

Sports

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Barnett, Mancuso hit the gridiron one last time in all-star games Union County football showered in accolades following 9-2 campaign

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Two of Union County football's finest student-athletes were invited to participate in Georgia high school football all-star games during the final week of 2014.

Before senior Chase Barnett and junior Joseph Mancuso suited up in their respective game, the duo was honored by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and the Georgia Sports Writers Association.

Mancuso was named First Team All State at the quarterback position by the AJC and Second Team All State by the Georgia Sportswriters Association.

In addition to his State-wide notability, the Region 8-AA coaches voted Mancuso as the Region's Offensive Player of the Year.

"They are all great individual goals, but I try to play at the highest level possible and just see what happens from there," Mancuso said.

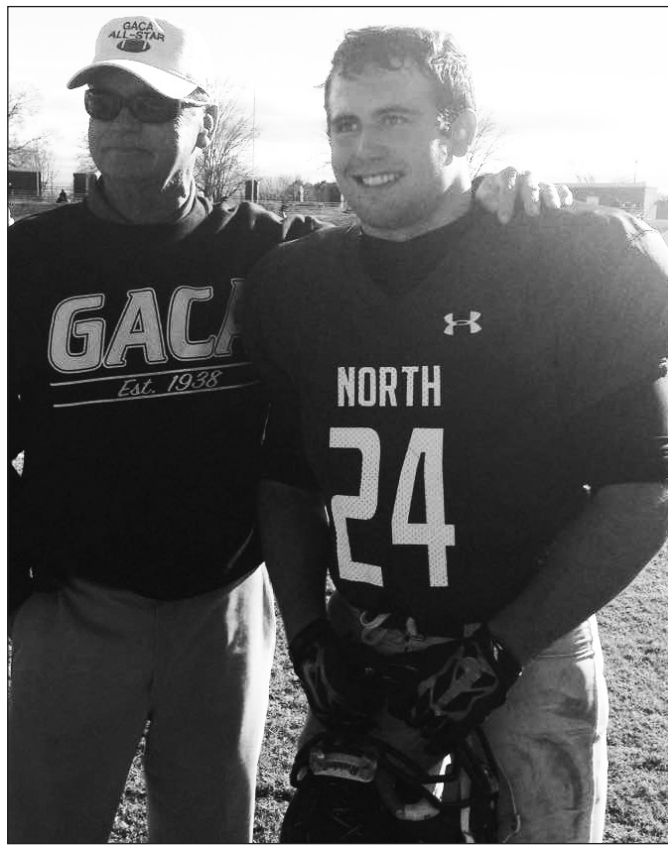
Barnett, who split time on offense and defense, was named Second Team All State at linebacker by the Georgia Sportswriters Association.

He was also named First Team All-Region at linebacker and Honorable Mention at running back.

Following all the acclaim, Barnett put on the purple Union County helmet one last time when he took the field for the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association (GACA) North-South All-Star game at Memorial Stadium in Columbus on Dec. 30th.

Mancuso, on the other hand, took the field on Dec. 29th in the Elite Junior Classic game at McEachern High School in Powder Springs.

The games pits the best



Union County linebacker Chase Barnett with legendary Panther coach Terry Rogers following the GACA North-South all-star game in Columbus last month.

juniors in the state against each other in another North vs South format.

Under the helm of Norcross High School Head Coach Keith Maloof, the North squad put up 25 fourth quarter points to rally past the South team for a 42-38 victory.

"We practiced three times before the game and it was a great bonding experience with all of my teammates," Mancuso said. "The practices definitely helped prepare us for the game."

