

# Sports

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## Soccer: Union County sweeps Rabun on Senior Night

Hat tricks by McCombs and Yost lead the way as Panthers/Lady Panthers combine for 10 goals

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As the Panthers and Lady Panthers continue scratching-and-clawing to remain in the mix for the final playoff spot in a brutal Region 7-AAA, both squads were allowed to unleash a bit of frustration on a former region rival from 8-AA, Rabun County, as Union soccer took a break from region play last week.

And the icing on the cake: it was Senior Night.

The Lady Panthers (6-5) pulled away with three unanswered goals in the second half for a 5-1 victory.

Madison Yost scored three times and Layne Baenninger dished out four assists.

Meanwhile, the guys jumped out to a 4-0 first half advantage and were never threatened in a 5-0 shutout.

Parker McCombs finished with a hat trick after breaking a scoreless tie in the 18th minute with an unorthodox goal.

With only the keeper to beat, McCombs blasted a kick into the left post that caromed straight back, awarding the senior another opportunity.

But this time he made them pay, scoring with a header off the rebound.

Approximately two minutes later, McCombs used his head once again and made it a 2-0 game with his second header of the half.

Fellow senior Sam Seiler got in on the scoring barrage, using a header of his own to give the Panthers a 3-0 lead during the 33rd minute.

Union crushed any Rabun County comeback dreams when Seiler tacked on another goal with 22 seconds left in the half.

With the Wildcat goalkeeper drifting away from the goal, Seiler lobbed a perfectly placed shot over the keeper and into the net.

Seiler's second goal combined with two from McCombs gave the Panthers a lopsided 4-0 advantage at the break.

McCombs extended the lead to 5-0, early in the second half with his third goal of the contest.



Madison Yost (No. 3) slips a shot past Rabun County's goalkeeper during the second half of last week's 5-1 victory over the Lady Cats on Senior Night. Yost tallied 3 goals - two coming in the second half. Photo/Todd Forrest



Maddie Sutton (No. 12) goes flying after colliding with the Rabun County goalkeeper immediately following her shot attempt that found the net - giving Union a 3-1 advantage, early in the second half. Photo/Todd Forrest

Earlier in the day the Lady Panthers handed Rabun County a 5-1 loss, but unlike the boys contest, the outcome wasn't decided in the early stages of the second half.

Union struck first when Yost scored off an assist from Baenninger and senior Braedyn Robbins during the 13th minute.

During the 37th minute,

a Brenna Innis goal, set up by a pass from Baenninger provided a bit of breathing room at 2-0 entering the half.

The early stages of the second half saw the Lady Cats storm out of the locker room and slice into the Union lead at 2-1, less than four minutes in.

However, the Lady Panthers quickly stole momentum back from the visitors when

Maddie Sutton converted a goal, despite being upended by the Rabun goalkeeper (see picture above) - making it a 3-1 game with 31:17 remaining.

After feeding Sutton on the previous goal, Baenninger recorded her fourth and final assist when she found Yost for a goal, and a 4-1 lead with 26:59 remaining.

Three minutes later, Union



Senior Parker McCombs (No. 7) takes a shot early in Union County's 5-0 win over Rabun on Senior Night. McCombs finished with a hat trick after scoring the only goal of the second half. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Sam Seiler lines up his shot during the final moments of the first half vs Rabun County. His goal with 22 seconds to play gave Union County a 4-0 advantage entering the intermission. Photo/Todd Forrest

scored its fourth goal in a span of a little more than 12 minutes when Yost made it 5-1 with her third goal of the game.

The final assist belonged to Robbins.

Union soccer joins the rest of the school system in taking the week off for spring break.

Action resumes on April 20 when Union County hosts Dawson County at 5:30 and

7:30 p.m.

The playoff status for both teams remains up in the air since other 7-AAA teams are in action this week.

Check out next week's *North Georgia News* prior to Thursday's game with Dawson to receive a full rundown of Union County soccer's postseason scenarios. **Senior Night photos** will also be in next week's edition.

## Banton wins his fourth but Greater Atlanta Christian takes two of three

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Union County (6-12) ended its eight-game skid on Friday with a 12-4 home victory over Greater Atlanta Christian thanks to a solid pitching performance from RJ Banton and a 4-for-5 day at the plate by Patrick Baggett.

The junior duo of Baggett and Banton wouldn't be enough to take the series, however, as GAC won the first and last games of the three game series.

The Spartans overcame a 2-1 fifth inning deficit to take the first meeting 4-2 in Norcross. They would also rebound from the game two loss with a 13-0 victory over the Panthers in the second game of Friday's doubleheader.

Although the first game of the Friday twin bill would be all Union County from start-to-finish.

The Panthers jumped out to a 5-0 lead in the first before GAC pulled within two at 5-3 in the top half of the sixth. Union immediately put the game away with seven runs in the bottom of the sixth.

Banton picked up his team-leading fourth win of the season after allowing three earned runs and five hits in 5 1/3 innings.

Ean Harkins and Cayden Rich entered in relief of Banton and kept the Spartans in check - limiting the visitors to just one run on one hit over the final 1 2/3 innings.

