

# Sports

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## Wrestling: Four Panthers collect bronze at State Championships

By Todd Forreest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nghanews.com

Union County departed Macon with a program-record four third-place finishes at last weekend's GHSA Class AA State Wrestling Championships.

Junior Anderson Clouse (132 lbs), sophomore Asa Smith-Foot (150), sophomore Payton Legatt (157) and junior David Heredia (165) all took home bronze on Saturday. Smith-Foot battled his way out of the consolation bracket after suffering a quarterfinal loss. Meanwhile, Clouse, Heredia and Legatt advanced to the semifinals before dropping a match.

Clouse opened the tournament with a 13-3 major decision over Columbia's Keenan Freeland, then defeated Fannin's Thomas Golden 9-2 in the quarters.

Clouse fell 7-1 in the semis to Rockmart's James Murray but recorded a 14-1 major decision over Northeast's Jarrdarrrious Goolsby in the consolation semis. During the third-place match, Clouse edged Cook County's Jaylen Thomas by a 3-2 decision.

Legatt earned a bye into the quarters, where he pinned Toombs County's Michale Jones in round two. The sophomore suffered a third-round pinfall



UCHS Wrestling state placers: (L-R) David Heredia, Asa Smith-Foot, Payton Legatt and Anderson Clouse. Union County finished fifth in Class AA in the final team standings.

defeat to Banks County's Kellon Walley in the semifinals before he pinned Jeff Davis' Billy White in the consols.

In the consolation finals, Legatt pinned Vidalia's Jack Godbee during round two.

Heredia suffered a grueling 8-7 loss to Berrien County's Matthew Lopez in the semi-

finals. He bounced back with second-round pinfall victories over Vidalia's Samuel Sapp and Haralson County's Michael Hyatt.

After earning a first-round bye, Heredia opened the tourney with a round-one pin over Callaway's Calvin Williams.

Smith-Foot picked up a

6-3 decision over Rockmart's Skylar Edwards before getting pinned by East Jackson's Ben Lampe in the quarters.

The sophomore pinned Toombs' Tyson Brantley to open his consolation bracket, then he nabbed a 12-1 major decision over Southwest's Nickiel Mikkel. In the consolation semis,

Smith-Foot pinned Haralson's Zach Sanders before earning bronze via a 94-second pin over Model's Rylee Kines.

Senior Huck Whisenhunt picked up two wins at 175 lbs, including a 51-second pin over Columbia's Pharrell Griffin to start the tourney on Friday. He needed only 59 seconds to pin

Banks' Isaac Cantrell in his first consolation match. Whisenhunt fell in the next match to Rockmart's Austin Wooten.

At 138 lbs, junior Zander Rotko advanced to the second round of the consolation brackets where he fell to Landmark Christian's Drew Robinson.

## Basketball: Panthers enter State as 2-seed, host Murray Co. on Wednesday

### Third-quarter surge propels No. 10 Providence to Region 8-AA championship

By Todd Forreest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nghanews.com

Union County (18-8) went ice cold during the second half of Friday's region championship loss to No. 10 Providence Christian, going 5 for 24 after halftime in a 73-49 loss to the Storm.

The Panthers trailed 33-29 entering the intermission, then moved with a point early in the second half, but it was all Providence the rest of the way -- hitting 10 of 15 shots in the third quarter and outscoring Union County 26-8 for a 59-40 score through three.

The Panthers went 3 for 13 in the final frame as Providence handed Union County its fifth consecutive loss in region championship games.

Union County will host Region 7-AA's third-seeded Murray County (12-13, 8-4) at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday. The Panthers and Indians share two common opponents in Fannin County and Polk County, Tennessee.

Murray defeated Fannin three times after Christmas break by an average of 24 points, including a 62-49 win final during last week's region tournament. The Panthers knocked off Fannin 71-58 in Blue Ridge on Dec. 2, then prevailed by a 62-42 score at home on Dec. 16.

