

Sports

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Five Union County athletes commit to play at the next level

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Five Union County High School student-athletes signed their name on the dotted line to continue their education on athletic scholarships.

In the fall, Chase Barnett (football) and Kelsey Nix (softball) played an integral role in leading their respective teams to second place finishes in Region 8-AA. Next year, Barnett will join the LaGrange College defense and Kelsey Nix will take over the bat and defensive prowess to Demorest, where she will join Piedmont College.

This past season, Barnett's Panthers capped off a 9-1 regular season with a thrilling win over defending Region Champions Washington-Wilkes. Union County would reach the State Tournament in back-to-back seasons for the first time in team history and hosted its first playoff game in 13 years.

Although he would take over the role of star running back and began trucking defenders like a bowling ball, Barnett's niche has always been on the opposite side of the ball, laying out ball carriers with a nose for the football that is unequaled in the annals of Union County football.

During Barnett's junior season in 2013, No. 44 set a new school record with 171 tackles, despite suffering an injury in the regular season finale that forced the coaches to shut him down for the majority of the season finale and the State playoff game at Lovett.

In 2014, the senior came on strong in the running game during a 42-27 win at Greene County where he ran for 106 yards and three scores.

While carrying the ball an average of 14 times per game and recording three receiving touchdowns, he still managed to break his own school record with



Chase Barnett with family.



Maddy Morlock with coaches and family



Kelsey Nix with coaches and family



Camryn Carter with coaches and family.



Brooke Maddox with coaches and family

175 tackles.

Barnett would finish his career with 306 solo tackles, 207 assisted tackles, 9 tackles for a loss, and 6 forced fumbles.

Meanwhile, Nix was a member of Lady Panthers softball squad that reached the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2010.

After four years of first round upsets, heartbreakers, and even blowouts, Nix and her fellow seniors got the softball program moving forward after spinning its wheels for the better part of four years.

The 2014 softball season saw Union County win 29

games - the most in five years while setting a team record for most regular season wins.

Nix was automatic at first base. Regardless of how high, how low, or how wide the throw was, if Nix could reach it, she would pick it.

At the plate, the lefty completed her senior campaign with a .360 batting average with 2 homers, 8 doubles, and 30 RBIs, while only striking out nine times in 110 plate appearances.

Nix graduates from Union County High School having reached four State Tournaments. Another Lady Panthers who's very familiar with the State Tournament is Region 8-AA

Basketball Player of the Year and Huntington College signee Brooke Maddox.

From the time the speedy guard began seeing significant varsity action and dropped 20 points on Hiwassee Dam in the first game of the season, the Lady Panthers had a star in the making.

Backing up another Region 8-AA Player of the Year Lauren Zollinger, Maddox waited for her chance and when Zollinger went down with a knee injury during the summer, the junior guard was thrust into the role of point guard on a team that had Region Championship hopes.

The Lady Panthers would

reach State but were matched up against the mighty Wesleyan, a team whose coach has more rings than fingers. Union County learned from that game and in Maddox's senior season, her Lady Panthers were a second away from their second Region crown in 6 years, but a near-half-court-buzzer beater sank their Championship hopes.

Maddox finished in the top two in scoring as a junior and senior while leading the way in steals and assists in consecutive seasons. At the point of Coach David Tucker's pressure defense, Maddox was a nightmare for opposing guards. Offensively she was deadly accurate from beyond the arc but it was her dribble drives that allowed her to score, get fouled, or kick it back out for an open trey.

As basketball came to a close and sports moved back outdoors, Sports Panthers and its two senior stars Camryn Carter and Maddy Morlock were just getting started on an historic season that concluded with Union County ranked No. 5 in the final poll of the season.

Morlock, who signed with Shorter, missed most of the season finale vs Oglethorpe County and all of the State Tournament, but still led the Lady Panthers in goals for the second straight season with 18, to go along with 8 assists.

Carter finished 2015 with 13 goals and 11 assists and will be taking her skills to Huntington College in the fall.

Carter, Morlock, and the other six members of the senior class played in three State Tournaments where they compiled a 3-3 record - with all three losses coming to private schools. During Carter and Morlock's four years, the Lady Panthers compiled a record of 40-12-3.

The duo was also selected to play in the DiVarsity Georgia High School All-Star soccer game at Sprayberry High School this past Sunday, May 17th.

Mountain Gymnastics Center racks up at State; advance to Regionals

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Eight State Championships among seven different gymnasts and four qualifiers for the Southeast Regional Meet.

All-in-all, it's another typical season for Coach Shelley Thomas at Blairsville's Mountain Gymnastics Center, where many State Champion gymnasts have trained. So it's no surprise that these young gymnasts have been busy collecting hardware this spring.

At the USA Xcel State Meet in Lawrenceville last month, 13-year old Evelyn McBride scored a 9.475 on the beam to claim a State title.

At the same event, 13-year old Erin Raper scored a 36.125 all around score for a State Championship. She took third on the bars, second on the beam, fifth on the



State Champ Ella Matheson

floor, and seventh on the vault. A week later in Villa Rica, 10-year old Kaitlynn Tant walked away a State Champion after scoring a 9.3 on the vault at the AAU Silver meet. She also gave a strong showing on the bars, taking third. In the AAU Level 3 meet, also in Villa Rica, 7-year old Ella Matheson scored a 9.425 on the



State Champ Evelyn McBride

bars and a 36.675 all around to become a two-time State Champion. She placed second on the floor and third on the beam.

