

Sports

See the Sports Section at nghanews.com

Softball: Union Co. thumps White, three ranked opponents on deck

Lady Panthers to visit No. 4 Commerce and No. 10 East Hall, host No. 6 Heard County

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Cleveland - Senior Trinity Queen picked up her second win of the year as 5th ranked Union County (2-1) used a five-run sixth to pull away with a 10-3 victory at White County.

The Lady Panthers scored three runs in the first inning and two in the third to jump ahead 5-0. White County benefited from a two-run error to get on the board during the bottom half of the third, then inched closer with a run in the fourth to make it a 5-3 game.

Queen, already a stellar defender in the pitcher's circle, provided Union County with the play of the game in the bottom of the fifth. With two down and Lady Warrior runners on second and third, Queen snagged a line drive en route to centerfield, which would have likely knotted the score at 5-5.

In their ensuing plate appearance, Queen's bat and some heads up baserunning sparked the Lady Panthers' five-run sixth. Following a base hit to center to lead off the inning, Queen alertly took an extra bag with no one covering second base. Moments later, Queen's courtesy runner, Caroline Karnes, was moved to third by an Aubrie Banton sacrifice bunt.

Ansley Collins put runners at the corners when she reached on a sacrifice bunt, but White County tried to catch Karnes in a run-down at third instead of taking the out at first. Karnes was able to get in under the tag on a bang-bang play, bringing the Lady Warriors' coach onto the field to argue



Lexi Sisum doubles in two runs at White County. Photo/Todd Forrest

the call. After Collins swiped second, consecutive RBI bunt singles by Caley Davis and freshman Sierra Burnette allowed Union County to open up a 7-3 advantage.

With two outs and the bases loaded following a Chloe Potts walk and a White County pitching change, pinch-runner Emily Byers scored on a wild pitch for an 8-3 lead. Seconds later, junior Lexi Sisum lined a two-run, opposite-field double into left-center to blow things open at 10-3.

The seven-run margin was more than enough for Queen, who worked around a two-out error to strike out the side in the bottom of the sixth.

The Lady Warriors put two on in the seventh with an infield single and a hit-by-pitch, but Queen retired the next three hitters to preserve the 10-3 win.

The Union County ace wrapped up her second complete game in as many starts, allowing five hits, one earned run and two walks.

"I feel like we had a great opening three games," Union County head coach Stephen Mitchell said. "We have been pretty solid for 20 of 21 innings. With that being said, we still have several things we need to clean up in order to reach our goals."

Sisum finished 2-for-4 at the dish with three RBIs, a double, a triple and a run. Fel-



Hannah Patton doubles down the line at White Co. Photo/Todd Forrest

low junior Emma Roxbury also doubled and drove in three runs during a 1-for-3 performance that included a run and a stolen base.

Potts went 1-for-2 with two walks, two runs and a steal; Collins was 1-for-3 with a run and a stolen base while Queen finished 1-for-4.

Senior Hannah Patton doubled and walked during a 1-for-3 day. Davis drove in a run and swiped a base; Katie Byers scored three times and Emily Byers scored once. Banton walked and stole a base; Sierra Burnette finished 1-for-1 with a pinch-hit bunt single.

The Lady Panthers' 10-run outburst was ignited by three in the first as Potts and

Patton drew consecutive walks to open the game. Roxbury cleared the bases with a two-run, one-out double before coming around to score later in the frame.

Patton and Sisum began the third with a double and triple, respectively, before a Roxbury sacrifice scored Sisum for a 5-0 score.

A two-run error at first allowed White County to pull within 5-2 in its half of the third; then a two-out single made it 5-3 in the fourth.

Up next: Despite its inclusion on an earlier version of the 2020 softball schedule, Union County dropped out of last weekend's Dalton tournament.

On Monday evening, the Lady Panthers paid a visit to Commerce - the fourth-ranked team in Class A Public. No results were available as of Monday's deadline.

Things only get tougher this weekend when Union County hosts a doubleheader with Class AA's sixth-ranked Heard County in a rematch from the 2018 Class AA State Tournament. Next Monday, Aug. 24, the Lady Panthers continue their early-season gauntlet with Class AAAA's No. 10 East Hall.

"The next four games will be very exciting for our program," Mitchell said. "It is not often that you get the opportunity to cross paths with some of the best programs in the state. Commerce, Heard County, and East Hall are all three going to challenge us in different ways."

"I look forward to facing each of them as a means to measure where we are early in the season. I have confidence that our girls will respond to the big-game atmosphere."