Mancuso, who split playing time with Landmark Christian's Stockton McGuire, fired two touchdown passes with one coming during the North's ferocious rally that made it a 38-35 game with under three minutes

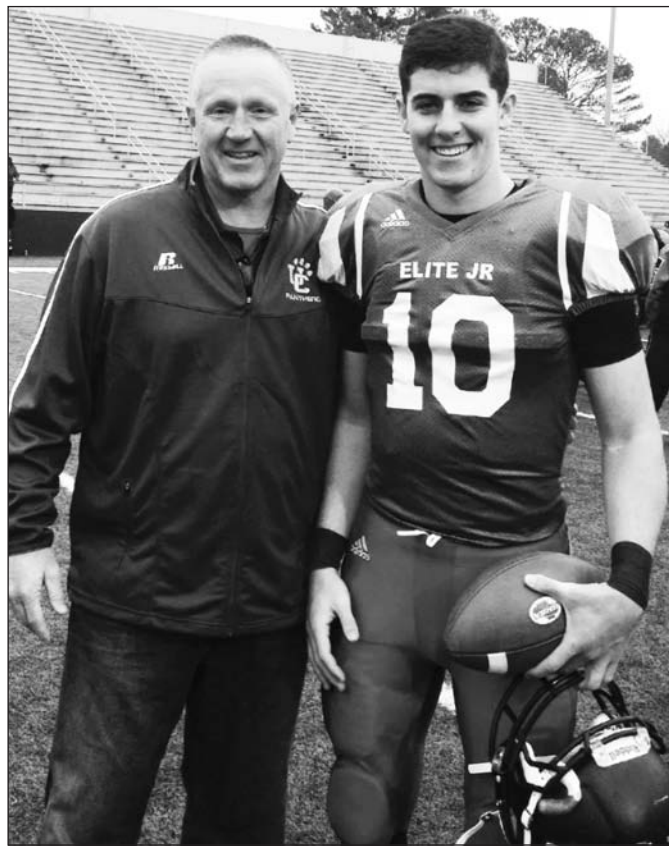
to play.

Following Mancuso's touchdown strike, the North executed a perfect outside kick that set up the game-winning 31-yard touchdown pass from McGuire with 1:58 to play.

Mancuso's other touchdown pass came in the first half.

After Mancuso and the North juniors lit up the scoreboard the day before, Barnett and the North seniors were locked in a defensive struggle. When it was all said and done, North Georgia was able to grind out a 14-10 victory over South Georgia in the GACA North-South All-Star game. Barnett racked up 6 solo tackles and 3 assisted tackles during the win.

During his four years at Union County, Barnett's in-



Panthers junior quarterback Joseph Mancuso with Union Head Coach Brian Allison at McEachern High School where Mancuso took part in the Elite Junior Classic.

stincts and nose for the football allowed the 6-foot 200-pound linebacker to set school records in career tackles and single season tackles.

He finished his career with 647 tackles as 171 tackles came during his junior year, despite an injury that sidelined him for much of Union's final two games.

In his senior campaign he broke his own school record when he tallied 175 tackles while leading the Panthers' offense in rushing yards.

While playing for the Panthers, he spent most of his time at middle linebacker, but during the all-star game, he was moved to outside linebacker where he split playing time with Flowery Branch's Cole Ford.

"We ran a 4-3 defense (in the all-star game) which is different from what we run (at Union) so they had me at outside linebacker," Barnett said. "It's completely different (from playing middle linebacker) and I was used a lot in pass coverage. They had some really good receivers that I had to cover man-to-man and that wasn't easy."

Barnett was the game's only representative from Region 8-AA but the game did feature a player from Fannin County and Lumpkin County.

"We had two practices before the game and it was an experience," Barnett said. "I got to meet all of the guys and coaches from different schools, and that was really cool. They had a lot of stuff scheduled and

it seemed like every hour you were doing something. I roomed with the guy from Fannin and made a lot of new friends. It was really fun and there was some really good guys on both teams."

As for getting the invite, Barnett thought his high school playing days were over, and the next time he would don the shoulder pads would be in college.

"I found out that I was invited about three or four weeks before the game," he said. "It was a huge surprise and definitely came out of nowhere."

"I want to thank Coach Allison and Terry Rogers because they were the ones that gave me the opportunity and I really appreciate that. Right now, I'm looking into a few colleges but still undecided."

Mancuso is still 13 months away from the 2016 National Signing Day and has one more year remaining as the Panthers' gunslinger.

