

Sports

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Soccer: Panthers claim Region title, finish undefeated in 8-AA

Lady Panthers second in Region 8-AA, will host first round of playoffs

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The sixth-ranked Union County men (9-1, 8-0) clinched the Region 8-AA title with Tuesday's win over Rabun County before securing a perfect region record Thursday at Riverside Military Academy.

The Union men's first Region Championship in six years came via a 9-1 victory over Rabun County on Tuesday night at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Later in the week, the Panthers survived a rare thriller in region play, fending off a furious rally in the waning moments at Riverside to survive with a 4-3 win. With the victory, the Union men finish undefeated in the region for the first time since 2011.

Leading 4-1 with under five minutes to play at Riverside, Union appeared on its way to an 8-0 region mark when the Eagles were awarded, and converted, two late penalty kicks to pull within a goal during the 78th minute.

The Panthers began the scoring during the 4th minute when Zach Jackson found the net off a Malachi Patrick assist. Following the RMA equalizer, Nolan Bachman put Union County in front to stay during the 37th minute, courtesy of Kyler Robbins' feed.

Robbins pushed the margin to 3-1 with an unassisted goal in the 53rd minute. In the 73rd, sophomore Wilson Walker added an all-important insurance goal off a pass from freshman Benton Gregory.

Panthers 9, Rabun County 1 - Union County ran away late following an inconsistent first half that saw the



The Union County men's soccer team after clinching the region title with a 9-1 rout of Rabun County on Tuesday, March 30. Photo/Todd Forrest

Panthers take a 3-1 lead into the intermission after allowing their first goal in Region 8-AA competition.

Zuriel Mancillas spotted Union an early lead when he converted a Robbins cross with his right foot during the 3rd minute. But Rabun notched the equalizer five minutes later when senior goalkeeper Aaron Helton uncharacteristically allowed a slow roller to slip between his legs.

A pair of good looks by Patrick and Wilson misfired in the 9th and 10th minutes, respectively, but Jackson and Bachman put Union ahead in the 13th when Jackson worked his way inside, dropping a pass off to Bachman for a tap-in directly in front of a wide-open goal.

Union could not take

advantage of a corner kick and a pair of scoring opportunities during the 18th minute when Patrick missed high and Mancillas hit the post.

Clayton Lester's header sailed over the post in the 21st, Jackson's shot was stopped by the keeper in the 27th and Gregory missed wide in the 32nd minute. Mancillas was also turned away in the 29th, but the freshman answered seven minutes later with his second goal of the half, opening up a 3-1 advantage.

A throw-in during the 49th nearly led to a Patrick goal, then a pair of kicks from Robbins misfired in the 50th. Union finally broke through in the second half when Gregory made it 4-1 in the 57th - opening the flood gates for five Union goals over the next 15

minutes.

Gregory scored again 72 seconds removed from his first goal, then Walker converted a 1-on-1 situation in the 62nd for a 6-1 lead. Robbins added an unassisted goal in the 63rd, and senior Reid Baumeister scored his first career goal in the 70th off a feed from fellow senior Sammy Spivak.

The Panthers' final score of the night came off a Rabun County own-goal in the 72nd.

Jackson finished with four helpers; Gregory added another.

Union will likely host Region 5-AA's No. 4 seed Haralson County in the first round of state. Haralson is 2-8 on the year with three of its losses coming by 10-0 runs.

The Panthers will take some time off for Spring Break

before returning on April 12 to host a 10-2 Pickens squad that has spent most of the season flirting with the Class AAAA Top-10 rankings. Two days removed from their fixture at UCHS, the Dragons could potentially claim a share of the Region 7-AAAA title with a victory at top-ranked Southeast Whitfield (10-0-2).

Lady Panthers 0, Rabun County 6 - Columbus State signee Lauren Barnes scored six goals to secure a Lady Cats' Region 8-AA title on Tuesday, March 30 at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

Minus two key starters, Union County (5-3, 4-2) was simply overmatched from the start. And toss in a steady dose of early bad luck in the form of two handballs -- the second coming in the 13th minute, resulting in a

Rabun penalty kick and an early 1-0 deficit - and the Lady Panthers found themselves playing from behind most of the day.

The Union attack still produced multiple opportunities to draw even but failed to capitalize, beginning with a shot by freshman Lara Turner that missed wide in the 18th. Sophomore Maggie Payne nearly tied the score in the 22nd, but her shot was batted away by the keeper.

Rabun County made Union pay five minutes later when Barnes stretched the score to 2-0. The Lady Cats took a 3-0 lead in the 39th minute after failing to convert a free kick in the 38th.

Freshman Reagan Covington was denied in the early stages of the second half and fellow 9th grader Kyra McKechnie delivered three huge saves to keep hope alive in the 46th, 47th and 49th minute.

Following a miss by Payne during the 58th, Rabun started pulling away in the 59th minute with its fourth goal. Sophomore Kaylee Helton's shot sailed wide two minutes later, and during the 62nd, Rabun extended its advantage to 5-0.

The Lady Cats made it 6-0 in the 77th, sandwiched between two shots on goal from Turner.

