

Sports

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UCRD sending three baseball teams to GRPA State Tournament

Union's 12U and 14U baseball squads undefeated at district; 10U softball begins Thursday

By Todd Forrest
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The 12U and 14U Union County Recreation Department baseball teams claimed District 7 titles last week during their respective tournaments.

The 10U softball team finished third but still earned a State berth as the highest placing Class C team of the weekend.

The 12U Panthers outscored the opposition 35-5 last week over three district games at Madison County - stretching their postseason winning streak to 13 games including last week's Mountain Athletic Conference tournament and the earlier Diaz Tournament.

District 7 action opened for the 12U squad with a 13-0 win over Jackson County on Friday. The Panthers punched their ticket to the title game with an 11-1 semifinal victory over Jefferson before knocking off the Dragons a second time, 11-4, to claim the 12U championship.

Union County smacked Jefferson in the mouth early with six runs in the top of the first - sending 11 players to the dish.

Despite playing its third-straight game, Jefferson remained competitive, answering with three in the second to remain within 6-3 heading to the fourth.

The Union bats reawakened with two runs in both the fourth and fifth innings while Jefferson added one in the bot-



The Union County 12U baseball team after taking home first place in Madison County (Danielsville) over the weekend. Photo/Todd Forrest

tom half of the fourth. Leading 10-4, the Panthers added an insurance run in the sixth inning then slammed the door by striking out the side in the final frame.

"It was a total team effort this weekend," said Union County 12U coach Trint Rich while holding the team's first player trophy. "Every single player contributed to this championship."

In the previous meeting with Jefferson, Union County

blew things open with a seven-run second after grabbing an early 2-1 lead. The Panthers tacked on a run in the third and fifth innings to take the 11-1 victory.

The Panthers scored 11 runs during the first two innings of their opening round 13-0 blowout of Jackson County.

The GRPA 12U Major Baseball State Tournament opens June 22 in Tifton.

The 14U Panthers sur-

vived a pair of bookend thrillers vs. rival Towns County to secure the District 7 title in Dawsonville. Following a back-and-forth rain-shortened 8-5 win over the Indians, Union County clubbed Habersham County 11-5 to move on to the finals.

Towns County edged Habersham 6-5 to earn a rematch with Union County, who came out flat in the final game.

Falling behind 3-0, 5-2

and 7-4, the Panthers finally raced ahead 8-7 with a four-spot in the fifth inning before putting the Indians away with two runs in the sixth to secure a 10-7 victory.

Despite the 17 combined runs, it was Union County pitching that proved the difference - limiting Towns to just one single over the final three innings.

The 14U State Tournament will be held in Hazelhurst-Jeff Davis County from

June 22-26.

The 10U Panthers came out swinging away in Gainesville, rocking Jackson County 14-2, then the host team 10-1. Habersham sent Union County into the loser's bracket with a 13-1 victory, forcing the Panthers into a Saturday doubleheader, where they fell 8-2 to Jefferson to finish third.

As the highest placing team from Class C, Union County earns a bid to the upcoming 10U State Tournament in Hazelhurst. Like the Georgia High School Association, the GRPA separates recreation departments based on community population. In GRPA competition, Class A represents the largest programs (Gainesville) and Class B is for medium-sized communities (Jackson County/Jefferson).

To prevent three different tournaments from taking place, all three classes meet in one location with the tourney's highest placing team in their respective class earning a state berth. With Union finishing third behind Gainesville and Jefferson, the Panthers secured a trip to the Class C State Tournament at Hazelhurst - Jeff Davis County beginning June 22.

The 10U softball team begins district play on Thursday at Lamar Murphy Park in Jackson County. The Lady Panthers will meet the winner of Dawson County and host Jackson at 7:30 p.m.

The 10U State Softball Tournament would be June 22 in Rockmart.



The 14U baseball team won all three games at District to advance to State in Jeff Davis Co. next week.



The Union County 10U softball team moves on to next week's State tourney at Jeff Davis Co.



