

Sports

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Panther fans receive a taste of things to come this fall

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Football fans were given a glimpse of the 2015 edition of Union County Panthers football last Friday night at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

The Holy Innocents Bears, who hail from Atlanta, made the trip to the mountains for a scrimmage contest between a pair of squads from Class AA.

The rules of the contest were very different from a normal game. In the scrimmage, each offense began at the 30-yard line and was given 6 minutes to do as they pleased.

During the allotted time, down and distance were kept and each team could score or punt as often as possible. They would continue to take over back at the 30-yard line each time until their 6 minutes were up.

Different variations in time and the yard line were used throughout the game, but each team possessed the ball an equal number of minutes.

Holy Innocents was awarded the ball first, starting from their own 30-yard line but the Panthers defense was very stingy in the first six minutes. They forced a 3-and-out and a punt on the Bears first series. Union recovered a fumble on Holy Innocents' second series, and forced another 3-and-out on the third series when their 6 minutes ran out.

When it was the Panthers turn to play offense for 6 minutes, they gave up a sack and then an attempted screen pass went the other way for a pick-six.

With more than 3 minutes remaining, the Panthers moved into Bears' territory but were denied on a 4th and 1.

On their third series, senior quarterback Joseph Mancuso completed passes to junior Bo Lynch and senior Sam Gilbert, getting the offense on the move.

At the Holy Innocents' 25-yard line, another sack derailed the Union drive. However, the Panthers were able to get into field goal range with an 11-yard completion to Gilbert and a 9-yard carry by Mancuso, that allowed Knox Kiernan to nail a 39-yard field goal with 2 seconds remaining on the Panthers' possession.



Sophomore offensive lineman Clay Carroll (76) keeps senior quarterback Joseph Mancuso (9) upright and able to hit an open receiver downfield. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior cornerback Josh Daniel (20) and junior safety Zach Stone (7) lead a host of Panthers as they drag a Holy Innocents ball carrier to the turf. Photo/Todd Forrest

"We've got to do a better job on pass (protection), our quarterback was running for his life," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "But they were blitzing the heck out of us too."

On Holy Innocents' second offensive possession, Union forced another 3-and-out and a punt. On their second series, the Panthers recovered a fumble.

The Bears picked up a first down on their third and final series but a sack by senior Chris Drost in the final minute

kept Holy Innocents out of the endzone.

On Union's ensuing possession, Mancuso hit Kiernan, who took the pass and raced 60 yards for a score.

When the Panthers restarted from the 30, Mancuso found sophomore Cole Wright for a 13-yard pickup. He then hooked up with Kiernan for 11 yards before the drive stalled around the Bears' 40-yard line.

"We dropped a few balls and we've got to do better on that side of the ball but Knox

kicked the ball well," Coach Allison said.

On 4th down, Coach Allison sent Kiernan onto the field to attempt a 57-yard field goal. With a breeze at his back, Kiernan's kick was on the money but fell a yard short.

The Panthers returned to the 30 where a handoff to Lynch and a quick strike to Wright had the offense back in Holy Innocents territory when Mancuso took off running and found nothing but green turf in front of him.

Before he could reach the



Senior Tyler McCoy (14) is in pursuit as junior Luke Winker (51) puts the heat on the Bears' quarterback. Photo/Todd Forrest

endzone, the play was whistled dead, reducing the risk of injury by preventing him from running all the way to the endzone.

On Holy Innocents' next possession, they found pay dirt on a 25-yard scoring strike.

"We had some missed tackles on defense," Coach Allison said. "I thought we were aggressive, and I thought we attacked pretty well on defense. We had a technique error that cost us about 30 yards and we weren't very disciplined when they scored on the (25) yard line."

On their second series, Drost and junior Nic Rodriguez teamed up for a sack, resulting in a 42-yard field goal attempt by the Bears.

The kick never had a chance, sailing wide, and well short of the goalposts.

On Mancuso's final series of the game, the Panthers moved into Holy Innocents' territory, setting up a 38-yard field goal by Kiernan.