Seven-year old Ariel McCarter's score of 9.425 on the vault proved to be unbeatable, bringing another State Championship back to the mountains.

In the AAU Level 2 State



State Champ Ariel McCarter

Meet in Macon on Apr. 26th, 8-year old Bailee Stiles was first on the bars with a score of 9.375 and 8-year old Lola Patton was first on the vault at 9.725. She finished fourth on the bars and fourth all around with a score of 37.50.

Meanwhile, Stiles placed third on the vault, third on the floor, and fifth all around.



State Champ Erin Raper

Reagan Ledford, Mia McCombs, Raper, and McBride traveled to Savannah earlier this month to compete at the Southeast Regional Xcel Gold Championship against eight different states from Louisiana to North Carolina.

McCombs placed sixth on the vault with a score of 9.50. Ledford would tie for sixth with a



State Champ Kaitlynn Tant

score of 9.35 on the floor. McBride placed second on beam with a 9.40 and fifth all around with 37.125.

Raper tied for fourth with a 9.55 on vault and placed fifth on beam with a 9.275.

Additional Mountain Gymnastics pictures on Pg 15A

Union County Baseball holds banquet following Region Championship season

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On the heels of a 16-6 season that saw Union County earn a Region Championship and a trip to the Class AA Sweet 16, Panther baseball hosted its banquet at North Georgia Technical College last week.

Union County Head Baseball Coach Brandon Bradburn handed out awards to the following players: the **Panther Award** went to senior Jackson Burks. The **Mr. Clutch Award** was awarded to junior Josh Daniel. The **Iron Man Award** went to senior Chase Barnett. The **Defensive Award** was given to senior Jake Sisum. The **Offensive Award** went to senior Hunter Hughes. The **Pitching Award** belonged to junior Joseph Mancuso. And finally, the **MVP** also went to **Mancuso**, whose right arm picked up Region 8-AA First Team honors as a pitcher. Mancuso's bat was named Second All-Region. Daniel, also a junior was Union's second representative on the All-Region First Team.

Third baseman Lance Rich received Second Team honors, while Jackson Burks and Hunter Hughes were selected as Honorable Mention.

Union County baseball's 2015 stat leaders were: **Batting Average:** 1) Hunter Hughes (.437, 2) Josh Daniel (.368, 3) Joseph Mancuso (.333, 4) Jack-



Baseball seniors L-R: Robert Prunier, Tyler Odom, Hunter Hughes, Jake Sisum, Chase Barnett, Jackson Burks

son Burks .311, 5) Lance Rich .306

Runs scored: T-1) Josh Daniel 23, T-1) Hunter Hughes 23, 3) Jackson Burks 16, 4) Lance Rich 14, 5) Jake Sisum 10

Homeruns: T-1) Joseph Mancuso 3, T-1) Jake Sisum 3, 3) Jackson Burks 2

Stolen Bases: 1) Hunter Hughes 11, T-2) Josh Daniel 7, T-2) Chase Barnett 7, 4) Andrew Brown 5, 5) Lance Rich 3

On Base Percentage: 1) Josh Daniel .500, 2) Hunter Hughes .474, 3) Jackson Burks .447, 4) Joseph Mancuso .433, 5) Chase Barnett .419

Slugging Percentage: 1) Joseph Mancuso .648, 2) Josh Daniel .544, 3) Jackson Burks .525, 4) Hunter Hughes .507, 5) Jake Sisum .500

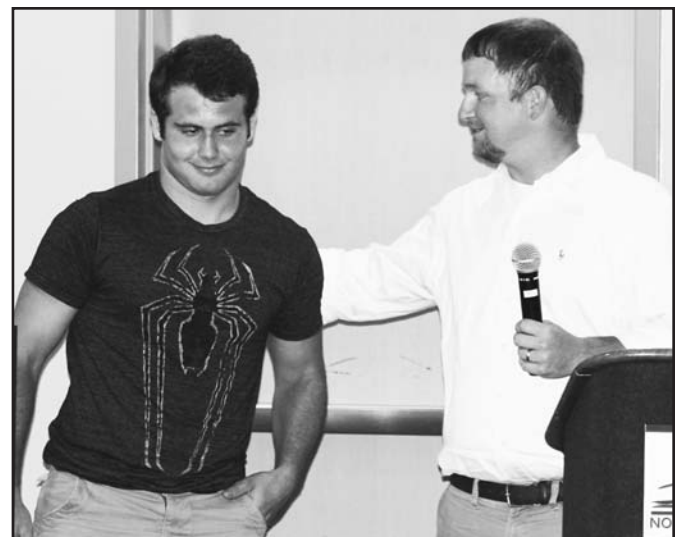
Walks: 1) Josh Daniel 17, 2) Jackson Burks 12, 3) Chase Barnett 11, T-4) Joseph Mancuso 10, T-4) Lance Rich 10

Innings Pitched: 1) Josh Daniel 47.1, 2) Joseph Mancuso 45, 3) Hunter Hughes 16.1, 4) Tyler Odom 12.1, 5) Jackson Burks 9

ERA: 1) Joseph Mancuso 1.71, 2) Tyler Odom 2.27, 3) Josh Daniel 3.70



Senior Tyler Odom with UC Head Baseball Coach Brandon Bradburn



Senior Chase Barnett with UC Head Baseball Coach Brandon Bradburn