"I think the teams that Murray beat bad, were teams that started turning it over against their press and it just snowballed, so handling that pressure will be very important for us," said Union County's Region 8-AA Co-Coach of the Year Corey Garrett.

"We're obviously not a halfcourt-style team either, but if we can handle their press, I think we can exploit their defense with [Eli Underwood and Hayden Hughes]."

Additionally, Murray County suffered a 72-59 loss to Polk County, TN on Dec.



Sophomore Maddox Young from near halfcourt at the first-quarter buzzer vs. Athens Academy during the 8-AA semis. Photo/Todd Forreest

22, six days ahead of Union's 69-59 win over Polk during the Battle of the States Christmas Tournament on Dec. 28.

"I want to make sure everyone knows we play on Wednesday," Garrett said. "Some people might think the season is over, but I want everyone to know we have a home game Wednesday. The season is still going and a playoff win would be something to hang our hats on. We didn't win a region championship but we still have plenty to play for."

**Panthers 77, Athens Academy 59** - Union County pulled away from the Spartans during the final minutes of last week's Region 8-AA semifinal contest.

"We just couldn't put them away," Garrett said. "We'd go up 10 and they'd cut it back to five. I personally think that out of the three games we played them, that

was [Athens Academy's] best performance."

Hughes scored a game-high 22 points on 6 of 9 from 3-point range. With 82 treys on the year, the sophomore sharpshooter surpasses Blake Williams' 19-year-old program record for 3-point field goals in a season.

With his team nursing a 65-59 lead with 3:18 remaining, Union County sophomore Jude Ellis drew a charge during an Athens Academy break -- sparking a 12-0 Union run that put the Spartans away and secured a first-round home playoff game for UCHS.

On the ensuing Union County possession, Hughes set a screen then peeled to the corner for a trey with 2:54 on the clock. Following a Spartans' miss from deep, Hughes sank a transition 3-pointer at the 1:44 mark to open up a 71-59 edge. A Houston Henry steal resulted in a Cade Dockrey



Underwood collected his 16th double-double of the season. Photo/Todd Forreest

bucket moments later, all but putting the game away with 1:11 to play.

Ellis made two free throws 17 seconds later, and Henry capped the scoring with two more from the stripe with 16 seconds remaining.

Ellis ended with 19 points, five rebounds, three assists and two steals. Henry had 6 points, nine assists, six rebounds and two steals.

Underwood collected another double-double with 12 points, 16 rebounds and two steals. Union County held a 20-15 lead after one via sophomore Maddox Young's buzzer-beater from just inside halfcourt. The Panthers opened up margins of 23-15 and 30-23 during the second before Athens Academy trimmed the deficit to 33-28 at the break.

Underwood converted a putback 70 seconds into the third, and a Henry dribble-

drive made it a 37-28 game near the 6:10 mark. After a Spartans' basket, Underwood and Ellis added back-to-back buckets to build a 41-30 advantage a minute later.

Underwood scored two more baskets in the paint for a 45-35 score. Later, Ellis answered an Athens Academy 3-pointer with one of his own, then Hughes drove the baseline to keep the margin at 10 points.

The Spartans answered with a 7-0 run to move within three until a Dockrey deuce and a Hughes triple closed the third with Union up 55-47.

Two Henry free throws nudged the lead to 57-47 early in the fourth. With his team still up 10 with under 6 minutes left, a spinning layup from Hughes opened a 63-51 lead.

Athens scored the next 6 points, but Underwood halted the spurt with a layup at the 3:55 mark before the visitors

trimmed the margin back to six on the ensuing possession.

Dockrey scored 10 points with two boards and a steal. Young added 8 points, one assist and one steal.

Senior Westbrook Adams led the Spartans with 21 points. Region 8-AA Co-Player of the Year, junior Kymel Williams, finished with 8 points on 3 of 15 shooting.