In 2014, his second year as Union's starting quarterback, he threw for 3,078 yards with 34 touchdowns to only 3 interceptions, all while guiding the Panthers to a 9-2 record.

He also ran for 422 yards and 3 scores - good enough for second on the team in both categories.

In 2013 he totaled 2,705 yards through the air with 25 touchdowns to 9 picks.

On the ground he posted 435 yards and six scores as Union reached its first State playoff game in 12 years.

Mancuso has already matched Kolt Owenby's team record with 59 career touchdowns through the air. And with just over 5,800 yards for his career, he needs approximately 1,200 yards to break Owenby's team record of 7,046 passing yards for a career.

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Panthers knock off Riverside, Wilkes at home but fall at Rabun

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Union moved to 4-0 in Region 8-AA action following a 64-53 victory over Riverside Military Academy on Tuesday, but fell 78-70 at Rabun County in a battle between Region 8-AA's only undefeated teams on Friday.

The Panthers (12-5, 5-1) were able to regroup, and less than 24 hours later, took care of Washington Wilkes 63-46 in a rematch that the Tigers have been waiting for since Union ended their season during last year's Region Tournament.

This week, both Union teams will get Tuesday off before starting a six-game road trip when they visit Fannin County on Friday in a rematch that the Rebels have had marked on their calendar since early December.

In a Tuesday night home contest with rival Fannin County, the Panthers defeated the Rebels on a tip-in at the buzzer after Fannin rallied from a 20-6 deficit in the second quarter.

Region play resumes on Saturday when the Panthers make the trip to Social Circle to face a much improved Redskins squad that is currently 1-2 in 8-AA and 5-7 overall.

Social Circle knocked off Oglethorpe County 75-72 last Friday. Previously, the Redskins had lost to Rabun County 65-52 after leading 12-6 in the second quarter. In their first Region game of the season, they lost 71-27 to Greene County.

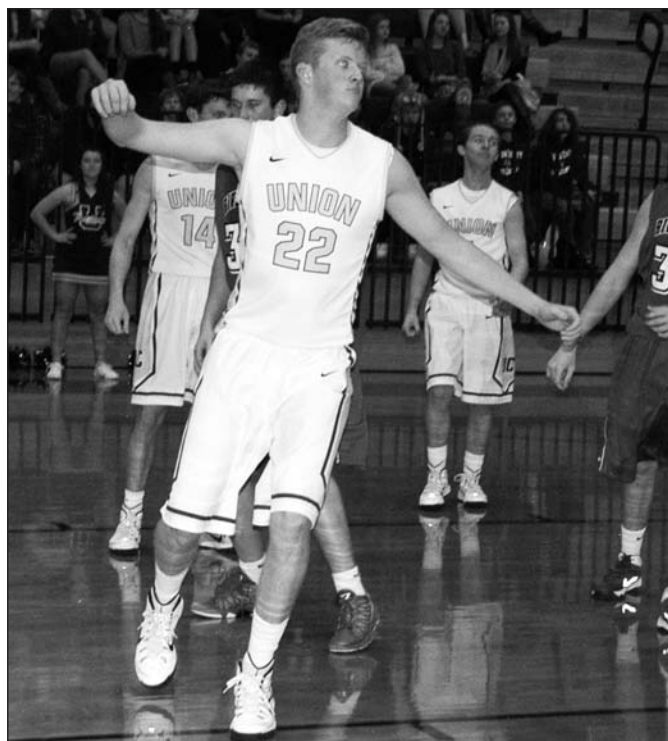
Union will also get next Tuesday off but won't play a game in Blairsville until January 30th when the Panthers host Rabun County in what is certain to be barn burner.