Wright, who started the game at receiver, moved to quarterback, and used his legs to convert a 3rd and 7, then connected with senior Andrew Brown for seven more yards. A first down carry by Rodriguez and an offsides penalty put the Panthers back into field goal range, but this time, Kiernan's kick sailed wide left from 45 yards out.

During Bears' next possession, a sack derailed the first series, then an interception by senior Eddie Kemp ended their second series.

Freshman Kanon Hemp-hill entered at quarterback for

the Panthers and quickly found sophomore Sean Dobbins for a first down.

Freshman running back Chad Buzzard carried for gains of 22, 14, and 5 yards before scoring from 2 yards out.

Next week the Panthers will host Sonoraville in a scrimmage that will have more of a 'real-game' feel to it than last week's.

"Preparation-wise, we've worked on their double-slot offense a couple of times and thought we did pretty good," Coach Allison said.

Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. Admission for the contest will be \$5.

A glance at Sonoraville



Location: Sonoraville
Nickname: Phoenix
Coach: Jim Kremer (2nd year)
2014 record: 6-5
Region: 6-AAA
Last Region title: None
Last State appearance: 2014 (Lost in 1st Rd.)
Players to watch: DT Kenny Cooper, LB Jonathan Novicki, CB Hunter Lay, OL Tristan Bravo, S Tate Moore, QB Cody Long, WR Dillon Dixon, OL Elisha Hagar

Lady Panthers rout Dawson, Commerce; hold their own vs Class AAAAAA

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The Lady Panthers opened the 2015 campaign by splitting four games at the Lanier Point Invitational Tournament in Gainesville over the weekend. Union picked up two lopsided wins over Dawson County (Class AAA) and Commerce (Class A) and were competitive in two losses against Class AAAAAA - the State's highest classification.

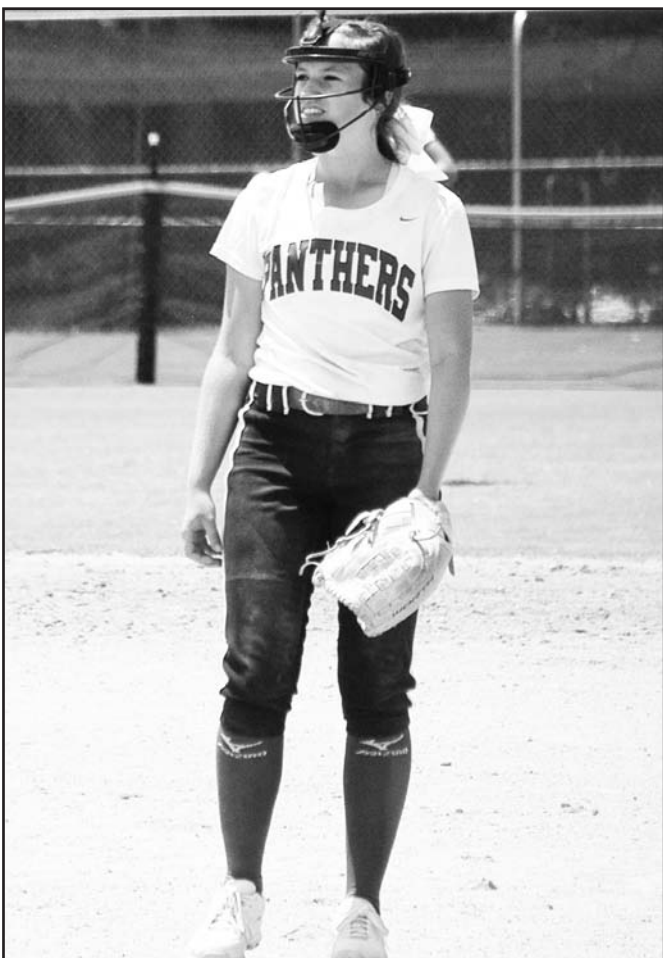
On Friday, Union County opened with North Forsyth from Class AAAAAA and fell 3-1, thanks in large part to a nine-strikeout performance from the Lady Raiders pitching.