"He didn't really show it in the first two meetings but I knew that [Adams] could play, and he played really well against us the third time."

**Game stats:** Union - 28 for 63 (44%) from the floor; 10 for 24 (42%) from three and 11 for 23 (48%) at the line; 38 rebounds (9 offensive); 32 points in the paint; 9 second-chance points; 4 turnovers; 10 points off turnover. Athens - 26 for 67 (39%) from the floor; 5 for 20 (25%) from three and 2 for 5 (40%) at the line; 44 rebounds (13 offensive); 40 points in the paint; 12 second-chance points; 13 turnovers; 2 points off turnovers.

**Panthers 49, No. 10 Providence 73** - Union County hit 29% from the floor and 18% from three as the Storm held Union to its lowest home scoring output since its 34-29 loss to Towns County on Nov. 22.

The Panthers made just 9 of 24 before halftime, but early Storm foul trouble helped Union head to the locker room in a tightly-contested 33-29 contest. In the third, Hughes' only triple of the night quickly trimmed the margin to 33-32.

"The gameplan was to attack No. 2 off the dribble and make No. 14 guard in the post," Garrett said. "We did that in the first half and got what we wanted. We kept [No. 14] in foul trouble all night, and got two quick fouls on No. 2 but he didn't get another one the rest of the game."

After a Providence bas-

See Region Basketball, Pg 3B



# Basketball: Lady Panthers open State at No. 8 Murray Co. on Tuesday

## Union falters late in region tourney losses to Athens Academy, East Jackson

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

**Homer** - Second-half scoring woes doomed the Lady Panthers (14-13) in each of their two Region 8-AA Tournament losses at Banks County last week.

Union County enters the Class AA State Tournament as a No. 4 seed and will travel to 8th-ranked Murray County (20-4) on Tuesday. The Indians own a pair of narrow wins over Fannin County, coming out on top 46-41 in Chatsworth on Jan. 10. Murray County locked down the No. 1 seed in the Region 7-AA tourney with a 52-51 victory in Blue Ridge on Feb. 3.

Union County suffered a 47-21 loss at Fannin County on Dec. 2 before stunning the Lady Rebels 48-45 in Blairsville on Dec. 16.

**Lady Panthers 36, Athens Academy 49** - Union County held a 30-28 advantage late in the third quarter, but the Spartans rattled off 15-straight to mount a 43-30 fourth-quarter lead.

The Lady Panthers were limited to six fourth-quarter points as Athens Academy cruised into the Region 8-AA title game. Union County made 16-of-24 shots after halftime and missed all eight of its 3-point attempts.

Meanwhile, Union County hit 8 of 16 and 2 of 3 from deep during the first half to hold a 24-22 lead at the break. The Lady Panthers heated up just past the midway point of the first after falling into a 10-0 deficit, beginning with a Kamryn Mull 3-pointer. Corinne Hill cut the margin in half with a floater, and Ariel McCarter made it 10-7 with a scoop layup off a drive.



Ariel McCarter led Union with 15 vs. Athens Academy. Photo/Todd Forrest

Athens Academy stretched its lead to 14-7 late in the period, but Mull drove the baseline in the final seconds to move Union County within five.

The Lady Panthers outscored the Spartans 15-8 in the second, starting with two McCarter free throws to keep pace at 16-11. McCarter hit a runner on the ensuing possession, then Katelyn Brown scored inside off a feed from Lara Turner, trimming the margin to 16-15.

McCarter put Union on top with a triple from the top of the key, and Hill made two free throws to cap a 9-0 run with her team up 20-16 with 3:53 on the clock. Hill answered a Spartans deuce with a runner in the paint, but Athens Academy tied the game at 22-22 near the 2-minute mark.

McCarter put Union on top 24-22 at the half with two free throws in the final

seconds. Tied at 24-24, Hill scored via a putback with 5:05 left in the third, but the Spartans pushed ahead 28-26 later in the period. Hill and McCarter handed Union its final lead at 30-28 near the 2-minute mark.

