

Sports

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Softball: Top-seeded Lady Panthers to host 8-AA Tourney

Queen throws 14 scoreless innings, fans 11 in Union's two region-clinching victories

By Todd Forrest
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Sixth-ranked Union County secured the top seed and home-field advantage in the Region 8-AA Tournament with a pair of shutout victories at Banks County and vs. Elbert County.

Senior Trinity Queen propelled the Lady Panthers to the No. 1 seed by tossing 14 scoreless innings, striking out 11 and allowing just five hits in the two wins.

"I think it was really important for me [to set the tone] because it gives us more confidence," Queen said regarding her two shutouts last week.

In the first meeting with Banks and Elbert, Queen allowed nine combined runs, which provided extra motivation in the second matchup.

"We were focused (vs. Elbert and Banks) because we wanted to come out and prove that we could play better for seven innings," she said. "This team has really bonded and we hope to go far [in the postseason] but we can still improve in a few areas."

While six runs aided Queen in the win over Elbert, offense was harder to come by in the 1-0 victory at Banks on Tuesday, Sept. 22.

Hannah Patton's RBI single in the third proved the difference as Queen fired a 7-



Senior Trinity Queen picked up two wins, allowing five hits and no walks in 14 innings last week. Photo/Todd Forrest

pitch masterpiece - fanning five without surrendering a walk.

After a double play ended Union's chances in the first and Aubrie Banton was stranded in the second following a two-out error, the Lady Panthers eventually broke through in the third when Ansley Collins reached on a bunt single and later stole second, setting the stage for Patton.

Queen retired the Leopards 1-2-3 in the third and fourth, but Union could not deliver in

the fifth with two down and a runner on second.

Banks threatened in the bottom half of the inning, opening with a single and a hit-by-pitch, followed by a sacrifice bunt, moving the go-ahead run into scoring position.

Queen escaped by inducing a tapper back to the circle for the force at home, and then a strikeout that retired the side. Neather squad produced another baserunner until the bottom half of the seventh when Banks kept



Senior Hannah Patton delivered the game-winning RBI at Banks, then finished 1-for-2 with a double and a walk vs Elbert. Photo/Todd Forrest

hope alive with a one-out hit batter.

But a grounder to the pitcher and fly out to center sealed the 1-0 victory - moving Union within one win of securing the regular-season region title.

Banks County's Jacy Ayers delivered a two-hit, no-walk gem of her own, but both of Union County's hits came in the third inning to bookend Collins' team-leading 10th stolen base.

In the clinching win over

Elbert County on Friday, Sept. 25 -- Thursday's scheduled meeting was a rainout -- the Lady Panthers jumped in front with three in the third before putting the game away with three more in the fourth.

Queen put the finishing touches on her second shutout and seventh complete game of 2020, striking out six while not giving up a walk. The senior right-hander received all the help she would need in the third when junior Lexi Sisum's sacri-

fice fly spotted Union an early 1-0 lead.

A costly infield error off the bat of Emma Roxbury pushed the advantage to 3-0 moments later.

The Lady Panthers made it 6-0 in the fourth following a 1-2-3 top-half of the frame by Queen. A leadoff walk from Banton and a single to center by sophomore Jaycee Seabolt put Union in business with nobody out. Then consecutive doubles by Collins and sophomore Chloe Potts provided the Lady Panthers with a 6-0 cushion.

Potts finished 2-for-4 with a run and two ribbies; Collins went 2-for-3, scoring once and driving in a run.

Patton, Seabolt and Davis each went 1-for-2, with Davis scoring once. Banton, Emily Byers and Katie Byers added a run for Union County.

The Lady Panthers host Rabun County on Tuesday, then turn around and travel to Tiger on Wednesday for the rematch. With Union's place in the standings secure, the two games are simply for bragging rights on the Lady Panthers' side. Rabun, however, could still move into a three-way tie for second by winning both Union games and receiving a little help via an Elbert County loss to Banks.

The Region 8-AA Tourney is scheduled to begin Tuesday, Oct. 6 at UCHS. The Lady Panthers will get underway at noon.

Volleyball: Union one win shy of securing No. 1 seed in Area tourney

Panthers to wrap up regular-season at home Thursday vs. Rabun and Putnam

By Todd Forrest
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Union County volleyball (11-6, 6-0) is one win away from locking up the No. 1 seed and home-court advantage in the Area 8 Tournament.

Following a scary 2-0 home loss to Chestatee on Tuesday that saw the Panthers lose junior Riley Allison to injury, Union County responded with a stunning 2-0 road win at No. 8 Oglethorpe County.