The Lady Panthers got back on track with a 13-1 rout of former Region 8-AA rival Dawson County. Union batted around in the fifth - bringing seven runs across and ending the game via mercy rule.

The bats remained hot as Union put away Commerce 10-1 in a game that was also called after five innings.

In the finale, the Lady Panthers jumped out to a 3-1 advantage over Johns Creek from Class AAAAAA but the Lady Gladiators scored two in the third and four in the fifth to take a 7-4 victory.

On tap this week for Union County is another former Region-8 rival, Fannin County, who visits Blairsville on Tuesday at 5:55 p.m. On Wednesday, the Lady Panthers face another Class AAAAAA school when Habersham Central comes calling at 5 p.m.



Junior Kendra Tanner (left) and senior Karley Nix (right) patrol the middle infield for the Lady Panthers. They also got the job done at the plate for Union County combining for 13 hits and 8 RBIs in four games at Lanier Point over the weekend. Photos/Todd Forrest

bats were unable to provide any support for their junior pitcher.

A leadoff walk that was followed by a single and a sacrifice fly during the top of the third resulted in North Forsyth's first run of the contest.

The Lady Raiders would tack on another run in the fourth by way of a one-out single and then a double.

The third and final run came in the fifth thanks to another leadoff walk and a base hit.

Union got on the board in the bottom of the sixth when senior Karley Nix singled, stole a base, and scored on a base knock from junior Kendra

Tanner. A one out single by Chambers brought the tying run to the plate but the Lady Panthers were unable to ignite a rally.

Union missed a scoring opportunity in the third when junior Lydia Arrowood opened the inning with a walk. Nix moved her into scoring position but the Lady Panthers were unable to do any damage.

Lady Panthers 13 Dawson County 1

Chambers picked up her first win of the season by firing a one-hitter against Dawson County. The junior right-hander struck out 7 in five innings of



work. Meanwhile, the offense caught fire and put up 13 runs and put the Lady Tigers away in only five innings.

At the plate, Chambers cranked a 3-run homer and drew a pair of walks to help her own cause. Freshman Aladriel Arnold finished 2-for-3 with 3 RBIs and a walk.

Sophomore Braden Poteete was hit by a pitch in the first inning and scored on a Maddie Garrett single.

Chambers' three run blast in the second spotted the Lady Panthers to a 5-run advantage. Arnold drove in Chambers in the fourth with an RBI single to make it a 6-0 game.

Union County sent 12

ing around eight hits and three walks to limit the Lady Tigers to just one run.

Tanner finished the game 3-for-3 with a triple and 4 RBIs. Nix was also 3-for-3 with 3 RBIs.

The Lady Panthers scored one in the first and four in the second. However, it was a five-run third inning that put Commerce away for good.

Everett led off with a single, Lawn singled, Arrowood singled, Poteete reached on a fielders choice, Tanner tripled, Nix singled, Chambers singled, and Garrett singled to give Union a 10-0 lead.

The Tigers got a run in the third and Tanner took over for Lawn in the fourth and allowed two hits and no runs in two innings of work.

Lady Panthers 4 Johns Creek 7

A 3-1 lead wasn't enough as Class AAAAAA's Johns Creek rallied past the Lady Panthers 7-4.

Tanner went 2-for-4 with a triple - the ninth three-bagger of her career, tying Kaitlyn Seabolt for the team record.

Before she tripled in the second inning, she opened the first with a single and scored on an RBI single by Garrett.

Arnold doubled to score Garrett and put the Lady Panthers on top at 2-0.

The Lady Gladiators got one in the first but Union got that run back in their half of the second when freshman Skyler Ludlum singled and scored on Tanner's triple.

Johns Creek put up two runs in the bottom of the third to tie it up at 3-3. They tacked on four more runs in the fifth before Union got one back in the seventh when Chambers scored Poteete with an RBI single.

Lady Panthers 10 Commerce 1

Sophomore Jillian Lawn and freshman Maddie Tanner took the circle and gave Union County five solid innings between the two of them, work-

Lady Panthers 1 North Forsyth 3

The Lady Raiders were locked in a pitchers duel with Union County's Laken Chambers, but the Lady Panthers'