Athens Academy tied the game following a Lady Panthers 1-and-1 miss, then the Spartans pushed ahead 32-30 after three quarters with two free throws at the 33-second mark.

Athens Academy extended its run to 15-0 with 4:36 to play before Hill scored inside on Union's next trip. A Spartans' steal-and-score put the game away at 48-32 with 1:42 remaining.

McCarter finished with 15 points, four rebounds, four assists and three assists. Hill had 12 points and three boards; Mull added 5 points and two rebounds.



Kamryn Mull scores to end the first frame on Tuesday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Brown ended the day with 2 points and seven rebounds. Turner had 2 points and two rebounds.

**Game stats:** Union - 14 for 40 (35%) from the floor; 2 for 12 (17%) from three and 6 for 7 (86%) from three; 25 rebounds (9 offensive); 20 points in the paint; 2 second-chance points; 28 turnovers; 11 points off turnovers. Athens - 19 for 47 (40%) from the floor; 2 for 8 (25%) from three and 9 for 14 (64%) at the line; 30 rebounds (15 offensive); 34 points in the paint; 8 second-chance points; 21 turnovers; 28 points off at turnovers.

**Lady Panthers 42, East Jackson 54** - Union County struggled late after rallying from a 16-6 deficit to tie the game at 25-25 in the third quarter.

The Eagles outscored Union 16-6 to close the third up 41-31, eventually extend-

ing their lead to 48-32 in the fourth.

Mull hit a trey, Brown made two free throws and McCarter had one as Union trailed 16-6 after the first frame. Freshman Paula Robertson drilled two 3s to move her team within six at 18-12 early in the second. Turner scored inside off an inbounds play, and Robertson connected from deep for a 20-17 score with two minutes left in the first half.

Brown and Mull scored in the final 75 seconds to trim the deficit to 23-21 at the break. Down 25-21, Union tied things up near the 5:30 mark via baskets from Hill and McCarter.

East Jackson scored six straight before Brown answered with a putback at the 3:37 mark. Turner countered an Eagles trey with a deuce, but East Jackson hit again from downtown to build a 37-29 advantage.

The Eagles extended the

lead to 41-29, but Turner scored off a feed from Morgan Warren to keep Union within 10 after three quarters.

East Jackson built a 48-32 lead with 6:19 left and Turner followed with two free throws, but the Eagles quickly converted a fast-break layup off a miss to remain up by 16.

Turner ended up with 13 points and eight boards. Robertson had 9 points; McCarter added 7 points, five rebounds and three assists.

Brown had 6 points, 10 boards and three steals; Mull had 5 points and six rebounds; Hill chipped in 2 points, five rebounds and two steals.

**Game stats:** Union -- 15 for 62 (24%) from the floor; 4 for 26 (15%) from three and 8 of 12 (67%) at the line; 43 rebounds (21 offensive); 22 points in the paint; 10 second-chance points; 15 turnovers; 8 points off turnovers. EJHS -- 16 for 39 (41%) from the floor; 7 for 16 (44%) from three and 15 of 25 (60%) at the line; 31 rebounds (4 offensive); 16 points in the paint; 4 second-chance points; 13 turnovers; 11 points off turnovers.

**Up next:** Union County visits No. 8 Murray County at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The Lady Panthers are appearing in their 22nd State tournament and have won at least one game in three of their last four State playoff appearances.

**Tip-ins** - Brad Cochran becomes the Lady Panthers' fourth head coach since 2016, and ninth in program history, to reach the State tourney, where the girls have compiled a 17-21 all-time record.

Jim Hughes and David Tucker lead the way among UCHS coaches with five State appearances. Tommy Wilson has four (1970-73).

