

Sports

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Union sweeps Washington-Wilkes in a pair of Senior Night shootouts State Tournament, Bowdon Red Devils on deck for Panthers

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Any hopes of the Union County vs. Washington-Wilkes match-up being a pitcher's duel were out the window by the second inning of Game One last Monday.

The Panthers however, took care of business on Senior Night, taking Game One 7-6 after overcoming deficits of 2-0 and a 6-4. In the bottom of the sixth, senior Wes Aulet doubled home junior Garrett Nix the courtesy runner for pitcher Kalvin Duckworth, after the Panther junior drew a one-out walk.

Union won the second game 16-11 in a contest that saw Washington-Wilkes post three runs in the top of the first. Union countered by putting up six in the bottom half, thanks in large part to junior Luther Jones' first career grand slam - his second homer of the year.

Union then scored four in the second and two in the third for a 12-3 advantage before the Tigers made things quite interesting late.

Senior Cody Davenport picked up his second win of the season after being handed a 12-3 lead by the Panther bats.

Washington-Wilkes chased the Panther pitcher from the game after six of the first seven Tiger hitters reached in the top of the fourth. Croskey entered and fanned two after surrendering a bases loaded walk and a passed ball that allowed another run to score, making it a 12-8 game.

Union stranded two in scoring position the bottom of the fourth and Washington-Wilkes went down 1-2-3 in the fifth.

The Panthers stretched the lead out to eight runs in the fifth by putting up four in the bottom half.

Croskey, Duckworth, and freshman Josh Daniel each walked.

Croskey scored on a passed ball, Zach Odom brought in two more when a shot to right was mishandled by the outfielder. He then stole a base and scored thanks to a Wes Aulet single - staking Union to a 16-8 lead.

Just because it was Senior Night didn't mean the Tigers would lay down. The visitors struck for three in the sixth, when Croskey walked two and was hindered by two passed balls. After giving up an RBI single, Duckworth entered to put an end to the Tiger rally.

Duck struck out the first hitter, then an error at third allowed Washington-Wilkes to score another run - charged to Croskey. The next hitter went down swinging then the third out came on a grounder to second.



Senior first baseman Wes Aulet



Senior right fielder T Bentley



Senior manager Keith Brewer



Senior centerfielder/pitcher Jared Croskey



Senior left fielder/pitcher Cody Davenport



Senior shortstop Zach Odom



Senior second baseman Cooper Patton

The Panthers left one stranded in the sixth before Duckworth pitched around two hit batters by striking out the last two batters of the game.

Aulet finished 2-for-3

with a walk, while scoring 3 runs and driving in 2.

T Bentley also crossed the plate three times, going 1-for-3 with an RBI, a walk, and was hit by a pitch. Odom

and junior Lane Everett each scored twice but the hero of the game was Jones.

The junior third baseman went 3-for-3 with a grand slam and two singles.

During Union's 7-6 victory in the first game, both teams went back-and-forth and was deadlocked at 6-6 when Aulet's heroics gave the Panthers their first lead of the game since it was 4-3 in the third.

Duckworth, who took the mound in the sixth in relief of Everett, nailed down his sixth win of the season, matching Everett for the team high, by getting out of a seventh inning jam created by consecutive walks and two stolen bases by the Tigers.

With the go-ahead run in scoring position and the infield in, Duck induced a grounder to the shortstop, Odom, who fired

to the plate, getting the Tiger runner in rundown between sophomore catcher Chase Barnett and Jones at third base. Barnett applied the tag and managed to hold onto the ball during a bang-bang play at home for the second out.

Bentley made the third out with a running catch on a sinking line drive to shallow right field to preserve the Union win.

Despite favorable results in both games, the doubleheader didn't open the way Bradburn and his Panthers expected.

Everett walked the lead-off man but got a chopper back to the mound, serving up a double play ball on a platter for the Panther righty.

The third spot in the Tiger lineup reached on an error and benefited from a balk call on Everett. The clean up hitter

doubled home a run and the next spot singled in the second run, putting the home team in a 2-0 hole.

The Panthers got the runs right back when Odom walked, stole two bases and scored on a passed ball. Everett walked and scored on a Cross-key out.

A base-on-balls, sacrifice bunt, and a single manufactured a Tiger run in the second.

Union took a 4-3 lead after two when Jones reached on an infield single, Barnett walked, and Odom doubled home Jones. Aulet's sacrifice fly brought in courtesy runner Robert Prunier but an aggressive Odom was thrown out at the plate.

A walk, a single, and two errors produced a three-run third for the Tigers, while Union fell victim to a double play ball in the bottom of the inning.

Leading 6-4 in the fourth, Washington-Wilkes left a runner on third after Everett reached down and fanned two of the next three Tiger hitters, keeping the Panthers within two runs.

Jones opened the inning with a double that he stretched into a triple after turning on the jets rounding second. Jones' hustle sparked his teammates to a two-run fourth.

