

Sports

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Boys Soccer: Panthers survive PK thriller with Lumpkin

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Union County soccer opened region play with a dramatic penalty kick victory over Lumpkin County on Friday night at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

After 80 minutes and a pair of 5 minute overtime sessions without a goal, the Panthers and Indians were decided by penalty kicks on a blistering cold evening that saw near-freezing wind chills for the duration of the contest.

Lumpkin County opened with a successful penalty kick and senior Sam Seiler responded with one of his own.

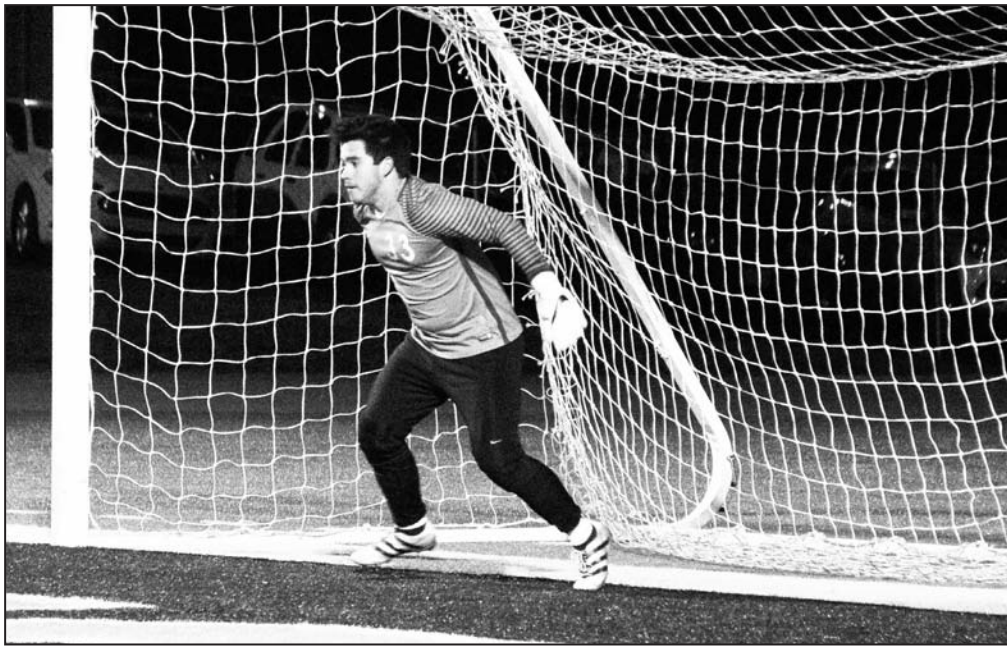
The second round of penalty kicks belonged to the Indians as their shot found the net and Union's was no good.

Senior goalkeeper Nick Rodriguez came through with a crucial stop for the Panthers to keep the deficit at one goal allowing senior Lawson Baenninger to kick a shot by the Lumpkin keeper to knot the score at 2-2 after three rounds of PKs.

Both attempts in the fourth round were unsuccessful as Rodriguez made another save for Union.

"Nick (Rodriguez) was very solid for us on Friday," Union County first year coach and former UCHS goalkeeper Leland Sarrell said. "He made all of the saves that we have come to expect from him - including a few key moments in the first half. Furthermore, he was in the right position for other shots all night. He certainly shined during the penalty kicks though."

Entering the fifth and



Union County senior goal keeper Nick Rodriguez gets an early read before deflecting a Lumpkin County shot during Friday night's penalty kick session. After a scoreless game and two overtime periods, the Panthers edged the Indians 3-2 on penalty kicks, thanks to two stops by Rodriguez. Photo/Todd Forrest

final round of penalty kicks, Lumpkin's shot sailed high over the top of the goal bringing junior Lance Underwood center stage with the game on the line. Underwood's kick found the net as teammates rushed to the other end of the field to mob both Underwood and Rodriguez in front of a stunned Lumpkin County bench.

"During penalty kicks the keeper's job is not usually a fun one," Sarrell said. "Considering a penalty kick is so heavily favored for the kick taker, if a keeper can save one of the five shots it is seen a solid performance for him. Nick did that with his first save; it was solid and kept things tight in the shootout."

"The second save went above and beyond though. His range and reaction time had to be spot-on to make that save

with his trailing, high hand; saves like that - saves that probably should not be made - can make all the difference in to world during penalty kicks."

With winds out of the northwest at 15-20 mph, the team playing with the wind at its back seemed to have the advantage.

"The wind always has a sizable impact on a game, especially when it blows at one teams back and into the other teams face," Sarrell said. "It makes the game much more offensive for whoever has the wind at their back. Everything from goal kicks, to throw ins, to simply progressing the ball downfield becomes easier. All things considered it also adds a bit of a 'luck factor' into the game."

Aided by the wind in the first half, the Indians were

unable to capitalize, despite keeping Union on the defensive for the majority of the opening 40 minutes.

The Panthers' best scoring opportunity of the half came with under 30 seconds remaining but Brian Smith's shot missed wide after the sophomore went on the offensive and advanced the ball from box-to-box, outrunning the Lumpkin defenders.

Unfortunately his shot from point-blank range bounced left, missing the front post by inches.

After surviving the first half with the wind in its face, it was Union's turn to go on the attack during the second 40 minutes.