Union County 12U catcher Chetley Cox kept Jefferson base runners honest in Saturday's final game, cutting down all three would-be base stealers over the first three innings. At the dish, he drew a first inning walk to load the bases and help propel the Panthers to an early 6-0 advantage. Photo/Todd Forrest

Basketball: Union men scrimmage Hayesville, ladies visit UNG camp

Lady Panthers to host Robbinsville this week; Panthers at Fannin and Towns

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Union County got its first taste of outside competition last week when the Lady Panthers visited the University of North Georgia (UNG) for a two-day camp and the men hosted Hayesville, North Carolina in a Thursday scrimmage.

On Tuesday, the girls traveled across Blood Mountain to participate in the UNG basketball camp in Dahlonega, where Union County played the role of the little fish in a big pond.

And according to interim coach Mandy Hunter, they played it well, rejecting any misgivings about punching above their weight.

"All five games came against schools that were much larger than us, but I still saw a lot of great things," Hunter said. "The two things we're concentrating on this year are effort and attitude. Those are two things you can control no matter where you are - whether it's school, on the court or at home, and we did a great job with that."

Union County faced Cass, Cambridge, Franklin County, North Gwinnett and Sequoyah at last week's UNG camp.

"We did a good job pick-



The Lady Panthers receive a breather between games at last week's North Georgia camp. Photo/submitted

ing up the pressure on defense and applying a lot more ball pressure and that helped us play at a faster pace," Hunter added.

The Lady Panthers hosted a youth camp on Monday and Tuesday before Robbinsville, NC comes to town for a Wednesday scrimmage. As of Monday morning, no start time was finalized.

Union County will also host a scrimmage vs. the Hayesville girls on Wednesday June 23.

"We expect a great turnout for our youth camp and we're just really excited to have a summer this year where

we're able to get in the gym and get better," Hunter said.

The Union men hosted Hayesville on Thursday, June 10 with the varsity and JV squads both seeing plenty of court time.

Divided into 16-minute segments between varsity and junior varsity, the scrimmage allowed third-year head coach Corey Garrett to peruse his entire roster. And despite some early struggles with Hayesville's pressure defense to open the first session, the Panthers varsity battled the Yellow Jackets tit for tat over the final two 16-minute segments. (No score was kept but the unofficial tally had Union ahead after each of the final two sessions)

"Obviously it's just good to be able to get on the court this summer," Garrett said. "But we started a little rusty and they punched us in the mouth, but once we adjusted to the speed, I thought we played really well. The older guys started executing and running the break a little bit more and I was happy to see that."

Meanwhile, the Union County junior varsity provided a glimpse of a potentially bright future. Triggered by a smothering defense, the JV Panthers converted the frequent turn-

overs into easy lay-ups on the other end.

In half court sets, both the varsity and JV squads flashed a much-improved shooting stroke, keeping an aggressive Hayesville defense honest with pick and pops and kick outs.

"We feel like we have some shooters out there this year," Garrett said. "We worked on that some in the offseason too. But some of those young guys can shoot it pretty well and we feel like [the 3-point shot is] certainly an option this year."

While playing short-handed vs. Hayesville, Garrett expected the Panthers to be at full strength for the Fannin County camp on Monday and Tuesday.

On Thursday, the Panthers will travel to Towns County. Although, Towns' 6-foot-8 standout Jake McTaggart was back in a Hayesville uniform during last week's scrimmage at Union.

In other Indians' news, the Towns County men are now under the direction of new head coach Brian Hunnicutt, who moves over from the Lady Indians following the retirement of Rob Benson.

"It's going to be pretty



Rising senior Landon Kight goes to work in the paint during last week's scrimmage vs. Hayesville, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest



Rising senior point guard Caleb John drives into the paint during last week's scrimmage with Hayesville, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

much the same, just keep it super-simple," Garrett said of that in against Hayesville. "It looked pretty rough when asked what to expect at this week's camps. "Like I said, we put some new things in this summer, and we worked some of that in against Hayesville. "It looked pretty rough but hopefully it will look a little better [this week]. The main thing this summer is just keeping it simple."