Following their 2-0 win over defending Area Champion Rabun County, Oglethorpe County entered last Thursday's showdown tied atop the standings with the shorthanded Panthers.

With Allison out of action until the postseason, Union County survived a 25-23 thriller in the opening set before following it up with a convincing 25-16 win to take the match in the straight sets.

"The first set was filled with so much tension, but the fluidity of play on our side of the net was remarkable," Coach Anna Chapman said. "We saw strong play from every single person on the court. The second set was even more amplified. We came out stronger and made less errors resulting in a bigger score gap. It means a lot for us going into the area tournament."

"[We] had one day of practice to prep for Oglethorpe and Washington-Wilkes. I made the choice to [take] as few players as possible so as not to disrupt the flow of play. The team is at a point in the season where they are in tune with the teammate on each side of them. I didn't want to throw that off."

"Without Allison, I made



Junior Morgan Fussell vs Chestatee. Photo/Todd Forrest

the decision to move right side blocker Olivia Blocker to her position. This moved Sofia McNabb to fill Blocker's position on the right side. We had a lot of pressure on our shoulders going into the match against Oglethorpe. In the standings, we were both at the top and this is a win we wanted to make happen. The team played phenomenally."

The Panthers also scored a 2-0 win over Washington Wilkes, dominating the Tigers 25-9 and 25-3.

"Washington-Wilkes gave us an opportunity to focus on our serves and reducing errors," Chapman said. "Middle blocker, Sofia Swartz, went down on a turned ankle in the first set and that caused a major line up change for the second set. Senior Katie Baumeister was moved to starting outside hitter and Saylor Noe was relocated in the vacant middle

blocker position. Blocker was the star of the second set serving 19 straight serves, 12 of those being aces."

Union County will host rival Rabun County (6-4, 3-2) in a Thursday tri-match with Putnam County (7-6, 3-3).

Entering the season in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution's* Class AA/A top five, Rabun County has been unable to replicate its recent success under a first-year coach. The Lady Cats also dropped a 2-0 contest to Lake Oconee Academy earlier in the year, falling 25-10 and 25-21. As a result, Rabun is currently fourth in Area behind the second-place tie of Lake Oconee and Oglethorpe County, who square off later this week.

On Rabun's heels is fifth-place Putnam County, adding extra importance to Thursday's tri-match in Blairsville.

Even with a loss on



Kaylee Helton during last week's JV game vs Chestatee. Union's JV season came to a close last week at Oglethorpe. Photo/Todd Forrest

Thursday, Union can still secure the No. 1 seed by breaking even in its two matches vs. Rabun and Putnam.

But make no mistake, Chapman has no intention of limping into the postseason, literally or figuratively.

"We want a victory against Rabun for the first time [in program history]," she said. "We are right where we want to be and are hoping for a No. 1 seed going into the area tournament."

"We don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but the team has big plans for the post season. We are focused on rehabbing injuries, prepping for tournament play, and ultimately seeing how far we can take this."

In last Tuesday's loss to Chestatee, the Panthers fell behind early and were forced to play catch up, which became a tall task following Allison's

in it.

"In the second set we lost Allison. The girls were able to hold it together with some line up changes, but we weren't able to pull out a win."

Up next: Thursday's tri-match with Rabun County and Putnam County is slated to begin at 5 p.m.

Stats vs Oglethorpe County:

Kills - Morgan Fussell, Swartz 5; Blocker, Saylor Noe 2.

Aces - Fussell, Molly Kay West 2

Blocks - Fussell 5, Blocker, Swartz 1

Digs - Haley Noe 11, Saylor Noe 9, Blocker 8, Emma Whicker 6, West 5, Fussell, Swartz 1

Assists - Whicker 13, McNabb 1

Stats vs Washington-Wilkes:

Kills - Fussell 4, Saylor Noe 3, Blocker 2, Haley Noe, McNabb 1

Aces - Blocker 12, West 5, Baumeister, Whicker 1

Blocks - Fussell 1

Digs - West 7, Saylor Noe 5, Blocker, Haley Noe 3, Fussell 2, Whicker 1

Assists - Whicker 11

BASKETBALL

Union County Recreation Department
Basketball Registration
has been extended to Friday, October 9th

Ages 5-12

Age you are September 1st is the age group you play in. Registration fee is \$50 and open to both boys and girls.

Registration can be completed online at unioncountygga.gov or at the Recreation Office.

If you need any additional information, please call 706-439-6074.