

Sports

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Baseball: Panthers fall 5-3 to West Hall at Coolray Field

Union County opens region play this week on the heels of back-to-back losses

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Union County dropped a pair of non-region contests last week beginning on Monday with a 7-2 loss at Murphy, NC that saw the Panthers fall behind 5-0 after two innings.

Later in the week, Union County faced West Hall at Coolray Field in Lawrenceville: the home of the Gwinnett Stripers (formerly the Gwinnett Braves) - the Triple-A affiliate of the Atlanta Braves.

Like the Murphy game, the Panthers spotted West Hall a 5-run lead before battling back with three in the sixth to make it a contest.

Sporting a 5-3 record, Union County opens its Region 7-AAA slate with a three-game series vs Lumpkin County. The first game was scheduled for Monday in Dahlonega before the series moves to Blairsville on Wednesday for a 5:55 p.m. first pitch. The series concludes Friday, returning to Dahlonega at 5:55 p.m.

MURPHY, NC - Panthers 2, Murphy 7: The Bulldogs scored three in the first and two in the second to grab an early lead that was never threatened.

Union County got on the board with two in the top half of the third but Murphy put the game away with one in their half of the third and another in the sixth.

Patrick Baggett finished 2-for-3 with a double and an RBI single.

RJ Banton went 1-for-3 with an RBI single while Logan Dyer and Cayden Rich each scored a run.

Dyer was hit by a pitch to lead off the third then Rich reached on a dropped third strike with one out.

Following a pop-up for



Union County baseball takes a team photo following its game vs West Hall at Coolray Field last Thursday evening. Photo/Todd Forrest

the second out, Baggett singled to right to score Dyer. Banton followed with a base hit to left to bring in Rich and trim the deficit to 5-2.

Four pitchers saw action for Union County with Del Ruff getting the start - allowing five runs and six hits in two innings.

With two outs and two on in the first, Ruff was unable to get out of trouble as Murphy made it 3-0 on three straight singles.

The Bulldogs dealt Ruff more two-out damage in the second with a 2-run homer to make it a 5-0 game.

Left-hander Pierson Allison replaced Ruff in the third and worked an inning, surrendering one run on one hit with two walks and a strikeout.

With two down and the bases loaded, Allison gave up his lone run of the game on a wild pitch.

Jackson Colwell took over in the fourth and gave up three hits, two walks, and one run in two innings, despite working a perfect fourth.

Colwell ran into trouble in the fifth, surrendering a run

on three straight singles to open the inning. Luckily, he escaped the jam with a double play to end the inning.

Coleson Daniel pitched a scoreless sixth while allowing one hit and fanning a batter.

LAWRENCEVILLE - West Hall 5, Panthers 3: Five first-inning walks helped the Spartans grab an early 5-0 lead, which proved more than enough for West Hall right-hander Jeffrey Jenkins.

The Mercer commit took a perfect game into the fourth until Baggett singled to center with one out.

Jenkins finally ran into trouble in the sixth when the Panthers roughed him up for three runs on five hits but the comeback bid proved too little, too late.

Baggett finished 2-for-3 with an RBI and a run. Banton drove in two during a 1-for-3 performance while Hunter Kelley scored a run and went 1-for-3 at the plate.

Senior southpaw Cole Davis got the nod for Coach Robby Roxbury's Panthers and struggled to find the zone in the

early going.

West Hall sent 11 batters to the plate in the top of the first, drawing five walks, while recording three hits - two singles and a double.

Davis eventually settled down and lasted three innings, allowing four hits, five runs, seven walks, and striking out three.

Junior left-hander Ean Harkins took the mound in the fourth and tossed two scoreless innings while yielding two hits and two base on balls.

The Union County offense began making noise in the sixth when Kelley got things going with a leadoff single.

Alec Scott reached with a one-out infield single to set the table for Baggett.

That's when the senior switch-hitter connected on the deepest hit ball of the day - a warning track double into the right-centerfield gap.

Trailing 5-1 with runners on second and third, Banton singled to right - scoring courtesy runner Jackson Colwell and Baggett.

Rich kept the rally go-

ing with a single to put the tying run aboard with only one down. Unfortunately, a pickoff and a strikeout ended the inning with the Panthers still trailing 5-3.

Banton replaced Harkins in the sixth and worked two scoreless innings to keep West Hall at bay. However, Union's three sixth innings runs were all they could muster off Jenkins as the Panthers went down 1-2-3 in the seventh.

Jenkins fanned 13 batters without giving up a walk while allowing six hits and three earned runs in seven innings.

West Hall's Gabe Allison - nephew of Union County football coach Brian Allison - finished 2-for-3 with a run and a walk.

Looking ahead - Union begins region play with Lumpkin County this week. The Indians are currently 5-5 and 0-3 in 7-AAA after suffering a sweep at the hands of defending State Champion North Hall by scores of 14-0, 10-0, and 7-3.

Like Union, Lumpkin owns a pair of wins over

Gilmer (8-5 and 5-3). They also defeated White County (4-3 in 8 innings) and lost 7-6 to Commerce.

The Indians offense is led by juniors Jacob Martin and Connor Pierce. Martin is batting .357 with 4 RBIs to go with the team's only homer. Pierce is batting .353 while leading the way with nine runs, two doubles, and a triple.

Juniors Matthew Grizzle, Braylen Chastain, and sophomore Nick Turner are tied for the team lead with 5 RBIs each.

Junior Dalton Stephens -- also one of the team's top two pitchers -- and sophomore Dalton Caldwell are one back of the team lead with 4 RBIs each. Caldwell is also second on the team with six runs scored.