Sophomore Coleson Daniel had a breakout game at the plate, going 3-for-4 and driving in four runs. Dawson Groves scored twice and drove in a pair while Logan Dyer finished 1-for-3 with 2 runs and 2 RBIs.

The Panthers out-hit GAC 11-to-6 for the game and both squads committed one error each.

Union's first inning outburst was primed by a Baggett single, followed by consecutive hit-by-pitches vs Dyer and Candler Colwell.

With one down, Banton drew a full-count, bases loaded walk to put the Panthers on top for good at 1-0.



Junior RJ Banton won his fourth game of the season (a team high) last Friday during Union's 12-4 victory over GAC. Earlier in the week, Banton didn't receive as much run support in a loss at GAC. Photo/Todd Forrest

Groves reached on a fielder's choice that drove in Dyer for a 2-0 game, an error on the play allowed Colwell to score - making it 3-0.

With two down, Daniel lined a two-run single to right that spotted the Panthers a five-run advantage.

After Banton pitched his way out of trouble in the second, GAC broke through in the third to trim the Union lead to 5-1. He later escaped a bases loaded jam in the fifth with an inning-ending double play.

However, he was unable to survive the fifth when a leadoff double and a hit-by-pitch put two aboard with no outs. After inducing a fly out to right, Banton gave up a single to load the bases. The Spartans pulled within 5-2 after a hit batter that chased Banton from the game.

Harkins quickly traded a run for an out with a sacrifice fly to right before getting a swing-and-miss at strike three to bring the top of the sixth to a close.

With its lead trimmed to 5-3, Union exploded for seven

in its half of the sixth inning to open up a 12-3 advantage.

With one down, Cole Davis singled and Baggett doubled - putting two in scoring position for Dyer, who scored both with a base hit to center.

Candler Colwell received a free pass and Banton later walked with two down to load the bases for Groves, who was also issued a base-on-balls to extend the lead to 8-3.

The fourth Spartan walk of the inning went to Carter Wright for a 9-3 advantage, allowing Daniel to clear the bases with an opposite field double.

Rich took over in the seventh and struck out one and walked one while allowing a run.

GAC put two aboard off Rich thanks to a fielding error and an infield single before the freshman right-hander fanned the ensuing hitter for the first out.

A passed ball allowed the runners to move up 90 feet and a ground out to second scored the final Spartan run of the game.

In game one, Banton provided Union with four innings of

three-hit baseball but wasn't as fortunate with the amount of run support provided by the offense during the 4-2 loss in Norcross on Tuesday.

Baggett, Candler Colwell, and Banton each finished with two hits at the plate but the rest of the lineup was a combined 1-for-16 with 5 strikeouts.

Davis tossed two innings in relief of Banton, allowing two hits and one earned run while striking out two.

A leadoff walk, a passed ball, and a base hit gave GAC a 1-0 advantage after an inning but Banton would limit the Spartans to just two hits over the next three innings.

Still trailing 1-0 entering the fifth, Union manufactured a pair of runs with two down - beginning with a Baggett double.

Back-to-back singles by Dyer and Candler Colwell tied the score at 1-1 before a Crawford Colwell walk loaded the bases. With two down and facing a 2-2 count, Banton was plunked to give his team a 2-1 advantage while putting the junior right-hander in line for the win.



Junior shortstop Patrick Baggett went 4-for-5 with a double to help lead the Panthers in the 12-4 win over GAC. Photo/Todd Forrest

Davis replaced Banton in the bottom half of the fifth and was treated unkindly by his defense as an infield error put the leadoff man aboard for GAC.

A walk, a hit-by-pitch, and a sacrifice fly later, the score was all even at 2-2. The Spartans regained the lead at 3-2 with a base hit back up the middle. A sacrifice bunt moved two into scoring position where a double-steal allowed another run to score for a 4-2 advantage.

In the sixth, Groves drew a leadoff walk and freshman Pierson Allison entered as a pinch runner but remained stranded at first following a strikeout, a pop out and a ground out.

Candler Colwell and Banton singled in the seventh but Union was unable to extend the game with a run.

The Spartans responded to the 12-4 loss with a 13-0, five inning rout in game two of the Friday doubleheader, allowing GAC to take the series 2-to-1.

The Panthers were unable to recover from six first inning runs by the Spartans. They tacked on four more in the third

and three in the fifth.

GAC out-hit Union 8-to-5 but three errors proved costly for the Panthers.

Groves finished 2-for-2 with a double for his team's only multi-hit performance. Baggett, Daniel and Crawford Colwell each singled for Union, who used four different pitchers.

Davis got the start and allowed five earned runs, three hits, and two walks in 2/3 of an inning.

Jackson Colwell gave up four unearned in 1 1/3, Allison tossed a scoreless inning, and Daniel went 2 innings surrendering 3 hits, 3 runs, and 2 walks while fanning one.

Up next is another region series with rival Fannin County on Tuesday at 5:55 p.m. The series will conclude Friday with a doubleheader in Blue Ridge, beginning at 5 p.m.

On Thursday, the Panthers will host Robbinsville, NC in a non-region contest at 5 p.m.

Union County's up-to-date season stat totals can be found on Page 3C.