

Sports

C.T. Hussion leaves Diamond Panthers in shock; high hopes for new coach

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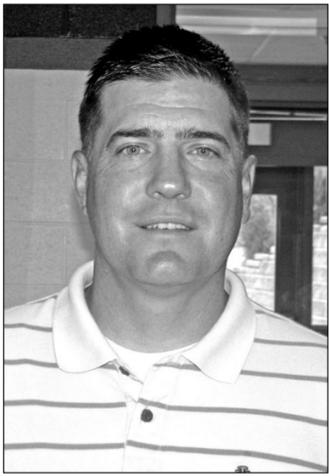
The players who took the field for Baseball Coach C.T. Hussion were stunned by his sudden departure from the program.

Panther baseball players say the coach who has led the program for the past five years called a players only meeting after school last Monday afternoon to inform his team that he would not be coaching them in 2013.

None of the players realized what they were about to be told.

"We all just thought it would be about summer training, and for us to get all the practice that we could to prepare us for next season," said junior pitcher, Cody Davenport. "It was kind of out of the blue and left everyone in shock. It caught us all by surprise. I didn't really know what to think. It was unexpected for sure."

What Davenport and other players learned was something



C. T. Hussion.

they totally didn't expect.

"I was pretty surprised at his resignation," said junior shortstop Zach Odom.

The shock of Hussion's resignation wasn't just felt in Union County by his current players. Even former Panthers were astonished.

Former Panther, and current Piedmont Lion pitcher, Trey Thomas, who graduated in 2011

and played four years under Hussion said that he was, "extremely shocked."

"He is a great coach," said Thomas. "He taught us a lot about baseball and always had a positive attitude towards the game and towards all of us."

When Coach Hussion took over the Panthers during the 2007-08 school year, the baseball team had won 14 games combined in the previous three seasons. Coach Hussion was brought in to turn a once-proud, Panther baseball program into state play-off contenders again.

In his first year at the helm, Hussion's team won 10 games, with seven coming in region play. In his second year, the Panthers finished with a .500 winning percentage and closed strong - winning three of four games to end the season.

The Panthers also took two-of-three from Dawson County, with the second win coming on senior night.

The 2010 season began with high hopes and Hussion's Panthers didn't disappoint. Union

County finished 19-9 overall and 14-6 in region play.

The highlight of the 2010 season came on April 27th when the Panthers thumped rival Fannin County 11-0 in six innings. The victory clinched Union County's first state-playoff berth since 1995. What made the state-clinching victory taste even sweeter, it came against a Rebel team that had beaten Union County in seven of their previous eight contests.

The 2011 season was a mix of highs and lows. The Panthers lost several key players, including most of its pitching staff, but Union County still managed to finish second in the sub-region, going 13-10 overall and 9-8 against Region 8-AA competition.

This season, Hussion's Panthers finished tied for second in Region 8-AA North. Some thought 2012 would be a rebuilding year for the Panthers, but this young squad had other plans. Union County swept their two arch-rivals, Fannin County and Towns County, then took two-of-

three games from Banks County, the Sub Region Champions.

The next coach at Union County will be taking over an experienced group that returns 20 players most off of the 2012 team.

"I feel like our returning team will be as strong as it will be for a few years to come," said Odom. "We are returning a lot of players with enough experience to make a good run. We will just need a few young kids to step up and for our upcoming seniors to step up and lead, especially with a new coach."

"We will have strong pitching and a really strong line up from one through nine," Odom said.

Coach Hussion will remain a teacher at Union County High School as he pursues a specialist degree. Knowing that Hussion will be staying in Union County makes the news a little easier to digest for the returning players.

"We understand his situation, hope everything works out for him, and we know that he will still be here to support us," Odom said.

Coach Allison: 'Spring Football has arrived in Union County'

By Todd Forrest
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The effort is there and soon, so will be the Union County Panthers players' rewards.

Coach Brian Allison and his Union County Panthers football team are upbeat after the first week of spring practice concluded on Thursday.

The gridiron Panthers have been restless since November and are prepared to rebound from a 3-7 finish last season.

"I was really anxious to get back on the field," said Union County running back, Clay Burnette. "I feel we have a lot of unfinished business to take care of from the previous season."

Spring practice opened last week with both the high school and middle school teams at opposite ends of the field. Aside from keeping his players healthy, the top priority for Coach Allison for the opening day of spring practice was to get 100 percent effort from his players.

"And we got that from them," said Allison.

The first practice involved Offensive Coordinator Howard McCombs going over the terminology of the play book with the running backs and receivers, before the players put on their shoulder pads and helmets to begin going through some fundamental drills.

The quarterbacks did some light throwing, while the kickers kicked off a tee from extra-point and short field goal range from between the hash marks.

Coach Casey Jones' Middle School team also practiced in



Spring football action last week at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Photo/Todd Forrest

rather muggy conditions. The Middle School Panthers performed a lot of footwork drills and worked on becoming more fundamentally sound.

On the second day, the pads were on and full-contact drills began.

The focus for Coach Allison on Day 2 was defense and he was looking for the same effort that he received on the previous day's practice.