# Baseball: Young Panthers combine for six runs in losses to Lumpkin, Pickens

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com

Union County couldn't rally from a 5-0 deficit during an 8-2 loss to Pickens on Tuesday, Feb. 14. On Saturday, the Panthers watched a 2-0 lead evaporate into a 13-4 loss vs. Lumpkin County.

Union County departs for three road games this week with an 0-5 record. The Panthers visit Pickens, Lumpkin and Woodland-Cartersville.

**Panthers 2, Pickens 8** - The Dragons scored two runs in each of the first two innings, then tacked on another in the fourth before Union broke through with two in the bottom half.

Pickens added three insurance runs in the seventh and retired the Panthers 1-2-3 to nail down the win.

Maddox Patton went 2 for 3, while Eli Gwynn and Lane Haney each ended their day 1 for 3 with an RBI.

Eli Sosensky turned in a 1-for-3 day at the dish with a run; Connor Swanson finished 1 for 3 with a steal.

Patton surrendered five earned runs over three innings. Hunter Fleming tossed two scoreless frames and Gwynn gave up three runs over the final two innings.

**Panthers 4, Lumpkin County 13** - The second home game of the week saw Union County grab an early 2-0 lead behind RBI singles from Patton and Will Duncan.

Lumpkin County evened the score via a two-out, game-tying double in the third. Later, a second-and-third bunt single



Lane Haney went 1 for 3 with an RBI and two steals vs. Pickens. On the mound vs. Lumpkin, he fanned two in 2 innings. Photo/Todd Forrest

with one away moved the Indians ahead 3-2 in the fourth.

Back-to-back two-out doubles by Lumpkin County broke things open in the fifth, making Union pay for a hit-by-pitch and an intentional walk earlier in the frame.

The Panthers were back in business during the bottom half but could only muster two runs following two hit batters, two singles, a walk and a triple.

Jordan Gilliam was plunked to begin the inning and scored on Patton's triple to right. Sosensky brought home Patton with a grounder to short and Duncan restarted the rally with a base knock to left.

Fleming singled, Connor Swanson and Gwynn were hit by a pitch, but Union failed to capitalize due to a costly out on the base paths.

The Indians tacked on four in the sixth and two in the seventh.

Patton finished 2 for 3 with two runs and two RBIs. Duncan and Fleming each went 2 for 4 with Duncan driving in one. Fleming went 2 for 4; Swanson was 1 for 3 and Moses Stephens scored during a 1 for 3 day.

Gilliam went 1 for 2 with a run. Sosensky drove in a run.

Gunnar Akins, Fleming, Gwynn, Haney and Patton all saw action on the mound.

# Region Basketball... continued from 2B

ket on the other end, Hughes and Ellis each missed potential game-tying baskets from long distance. With 5:26 left in the period, the Storm scored off penetration, sparking a 12-0 run to take a 47-32 lead. A step-back 3-pointer by Ellis and two Underwood free throws temporarily stopped the bleeding at the 2:26 mark -- moving Union within 10 at 47-37.

The Storm outscored the Panthers 12-3 over the final two minutes, breaking things open at 59-40 entering the final frame. Following a scoreless two minutes, Underwood's jump hook made it 59-42 near the 6-minute mark. The senior post would keep Union within 17 via an offensive board with 4:47 left, but a Providence trey, followed by a steal-and-score, put the game away at 66-44.

Underwood finished with 19 points and 11 rebounds; Ellis had 12 points and two assists. Young scored all 8 points in the first half, while Henry added 3 points, 11 rebounds and three assists.

Ellis, Underwood and Young led Union in the first half after their team fell into a 5-0 deficit. Underwood and Young tied the game at 5-5 near the 4:20 mark, but the Storm answered with eight straight. Down 13-5, Union County rallied with two Ellis free throws and a breakaway layup by Hughes to move within six at 15-9 by the quarter's end.

A Providence 3 made it 18-9, but Underwood answered with a traditional 3-point play and a putback. Young hit from the corner to make it 20-17, then Ellis and Underwood kept pace at 29-26 as the clock approached the 2-minute mark.