Including the opener vs. Lumpkin County (No. 8 in AAA), nine of Union's first 12 games are vs. ranked opponents from the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Preseason Softball poll. Speaking of Lumpkin, the Lady Panthers will visit Dahlonega on Aug. 31 following an Aug. 27 meeting with Fannin County.

Union will host Commerce in a Sept. 3 rematch before visiting Fannin County five days later. Region 8-AA play will offer no reprieve for the Lady Panthers as they open with the top-ranked defending State Champion Banks County on Sept. 10 in Blairsville.

Volleyball: Union County stumbles vs Lumpkin, Habersham Central

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Dahlonega - Tenth-ranked Union County dropped both contests in straight sets during last Thursday's tri-match vs. Habersham Central and host Lumpkin County.

The Lady Panthers got off to a rocky start vs. the Habersham Central Lady Raiders in the season opener, falling 2-0 (9-25, 15-25) to the Class AAAA opponent.

"Habersham is a solid team and definitely outplayed us," Union County first-year coach Anna Chapman said. "It's obvious that they have a solid program that starts building its players at younger ages. We were able to play some impressive rallies and show them what we have to work with."

Tied at 1-1 in the first set, Habersham rattled off nine-straight points to grab an early 10-1 advantage. Union County was unable to recover, never getting closer than an 11-4 margin before the Lady Raiders put things away by taking seven of the next eight points for an 18-5 score, eventually prevailing 25-9.

With first-set jitters out of the way, the Lady Panthers appeared a bit more poised in the second stanza, using a 4-0 spurt to pull within a point after falling into a 9-4 hole. Union continued to hang around, trailing 12-11 at the halfway point before Habersham began to open up some breathing room with



Union County volleyball in action during last week's tri-match at Lumpkin County. Photos by Todd Forrest

four-unanswered of its own. Down 16-11, the Lady Panthers kept within striking distance at 17-12 and 19-14, but Habersham ultimately proved too much, taking the set and the match 25-15.

In Thursday's finale, Union County met Class AAA Lumpkin, who already edged Habersham Central 2-1, and put up a better fight during another 2-0 defeat.

"Lumpkin was an impressive match," Chapman said. "It was obvious that we learned a lot in the previous match vs. Habersham and were able to make a few changes that helped us score points vs. Lumpkin."

In the opening set, the Lady Panthers briefly showed why they received a No. 10 ranking in Class AA/A as they grabbed early leads of 5-3 and 9-6. Still clinging to a 10-9



Union County volleyball in action during last week's tri-match at Lumpkin County. Photos by Todd Forrest

advantage, Union County hit a rough patch, allowing six-straight to the Lady Indians, finally swinging the pendulum in favor of the home team at 15-10.

The Lady Panthers battled back to within 16-13 and 18-15, but Lumpkin put them away by stretching its margin to 24-16. Union County went down swinging with three-straight points before the Lady Indians

secured game-point for a 25-19 victory.

The second set featured more of the same as the Lady Panthers were unable to keep pace except for a few limited stretches. Despite a tightly contested start that saw Union County trailing 9-7, Lumpkin inched away at 13-8, 15-10 and 19-14.

The Lady Panthers' last opportunity at making things

interesting came when they crept within four at 21-17; unfortunately, Lumpkin outscored them 4-3 the rest of the way for a 25-20 defeat.

The early-season schedule gets even tougher this week as Union County returns to Blairsville for the 2020 home-opener vs. Class AAA's seventh-ranked Dawson County. The JV begins at 5 p.m. with the varsity to follow.

Union visits Gilmer at 5 p.m. Thursday for a tri-match with Murray County.

"Both matches [last week] consisted of everything from impressive digs to missed serves to improved communication," Chapman said. "We had a lot to celebrate but also have a lot to work on. The athletes had a blast and can't wait to take the court vs. Dawson County this Tuesday."

"The beginning of our season is stacked with solid teams in hopes that it prepares us for our region matches. We are going to be ready."

Stats vs Habersham Central: Kills - Morgan Fussell 3, Saylor Noe 2. Blocks - Fussell, Sofia Swartz and Riley Allison 1.

Digs - Haley Noe 2, Olivia Blocker and Allison 1. Aces - Fussell 2.

Stats vs Lumpkin County: Kills - Fussell, Swartz and Blocker 1. Blocks - Fussell 6, Swartz 2.

Digs - Fussell, Allison and Haley Noe - 1. Aces - Fussell 2, Haley Noe and Saylor Noe 1.