The squad broke off into several groups with Coach Allison working on tackling and stripping the ball. Assistant Coach Cullen Robertson worked on tackling and forcing the ball carrier out of bounds, while McCombs and Asst. coach Robby Roxbury worked with the secondary on pass coverage.

It has been six months since the 2011 football season ended so the returning Panther players were anxious and ready to do some hitting.

"The whole team is

pumped for the upcoming season," said Burnette. "We had a lot of people come out for spring practice this year. We have a strong senior class that has been together since our freshmen year, and we are ready to work hard and win."

On the final day of Week One, Coach Justin Byers worked with the running backs on footwork and fundamentals. McCombs and Coach Robbie Roxbury had the quarterbacks throwing routes to receivers. Meanwhile, Coach Robertson directed the defensive backs on man-to-man coverage and jamming the receivers at the line of scrimmage. Assistant Coach Gary Butler put the lineman through a series of drills all week and hopes for the Panthers to be physical in the trenches and control the line of scrimmage.

Coach Allison was just looking to cover the basics during the first week of spring practice.

"The biggest thing during

week one is to improve our fundamentals and technique. That was one of the team goals coming into the spring," Coach Allison said.

Spring practice resumed this week and will continue through Thursday. Finally, practice will conclude after two days of work on May 14th and 15th. Although, according to Coach Allison, the second week will see more action than the first.

"Next week there will be more contact," he said. "We will be a little bit more physical."

Despite just three practices, the players have learned a lot about themselves and their teammates. "After one week of practice, we have accomplished a lot," said Burnette. "The whole team has been working hard to get better. One thing I have learned is that since I'm a senior, I need to step up and be a good leader to the rest of the team."

With fall practice less than three months away, the Panthers are already gearing up for a successful 2012 campaign.

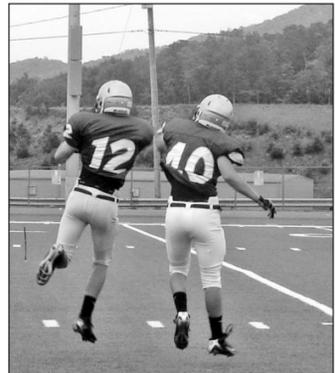
Burnette says he wants himself and his teammates to continue their hard work.

"I think this team has the ability to go far this fall, and hopefully win Union County a lot of games," Burnette said.

Following Burnette's lead, the Panthers' desire to work hard and win has already started to appear on the practice field, as players are already competing for starting jobs on both sides of the ball. "The most competition will be seen at receiver, for sure," said Coach Allison. "There will also be some solid competition in the defensive sec-

ondary."

After spring practice concludes, the Panthers will still have plenty of opportunities to enhance their skills. There will be a series of off-season, voluntary workouts during June and July before official practice begins at the end of July.



Angie Hughes, Callie Dyer set for All-Star Game

By Charles Duncan
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Two of Union County's most heralded fast pitch softball players are headed to Rome on June 13.

Seniors Angie Hughes and Callie Dyer have been named to the North All-Stars and are ready to compete in the annual Georgia Athletic Coaches Association North-South All-Star Game, Union County High School Athletic Director Jim Hughes said last week.

The game will be held at Alto Park in Rome, the home field for Shorter College, on June 13, Coach Hughes said.

"The girls will have practice on Monday and Tuesday and the game is on Wednesday," Coach Hughes said. "It's a thrill to have them represent Union County."

"Our softball team has been on a great run the past few years and to top it off this year, we've had two seniors selected

to play in the GACA North-South All-Star game," Coach Hughes said.

Angie Hughes has had a stellar career on the softball diamond. She's in the state record books with the sixth highest career strikeout total with 1,143. Her career 689 innings pitched in the ninth highest total in state history. She recorded 79 career wins, the most in Region 8-AA history, and seventh all time in the state.

Angie Hughes has committed to Lee College in Cleveland, Tenn. to continue her softball days at the collegiate level.

"Their Christian and friendly atmosphere and their winning tradition were definitely factors in my decision," Angie Hughes said. "I want to help them win a national championship."

Callie Dyer is no slouch. She's played four seasons in centerfield for the Lady Panthers. Her 155 career hits is the second most in team history; she broke the Class AA state



Callie Dyer

record for career doubles with 46; her 14 career home runs are second in the school record books; she's the only player in school history to reach the 100 RBI mark in a career. She finished her career with 106 RBIs; her career .360 batting average is third in school history.

"Coach Hughes just came up and told me today that I would be playing and it is so overwhelming and exciting, but at the same time I am nervous," Callie Dyer said. "It's an honor to get to do this because not a lot of people get this opportunity."

"I wanted to play softball at Young Harris but they just fired their coach," Callie Dyer. "I have also been talking to Tennessee Wesleyan so I am going to decide really quickly what I am going to do. I will decide before the end of the school year."



Angie Hughes

Summer Day Camp Registration

The Union County Recreation Department Summer Day Camp Registration begins May 1st. Registration forms will be available on the Website, www.unioncountyrecreation.com or can be picked up at the Union County Recreation Department Central Office at 310 Wellborn Street. The fee for the camp is \$70 per week; a discount will be given for multiple children and includes breakfast, lunch, and most all activities. Camp will be held at the Union County Kidz Corner - formerly known as Mountain Learning and Childcare Center. Spots fill fast so get your registration in now.