Pierce, Turner, and Chastain are also leading the way with five stolen bases each. As a team, Lumpkin has 27 stolen bases in 10 games. To put that in perspective, Union County has 13 steals through eight games.

Another Indian to watch is sophomore Logan Choflet, who is batting .417 in only 12 at bats.

Meanwhile, Stephens (2-1) and Grizzle (2-1) anchor the Lumpkin pitching staff. Stephens has fanned 19 batters in 20 innings while Grizzle has 18 strikeouts in 16 innings.

Other pitchers are senior Austin Black (10 BB in 9.1 IP), Martin (1-0, 8 IP), and sophomore Tucker Kirk (5 K in 5 IP).

Game one was played Monday in Dahlonega, game two is Wednesday in Blairsville, and the finale is Friday at Lumpkin County.

First pitch in each game will be at 5:55 p.m.

Season stats and the West Hall game box score are located on the following page.

Soccer: Panthers hang on at Darlington; surrender early lead in loss at Fannin County

By Todd Forrest
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The Panthers split a pair of road games last week at Fannin County and Darlington to improve to 2-5 overall while remaining winless in region play.

Union County will travel to Pickens County on Tuesday before resuming 7-AAA competition at Lumpkin County on Thursday.

ROME - Panthers 1, Darlington 0: A Kobi Robbins penalty kick with 8:53 remaining was the difference as Union County recorded its second win of the season.

Following a physical, but scoreless, first half, the contest appeared destined for overtime until the Panthers drew a foul inside the penalty box with under nine minutes to play.

Union County coach Leland Sarrell selected Robbins for the PK and following a successful kick, he was forced to attempt the PK again, due to a double encroachment (both teams entered the penalty area before the kick was taken).

Fortunately, the result was the same on the second attempt and the Panthers had their second second-half lead of the season.

During the final 8:23, the Union County defense and goalkeeper Aaron Helton were able to keep a furious Darlington attack off the board to preserve the win.

BLUE RIDGE - Fannin 2, Panthers 1: After getting shutout by the Rebels last month in a non-region contest, the Panthers needed 28 minutes to get on the board during the second meeting.

Senior Sean Dobbins gave Union County the early lead with a goal in the 28th minute, however, the lead was short-lived as Fannin (8-1, 1-1) tied things up 10 minutes later for a 1-1 score at the half.

After 34-plus minutes without a score in the second half, the Rebels' game-winner came with 5:53 remaining. Fannin remained unbeaten with its win over Union, improving to



Top: Keeper Aaron Helton with a save just in time at Darlington. Bottom: Kobi Robbins at Darlington. Photos/Todd Forrest

8-0 on the year.

Later in the week, the Rebels would fall to Class AAA's No. 2 East Hall, by a 2-1 score.

Looking ahead - The Panthers visit Class AAAA Pickens County (0-4) on Tuesday where the Dragons will be looking for their first win of the season.

The only common opponent between Union and Pickens is Fannin County, who defeated the Dragons 3-0.

Start times are scheduled

for 5 and 7 p.m at Pickens County.

Region play resumes on Thursday, Mar. 15 at Lumpkin County. The Indians are 5-3 overall and 1-0 in the region with a 3-2 win over North Hall.

Lumpkin County owns a 7-0 win over Towns County, who lost 10-0 at home to Fannin Co.

Start times at Lumpkin County are scheduled for 5:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Union County Recreation Department 2018 Evening Step-Aerobics Program Session 2! Ages: 50 and over

You asked and we listened! Union County Recreation Department is now offering a second evening Step-Aerobics fitness class! If you are looking for an indoor exercise program to fit your work schedule and other needs, then come on down to the Union County Recreation Department and sign up for our second session



of Step-Aerobics. The Program Director of Union County Parks and Recreation will be leading Step-Aerobics sessions two times a week for April and May for 45 minutes each class. This is a great time to socialize and exercise with a fun group for a very low cost of \$10 for 16 classes!

**Step-Aerobics Registration begins on March 5, 2018 and ends March 30, 2018 at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.)

Registration must be done in person due to class size limits. If you have any questions, please call our office at (706) 439-6074.

North Georgia Rapids Swim Team compete at "Swim Above the Clouds" in Highlands, NC



North Georgia Rapids Swim Team

The local swim club, the North Georgia Rapids, ventured north to Highlands, NC to represent their club in the annual "Swim Above the Clouds" meet. The team was very successful with many personal best times and pool records:

Caroline Cole set five personal best times and one pool record in the Girls/8&U division; Wyatt Yancey set three personal best times in the Boys/8&U division; Lily Helton swam in five events in the Girls/10&U division and placed first in all five events;

Hunter Yancey set two personal best times in the Boys/10&U division; Anniston Howse set three personal best times in the Girls/12&U division; Brooke Yancey set three personal best times and one pool record in the Girls/12&U division; Liam Smith set five personal best times and one pool record in the Boys/12&U division; Michael Dillard swam in four events in the Boys/12&U division; Hunter White set four personal best records and one pool record in the Boys/14&U division; Riley Howse set four personal best records in the

Boys/14&U division; Alden Wilkes set three personal best records in the Boys/18&U division; and Bethany Anderson had three personal best records and three pool records in the Girls/18&U division!

The North GA Rapids Swim Team truly appreciates the tremendous support given them by the Union General Wellness Center staff. Without their support, and that of the entire community, this team (which also feeds the UCHS and UCMS teams) would not be as successful as they have been. NMar7212CA