Hurry - Registration ends at the Union County Recreation Department for Tackle Football and Cheer June 25th!

Fee: Football \$100 / Cheer \$105
Open to upcoming 1st-6th graders for the 2021-2022 school year.

You may register online at unioncountygga.gov or in person at the **Union County Sports Center, located at 519 Industrial Blvd. 706-439-6074**

Last week's youth softball camp a success, Lady Panthers resume practice

By Todd Forrest
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Union County softball welcomed more than two dozen future stars to the UCHS softball complex last week for a three-day youth camp conducted by the Lady Panthers coaching staff and players.

Despite dodging rain showers for most of the week, Union County head coach Stephen Mitchell was pleased with the turnout of both the campers and his Lady Panther players. Except for the days that UCHS attended the University of North Georgia basketball camp, where a handful of two-sport players were missing, Mitchell benefited from having his entire 2021 roster available to offer their expertise and learn something themselves as well.

"We were fortunate to get all three days in, but it's just a very good building block for our program," Mitchell said. "It connects our coaches and players with kids that will [be in high school] in a few years."

"It also gives our current players the chance to teach, and when you're teaching, you're learning, and our student-athletes did a fantastic job last week."

Union County will begin a regular summer practice schedule this week with the Lady Panthers hitting the field on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. The softball team will practice twice next



Former UCHS softball great and current assistant coach Kaitlyn (Seabolt) Payne conducts infield drills during last week's youth camp. Payne, a four-year starter at second base between 2007-2010, led Union to a region title and a State runner-up finish while batting leadoff during the 2010 season. She attended North Georgia on a softball scholarship. Photo/Todd Forrest

week before taking off for the GHSA dead week leading up to July 4.

During the week of July 5, Union County will open its preseason slate with a pair of games vs. Lumpkin County on Monday the 5th and Wednesday, July 7. Beginning July

12, the Lady Panthers will participate in the Franklin County summer league before taking part in a two-day camp at Carrollton during the week of July 19.

Union will resume action in Franklin County starting July 26 and official practices get underway on Aug. 2. The regular season opens at home on Aug. 5, followed by a three-team round-robin with Commerce and Dawson County on Saturday, Aug. 7, also at home.

The Lady Panthers expect to return four of their top

leaders in OPS and batting average, along with their top 10 run-scorers this fall. Union's most significant loss will be felt with the departure of the program's long-time battery of pitcher Trinity Queen and catcher Hannah Patton.

Fortunately for Mitchell, rising-sophomore right-hander Sierra Burnette logged 30 2/3 innings in 2020, compiling a 1.83 ERA and a 0.85 WHIP while fanning 26 and walking five. Burnette led the team with a .183 opponent's batting average, 5.2 Ks per walk and 6 strikeouts per 7 innings.

Union County wrestlers find success at Nuway Nationals in Gatlinburg, TN



Shelby Agacinski wins the Nuway Nationals representing Union County Wrestling and AWA. Super proud! I hope this encourages others to come out and be a part of the wrestling team. Please let her know Blairsville and Union County are proud of her! Look at that Trophy! Photo/submitted



More BIG Union County wrestling news from the Nuway Nationals in Gatlinburg, Tennessee: Keegan Deeds (left) wins the 80-pound Novice Folkstyle, and Kevin Kilpatrick (right) wins the Freestyle Division as well! So Union County takes home THREE Championships at a National level event! Let the boys and their parents know you saw their accomplishments! Photos submitted



More BIG Union County wrestling news from the Nuway Nationals in Gatlinburg, Tennessee: Keegan Deeds (left) wins the 80-pound Novice Folkstyle, and Kevin Kilpatrick (right) wins the Freestyle Division as well! So Union County takes home THREE Championships at a National level event! Let the boys and their parents know you saw their accomplishments! Photos submitted