**Panthers 64
Riverside 53**

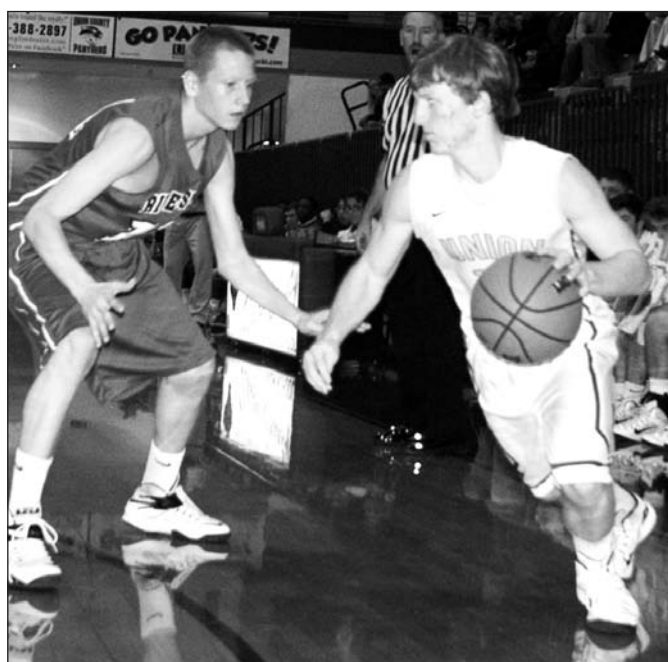
The Panthers came out firing on all cylinders and opened up a double-digit lead in the first quarter but were unable to put the Eagles away despite 26 points from Hunter Hughes.

Union was able to keep Riverside's leading scorer Avery Cagle in check, limiting him to 12 points. However, the Eagles finished with three other scorers in double-digits.

After one quarter, the Panthers maintained a comfort-



Chase Shook patrols the paint for the Panthers. Photo/Todd Forrest



Hunter Hughes drives to the basket vs Riverside. Union's senior guard scored 26 in the contest. Photo/Todd Forrest

able eight point lead but missed several opportunities to pull away in the first half.

At the break, Union was on top at 32-25. Hughes had 13 points at the break and Tyler Odom had 11.

In the third, the Eagles were able to pull within four points when Cagle was fouled after nailing a trey. He hit the free throw to complete the 4-point play but treys by Hughes and sophomore Lawson Baenninger kept Riverside at bay, allowing Union to take a 47-37 advantage into the final frame.

The Panthers got nine

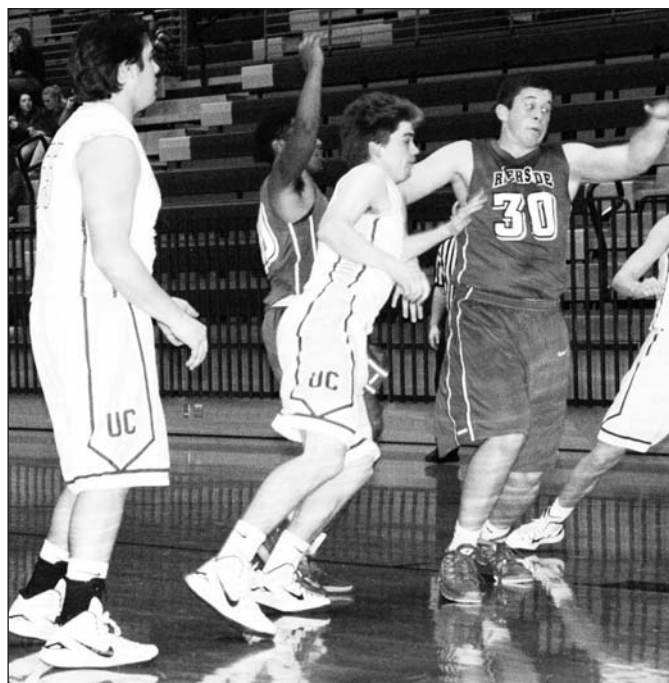
points from Hughes and five from Odom in the fourth period as Union went on to win 64-53 to improve to 4-0 in Region play.

