first in the triple jump.

Katie Byers (100M hurdles), Noel Hyatt (high jump) and Linley Jones (triple jump) all finished first. Ava Loyd placed second in the 100M and Lydia Wagner took home silver in the 1600M event. Other runner-up finishes went to the 4x100 and 4x400 relay teams. Lola Hunter in the 3200M race and Jones in the 300M hurdles.

Hunter placed third in the 400M race and Hannah



Senior Sam Page came in third in the 100M hurdles event at Fannin County.

Kazmierzak took home bronze in the 800M. Abby Barrett (triple jump), Jones (100M hurdles, long jump), Sara Patterson (high jump), Averie Tanner (1600M) and Wagner (3200M) all came in third.

Fourth-place girls were Ellie Adams (800M), Byers (high jump), Loyd (200M), Jewell Massey (100M hurdles), Katie Payne (300M hurdles), Natalie Payne (400M,

3200M), Charlie Robinson (discus), Giovanna Salazar (long jump) and Jolie Schmitt (1600M).

Rounding out the top five in girls' action was Barrett (300M hurdles), Averie Hussion (long jump), Hyatt (800M), Patterson (400M), Leslie Rash (shot put) and Salazar (100M, 200M). Sixth-place finishes went to Hussion (100M, 200M) and Ada

Massey (discus).

In the boys' events, Jonah Kluth (100M) and Rotko (200M) came in second. Other runner-ups included the 4x100 relay team and Braden Plott (long jump). Ivan Garcia placed third in the 1600M race, Sam Page was third in the 100M hurdles and Cooper Kluth picked up a bronze in the 300M hurdles. Jonah Kluth was third in the high jump and



Beau Webster competes in the shot put at Fannin County.

Daniel McPhee picked up the No. 3 spot in the triple jump.

Fourth-place finishers included Cade Dockrey (long jump), Garcia (800M), Thomas Gary (1600M), Cooper Kluth (triple jump), Van Marevka (400M) and senior Eli Underwood (discus and shot put).

Top fives were netted by Logan Duckworth (1600M), Gary (800M), Nickolai Gro-

mowa (long jump and Ethan McBride (high jump). Jensen Goble (100M), Tyler Grasty (discus), Tyler Parker (200M) and Beau Webster (shot put) were all sixth. Lane Lance placed seventh in the discus and senior Colemann Burntee was eighth in the shot put.

Union County went to Stephens County on Monday, but results were unavailable at the deadline.

Golf: Both Union teams victorious at Fannin, boys fall to Murphy, NC



Pictured (L-R): Huston West (left) wraps up his 9-hole match vs. Murphy, NC at Old Union Golf Course last Monday, March 6. Senior Jett Busbee chips onto the fifth green during the Murphy, NC match at Old Union. Ivie Chapman in action at Old Union. Huston and Turner West each fired a 39 in Union County's boys-only match vs. Murphy, but it wasn't enough to lead their team past the Bulldogs on March 6. Busbee shot a 46 and Leo Nam had a 55 for the Panthers. Later in the week, Union won both matches at Fannin's Old Toccoa course. Hope Patton's 46 and Chapman's 49 carried Union County (95) past Fannin and second-place Towns (125). In the boys' match, Union's 179 total score was 26 strokes better than Fannin County (205) and 46 ahead of Towns (225). Photos by Todd Forrest



Basketball: Miller reflects on UCMS title run UCHS 2022-23 Winter Sports Senior Night



Union County's 8th grade boys basketball team is joined by the Panthers' varsity squad after the middle school was recognized during the high school's January contests vs. Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest

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Last month the *North Georgia News* spoke with UCMS 8th grade boys basketball coach Gabe Miller about his team's undefeated championship season.

NGN: Looking at the year as a whole, we didn't lose a game and Fannin was the only challenge; is that a fair assessment?

GM: Fannin was definitely our toughest competition, but Pickens was capable of giving us a run for our money. They beat Fannin County but they just didn't match up to us very well.

NGN: Yeah, that championship game vs. Fannin, we were up double digits but let them get back into the game.

GM: We got into foul trouble and the guys that were left picked up the energy, kept us calm and moving in the right direction. I think that game was the highlight because that's the same Fannin

team that beat us last year in the championship by 3 points. So we had an idea that we'd roll through the season, then see them again at the end. But this [Union] group has only lost twice in school ball, and one of those was that championship game last year.

NGN: Even with the sky-high expectations, were there any moments throughout the season that had you concerned? Maybe the team lost its focus or its edge.

GM: Going into the season there was definitely high expectations, so I did my best to keep us humble. It's easy for an 8th grader to walk into the gym, look at the other team and say 'we got this,' and let down their guard. But we had foul trouble just about every game, and sometimes it seemed like the refs were against us, but we were usually the biggest, strongest and most physical team by far. We had some sickness hit us, then we had a reserve get hurt and another starter get a concus-

sion - both against Fannin. But everyone stepped up and played their role and did more than I could ask.

NGN: What about managing the expectations? You enter as favorites to win your league for two years, then you didn't get it done last year; was there any added pressure to deliver in your last go-round with this group?

GM: There was a little bit of concern, yeah. There were a few times at practice when we were just going through the motions, and I had to do a little 'extra' coaching. But they responded well, came together as a team, and were fired up and ready to go when it came time to play the next game.

NGN: Anything else that stood out from this year?

GM: Outside of the championship game, it was probably breaking 70 vs. Gilmer. I think we finished with 71 against them with 7-minute quarters. Beating White County three times is another high point. Even though we beat them, they matched up well against us with some quick kids, and we had to beat them to get to the championship.

NGN: Anyone that you want to thank?

GM: I'm thankful to Coach [Caleb] Paul for giving me this opportunity. On paper he might be head coach, but I coached these guys last year and he let me stay with them. This is my second year, and I am blessed to have started with the team like this.

The parents were tremendous from the start and the fans supported us. We had students at every home game, a few road games and the championship. We also have our lucky charm, Ellie Harper. She is a celebrity for sure. Then, [Athletic director Neil] Setzer for all his support. Oh, I definitely need to thank my wife, Gaby, for taking care of the little man while I've been spending all this time at the gym.



Senior cheerleader Bailey Adams with family. Photos/Todd Forrest



Senior cheerleader Lexi Starling with family. Photos/Todd Forrest



Senior swimmer Courtney Foster with family. Photos/Todd Forrest

Union County Recreation Department's

ANNUAL EASTER EGG HUNT

Saturday, April 1, 2023
Make-up day, Saturday, April 8th
11 AM to enjoy hot chocolate and popcorn with the Easter Bunny and have your picture made!
Egg Hunt begins at noon.
Age Groups: 2-4; 5-7; 8-10
New Location: Lower Baseball Fields, Meeks Park

A balloon artist will be making special creations for the kids! A photographer will be available to make your special picture with the Easter Bunny! 4000 eggs and many prizes to win in each age group. Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.