Two free throws by Young made it 29-28 on the Panthers' next trip, and Henry made 1 of 2 at the line to bring Union within 33-29 at halftime.

Hughes had 7 points on 1 of 6 from downtown. Dockery collected two steals, one rebound and one assist.

Providence's Region 8-AA Co-Player of the Year, junior Samuel Thacker, recorded a game-high 20 points on 6 of 7 from deep. Seniors Thomas Malcolm, Chandler Dunn, Devin McClain, Kamron Carryl and Ephraim Rowell had 16, 13, 10, 6 and 4 points, respectively.

"I felt like we guarded [Thacker] well in the first half but we had some defensive breakdowns in the second half," Garrett said. "We helped off him a couple times which we knew was a big no-no. We knew we had to play nearly perfect to win and we didn't do that, then Providence got hot in the second half and that was it. End of story."



With 31 points in two region tourney games, sophomore Jude Ellis surpassed 600 career points and currently sits at 619. Photo/Todd Forrest

**Game stats:** Union - 14 for 48 (29%) from the floor; 3 for 17 (18%) from three and 18 of 22 (82%) at the line; 30 rebounds (8 offensive); 20 points in the paint; 9 second-chance points; 15 turnovers; 7 points off turnovers. Providence - 31 for 61 shooting (51%); 9 of 26 (35%) from three and 2 of 3 (67%) at the line; 34 rebounds (7 offensive); 36 points in the paint; 10 second-chance points; 12 turnovers; 12 points off turnovers.

**Up next:** Union County and Murray County will tip off at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday. The Panthers are looking for their first State win since 2016's first-round victory at Bowdon.

According to Garrett, his Panthers match-up well with the Indians in halfcourt sets, but their relentless full-court defense poses a serious threat.

"[Murray] isn't big and they aren't super-skilled, but they play really hard and are super scrappy," he said. "They press a lot out of a 1-2-1-1. It's not like the Rabun girls' 1-2-1-1. [Murray] is a little softer and want to trap at midcourt, where as most traditional presses want to trap on the first pass in."

"[Murray] doesn't like playing a half-court game, offensively or defensively, because they are pretty small. They have some decent shooters, but nobody that can really fill it up. They really want to play a fast full-court game and rely on their scrappiness and physical play to kind of muck things up a bit. But that's how that whole region plays. They all press and then fall back into zone in halfcourt sets."

The winner of Union-Murray will likely travel to Class AA's second-ranked Columbia (Decatur) this weekend to face the 27-1 Eagles.

Providence jumped three spots to No. 7 in Class AA following its region title and will host Rockmart in the opening round. Third-seeded Banks County will visit North Murray. Fourth-seeded Athens Academy will travel to Model.

"I couldn't believe how physical the refs let them play over there in Region 7," Garrett said. "It's completely different than Region 8. The only team we've seen that plays anything similar is North Hall, and they pressed us and turned us over, which is a little concerning. If you handle the press you'll beat them. If not, the best you can hope for is being in a dogfight."

**Tip-ins** - Henry, Hughes and Underwood all earned a first-team all-region nod for Union County.

Wednesday will mark the Union County men's 21st state playoff appearance in program history. The Panthers are 11-20 all-time at State and 3-11 since 2000.

Garrett's fourth state playoff appearance moves him into a second-place tie with Casey Jones among men's coaches at UCHS. Earl Odom leads the program with six state appearances between 1970-1981. Ben Corley has three (2000-2002).

With five-straight state playoffs dating back to 2019, Union's current streak surpasses the Panthers' teams of the early 1970s and early 2000s that reached State four consecutive years.

# UCRD 12U girls basketball wins MAC title



Union County Recreation Department's 12U girls basketball team took home first place earlier this month at the Mountain Athletic Conference tournament in Dawsonville.