SCORING: Hughes 26, Odom 18, Drake 7, Shook 6, Hamby 4, Baenninger 3

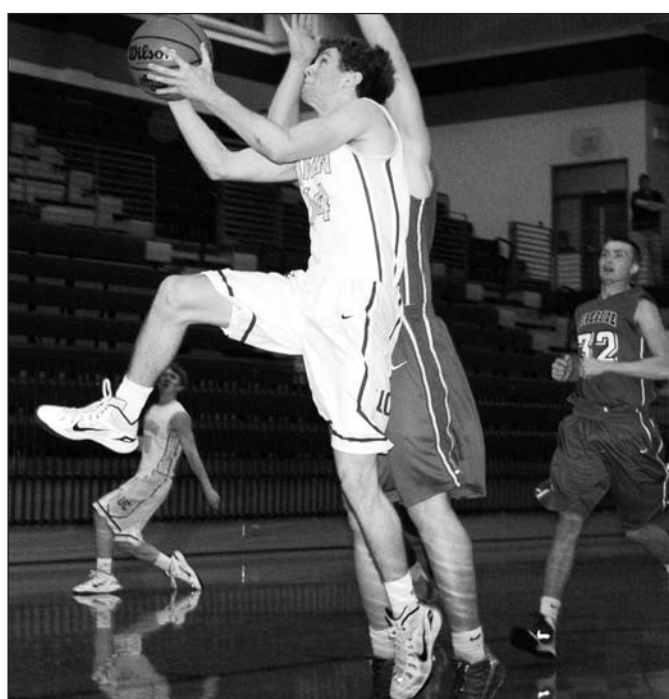
**Panthers 70
Rabun County 78**

Tiger - The Panthers got a career-high 24 points from Chase Shook but it wasn't enough as Rabun held off the Panthers to become Region 8-AA's only unbeaten team.

The Wildcats knocked



Juniors Lance Rich (left) and Andrew Brown (right) mix it up in the paint vs Riverside. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Tyler Odom with two of his 18 points during Union's win over Riverside. Photo/Todd Forrest

down 10 treys to counter Shook's big day.

The first half was tight as Shook poured in 18 points, 12 coming in the second quarter. Rabun led 16-14 after one, and 36-33 at the half.

Foul trouble began to plague Shook in the second half and the Panthers' big man eventually fouled out in the fourth quarter.

The Wildcats opened up a 10-point advantage at 56-46 after three quarters.

Odom scored 10 in the fourth but it wasn't enough as Rabun hit 9-of-11 at the line

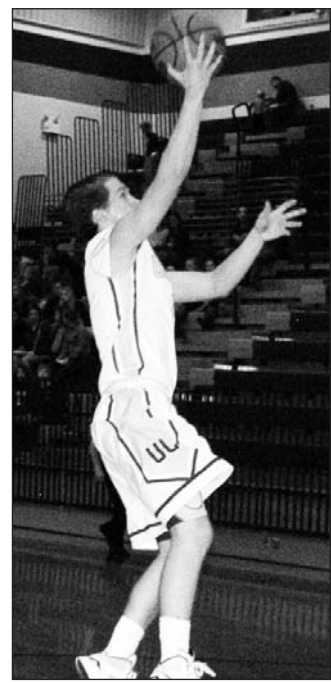
during a 22-point quarter that allowed the Wildcats to hang on 78-70 for their third straight win over the Panthers.

SCORING: Shook 24, Hughes 17, Odom 15, Brown 5, Drake 3, Hamby 2, Arnick 2, Baenninger 2

**Panthers 63
Washington Wilkes 46**

The Panthers used a 23-12 second quarter to blow things open over Washington Wilkes, en route to a 63-46 victory.

Odom led the way with 20 points while Hamby added



Kyle Hamby



Ralston Drake

17, and Shook chipped in 12. Union was able to limit Wilkes' two-sport star DeAndre Harris to 9 points.

During an 11-5 opening quarter, Odom hit a trey on his way to 7 points in the period.

The second frame saw Hamby come to life with two treys and 11 points. Shook tacked on 8 points and Odom added four more.

The Panthers put it in cruise control for much of the second half as they coasted home with a 17-point victory.

SCORING: Odom 20, Hamby 17, Shook 12, Hughes 8, Drake 4, Brown 2