Union County will enter the Class AA State Tournament as the two-seed and will host the No. 3 seed from Region 5-AA. As of this writing, Callaway and Temple are each tied for second in 5-AA after splitting two meetings.

The Lady Panthers will resume action on April 12 when they host Pickens (2-9-1) at 5:30 p.m.

Baseball: Panthers blast Riverside, clinch postseason berth

Three meetings between Union County and Rabun to settle third place in 8-AA next week

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Union County powered its way past winless Riverside Military Academy to secure a spot in the Class AA State Tournament later this month.

The Panthers (8-14, 3-6) dropped a non-region contest at Towns County on Monday, March 29, but bounced back with a three-game sweep of Riverside to lock down a top-four position in Region 8-AA and clinch their second-straight postseason berth (2019).

Panthers 12, Riverside 0 (six innings) - Union lefthander Lake Hughes set the tone in the series with a 15-strikeout performance, and senior Isaak Mullanack finished 4 for 4 to end Union's seven-game skid on Tuesday in Gainesville.

Hughes' 15 Ks is the most by a Union County pitcher in over two years (Zeke Swartz - 16 vs Monticello, March 15, 2019). Meanwhile, Mullanack's four-hit day was his first since Union's 7-3 win at No. 6 Commerce on March 3, 2020 - named the *North Georgia News'* top individual baseball performance of 2020 in the Jan. 6 edition.

Mullanack finished the Riverside series a perfect 8 for 8.

Scoreless through two innings, the Panthers finally provided Hughes with some run support when consecutive singles by junior Thomas



Junior Lake Hughes set a UCHS season-high and a personal career-high with 15 strikeouts at Riverside on Tuesday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Dyer and Mullanack sparked a three-run frame. Junior Conner Shields delivered a two-run opposite-field single and later scored on an error off the bat of fellow junior Caleb Towe.

Hughes struck out the side for the second-straight inning in the third and Swartz extended the margin to 4-0, scoring Mullanack (walk) with a two-out double.

Towe doubled and Bailey Brown singled to set the table in the fifth for a two-run single by Hughes. Leading 6-0 entering the sixth, Union County blew things wide open with four singles (Mullanack, Swartz,

Shields, Hunter Loyd) to start the inning. Up 8-0 after four-straight hits, Towe's sacrifice fly made it 9-0, and a Brown groundout brought home the 10th run.

Following a walk to Hughes, RBI singles by Dyer and Mullanack opened up a 12-0 advantage. Hughes closed out the contest with a four-strikeout sixth after a passed ball on strike three allowed the third batter of the inning to reach.

Hughes tossed a six-inning two-hitter, walking one during an 80-pitch outing.

Mullanack swiped four



Hunter Loyd watches his 2-run homer sail over the right-centerfield fence during Union's 16-1 win on Thursday. Photo/Todd Forrest

bags and scored three times while driving in one during his 4-for-4 day. Shields went 2 for 4 with 2 runs and 2 RBIs, Swartz doubled, scored and knocked in two while going 2 for 4 at the dish. Dyer and Hunter Loyd also finished with two hits, a run and one RBI apiece.

Hughes finished 1 for 4 with a run and 2 RBIs; Towe doubled and scored during a 1-for-3, one RBI performance. Hunter Fleming walked twice and scored. Brown went 1 for 4 with a run and an RBI.

Panthers 16, Riverside 1 (three innings) - After going winless in four March starts,

Swartz opened April with a victory in game one of Thursday's home doubleheader.

The senior lefty fanned eight and surrendered one hit, one walk and one earned run during Union's three-inning rout.

Mullanack and Swartz each went 3 for 3 with 4 RBIs, and Hunter Loyd ended the contest with a two-run homer to finish 2 for 3 with 2 runs and 2 ribbies.

Trailing 1-0 in the first, all 14 Union County batters reached safely in the inning as the Panthers exploded for 10 runs. A Hughes base hit and

an error off the bat of Dyer allowed Mullanack to even the score with an RBI single. Mullanack came around for the first of his 3 runs on a two-run single by Swartz.

A Shields' fielder's choice and a Hunter Loyd single loaded the bags for Towe, who extended the margin to 4-1 with a little help from an Eagles' error. Brown made it 6-1 with a two-run double, Brayden Sweat reached on an infield single but Towe was thrown out trying to score. Consecutive errors allowed Mullanack to push the lead to 9-1 with a two-run double.

Following a Swartz single, Shields reached on an error to score Mullanack, but courtesy runner Logan Anderson was cut down at third to end the inning.

After allowing a leadoff walk to score in the first, Swartz struck out the side in the next two innings and Union ended the contest early with 6 runs in the bottom of the third.

Hughes and Dyer started the six-run frame with back-to-back singles, then three consecutive doubles by Mullanack, Swartz and Shields quickly made it 14-1. With one on, nobody out and a 3-1 count, Hunter Loyd launched a towering shot to right-center to end the game with a 16-1 victory.

Dyer scored three times during a 1-for-3 day, Shields scored twice and knocked in one while also going 1 for 3.

See Baseball, Page 3B