Davenport laced a single to left scoring Jones. A bunt-single by Barnett and a walk to Odom loaded the bases. Everett followed suit with another free-pass, scoring Davenport. Union was unable to take the lead with the bases still packed and no outs. A force out at the plate, a strikeout, and a grounder to short was not a good-showing for the 3-4-5 spots in the Panther lineup, but the Panthers had still tied things up, nonetheless.

Everett had an easy fifth with two strikeouts and a grounder to second baseman Cooper Patton.

Another double-play ball ended Union's chances of tacking on an insurance run in the fifth.

Duck entered in the sixth and struck out two, with two walks - one intentional.

Union County (14-5) outlasted the Tigers in two wild contests where offense was definitely not a premium, the Panthers learned late Tuesday that they will host 5-AA's No. 3 seed Bowdon (15-10) in the first round of State, beginning on May 3rd.

The Red Devils are newcomers to Class AA this year as they, like Washington Wilkes, made the jump from Class A at the conclusion of the 2011-12 school year.

Game time for Friday's doubleheader is 3 p.m. If needed, Game Three will also be held at Union County at 3 p.m. on Saturday.

Admission is \$7 as mandated by the Georgia High School Association

Soccer gets two weeks to prep before hitting the road at State Tournament

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State Tournament action kicks off later this week for both Union County soccer teams.

The Panthers and Lady Panthers each finished in third place in Region 8-AA and will take two excruciating road trips, respectively to face the No. 2 seeds from Region 5-AA.

On Thursday, the Union County Lady Panthers will travel to Manchester to face a 7-5 Lady Blue Devils squad at 6 p.m.

Friday, the Panthers hit the road for an even longer journey to Cusseta, where they will square off with the Chattahoochee County Panthers at 5:30 p.m.

No team from Region 5-AA, boys or girls is currently ranked in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* top-10. So other than making the long journey that rivals Bilbo Baggins' adventure in *The Hobbit*, Union Head Coach Tim Hunter likes his teams' chances of reaching the Sweet 16. Especially since Union has avoided the Bremen girls, the top team in Region 5-AA.

"I feel that both of these games are very winnable for our teams," Hunter said. "We will have to play very well but we are not facing a David and Goliath situation. Basically, it will be which ever team shows up and gets after it will have the opportunity to move on. Bre-



men's girls have flirted with the Top 10 and I believe are ranked there now. They are the top team in their region for girls."

With two weeks between the last regular season game and the State Tournament, Hunter believes he will have his teams ready for the first trip to state since 2010.

"Practices have been good so far," Hunter said. "This time of year, the team's focus is the biggest challenge. There is a fairly long layoff and graduation is getting close. But this is something that all teams face. The teams that meet this challenge the best are the ones most ready for State play. Our guys have been playing well so we are trying to keep the ball rolling. Our formation change has been one that has really been positive for our team and our intensity level has really raised in each game.

"The travel is difficult but the time to focus on the bus is of benefit to an inexperienced squad," Hunter said. "Fortunately, I have had a lot of experience in the State Tournament as a coach so we are trying to maintain as much of a level of normalcy as possible. We have to realize that these games are win or go home, but at the same time, unnecessary pressure does not help us perform. I just want them to enjoy this moment and their teammates. The closer we pull together as a team the harder we will play because we don't want to let our teammates down. I feel that we have played several games that were played at state tournament level intensity. Especially the Lumpkin, Riverside, and Jefferson games. It actually helps right now to have the time off to be able to rest up and get healed."



Kyle Hamby

Zach Odom's blast surges Union late as Mancuso picks up first career win

By Todd Forrest
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Murphy, NC - Zach Odom went deep for the second time this season as Union pounded Murphy 12-7.

Freshman Joseph Mancuso got the call by Coach Bradburn and after a rocky start, he settled down and worked four innings to pick up the first varsity win of his career.

Lane Everett singled home Odom in the first to draw first blood but the Bulldogs put up four in their half of their first, including a two-run homer to the third batter Mancuso faced. The freshman eventually struck out the side and after other than a lead off triple that led to Murphy's fifth run in the second, he only allowed one hit the rest of the way.

The Panthers batted around in the second, scoring five runs, sparked by Mancuso's single. Odom walked and Aulet cleared the bags with a double, then later scored on a passed ball. T Bentley scored on a bases loaded walk and Jared Croskey brought in Lane Everett for a 6-5 Panther lead.

Cody Davenport entered for Mancuso in the fifth and shutout the Bulldogs through the sixth inning until he gave up two unearned runs in the



Zach Odom goes yard at Murphy. Photo/Todd Forrest

seventh frame.

Union scored two in the fifth when Odom brought in Robert Prunier and Aulet singled home Hunter Hughes.

The Panthers' four-run sixth was sparked by Jackson Burks, Croskey, Prunier and Chase Barnett. After Croskey scored on Prunier's single, Odom emptied the bags with his three run blast.

Cooper Patton followed with a base hit into left before Aulet struck out to end the inning.

Murphy added two in the seventh but it was too little too late as Union County cruised to a 12-7 win.



Joseph Mancuso