"Our defense played a phenomenal game on Friday," Sarrell said. "Without them, a goal could have easily slipped



Union County coaches Jon Krieger (middle) and first year coach and 2009 UCHS grad Leland Sarrell (far right) meet with the five Panthers who will take penalty kicks. Photo/Todd Forrest

in during the first half while the wind was blowing at us."

Less than 17 minutes into the second half, a free kick by Sam Seiler resulted in a near-goal for the Panthers, but the Lumpkin keeper came up with the save in front of the goal.

The second offside of the half was called two minutes later when it appeared that Union might finally break through.

Between 18:14 and 12:42 remaining, the Panthers got off four shots with three missing wide. The fourth resulted in a save off a Union County corner kick.

Rodriguez made a stop of his own with just over seven minutes to play. Then another Panther corner kick was unsuccessful, this time with 5:48 left.

Twenty-two seconds lat-

er, Seiler's kick missed wide but Union's best shot came with less than four minutes to play. Colby Ives blasted a kick that would have likely won the game but the Indian keeper went up high and with arms fully outstretched, snagged the shot before it found its way under the crossbar and into the net.

Rodriguez denied Lumpkin on a free kick with 1:46 to go before Union's final chance came on a free kick with 3 seconds left.

McCombs nearly won the game in regulation but the Indian keeper came through once again, securing the ball as the horn sounded.

Following a scoreless first (five-minute) overtime session, the teams switched ends

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Girls Soccer: Lumpkin County scores early and often in 8-1 victory

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The Lady Panthers fell behind by five goals in the opening 25 minutes to Lumpkin County in the first region contest of the season.

The score would remain 5-0 until the Lady Indians exploded in the final 14 minutes to pull away 8-0.

Union County's Layne Baenninger would tack on a late goal in the final minutes for an 8-1 final score.

Maddie Sutton recorded the assist on Baenninger's goal.

On Tuesday the Lady Panthers will resume Region 7-AAA action when they host Fannin County at 5 p.m.

The two teams met last month in a non-region contest and Union edged the Lady Rebels, 2-1 in Blue Ridge.

Fannin is currently 4-2 overall and 1-1 in region play.

The loss came to North Hall by a 5-2 score, meanwhile the win was a 2-0 shutout at East Hall - who Union visits on Friday.

The Lady Panthers and Lady Vikings will get underway at 5:30 p.m. on Friday in Rabbitsville.

East Hall is 2-5-1 overall with wins over Cedar Shoals and Darlington to go with a 1-1 tie of West Hall.

However, in their five losses, the Lady Vikings have been outscored 34-3 with three of those losses coming to Class AAAA teams.



Layne Baenninger (1) provided the only Union goal. Photo/Todd Forrest



Maddie Sutton had the Lady Panthers' lone assist. Photo/Todd Forrest

Girls Golf: Lady Panthers take second at White County's Warrior Spring Swing at Mossy Creek GC



The Union County Girls' Golf team finished in second place at the Warrior Spring Swing at Mossy Creek Golf Course in Cleveland on Saturday, March 11. The Lady Panthers competed against 21 schools from across the state in all classifications. Union County's Ally Horinek broke the tie for second place by sinking a par putt against Reigon 1-AAAA's Columbus High School's No. 1 golfer on a sudden death playoff hole. On Thursday, both Union County squads will host White County at Old Union GC beginning at 3 p.m. This weekend, the Lady Panthers will participate in the Lady Cat Invitational in Dalton. Earlier this week, both Union teams traveled to Kingwood to take on Rabun County. The tournament was played on Monday - after the weekly deadline.

Mountain Gymnastics Center participates in the Champions Cup

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Roswell - Six teams from Blairsville's Mountain Gymnastics Center took part in the Champions Cup last month.

Dakota Hogeback took first place All Around in the AAU Silver division with a total score of 36.725

She placed second on the vault with a score of 9.25 and second on the bars with a 9.475.

She also scored a 9.1 on the beam and an 8.9 on the floor.

In the AAU Gold division, Lola Patton placed third all around with a score of 35.65.

She tied for third on the bars with a 9.1, tied for third on the beam with a 9.175, was



Mountain Gymnastics Center AAU Level 2 team: (L-R) Millie Banks, Adriana Viera, and Kara Lodge.

fourth on the vault with an 8.45, and sixth on the floor with an 8.925.

In the AAU Level 3 divi-

sion, Lillian Peacock finished third all around with a 35.875.

She was first on the beam with an 8.875, tied for second



Mountain Gymnastics Center group shot.

on the floor with a 9.05, fourth on the vault with an 8.85, and sixth on the bars with a 9.10.

Erin Raper took home a fourth place all around finish in the USA Platinum division thanks to a score of 35.075.

She placed third on the floor with a 9.25, fifth on both the vault (8.70) and the bars

(8.65).

Raper also scored an 8.475 on the beam.

Placing fifth all around was Reese Chambers in the AAU Silver division.

She tied for third on the vault with an 8.15, was fourth on the bars with a 9.35, and took sixth on the beam with

an 8.925.

Chambers also scored an 8.75 on the floor.

Josie Poston recorded a sixth place all around finish in the AAU Gold with a score of 33.40.

Her best event was the bars where she placed third with a 9.15. She tied for fourth on the vault with a 7.95, was fifth on the floor with a 9.10, and sixth on the beam with a 7.20.

Three competitors placed seventh all around with Jacey Lee finishing tied for seventh in USA Gold with a score of 34.875.

Mia McCombs was seventh in the USA Platinum with a score of 34.90 and Avery Frechette took seventh in the AAU Gold with a score of 34.75.