

Sports

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Solorio's hat trick propels No. 4 Union Co. into Sweet 16

Panthers thump Towers 6-1, visit No. 1 Model on Thursday

By Todd Forrest
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Junior Antonio Solorio and the 4th-ranked Panthers are moving on to the Sweet 16 after cruising to a 6-1 victory over Towers High School in the opening round of the Class AA State Tournament on Friday, April 19.

The Panthers (9-2-3) used three goals in the early moments of the second half, turning a 3-0 lead into a 6-0 rout with more than 26 minutes remaining. Towers added a late goal against the Union County reserves to avoid the shutout.

Union County visits undefeated Model, the top-ranked team in Class AA on Thursday, April 25 in a heavyweight showdown.

During the win over Towers, Solorio's hat trick began with a header goal in the 7th minute, redirecting an Evan Bohms' cross into the net from 10 yards out.

Bohms made it a 2-0 game in the 10th, sneaking a 22-yarder past the keeper into the back-right corner.

Towers nearly cut the lead in half moments later, sending a shot off the post, before both offenses went silent over the next 20-plus minutes until Bohms and Solorio connected a second time, sending Union into the intermission with a 3-0 lead.

Solorio's score came on the heels of Bohms' unsuccessful free kick in the 32nd.



Senior mid Zurriel Mancillas scored the 26th goal of his career vs. Towers during his 11th postseason start. Photo/Todd Forrest

However, Eli Decker gathered the ensuing goal kick, allowing the Panthers to force the action behind Zurriel Mancillas, Zack Depalma and Bohms, who eventually found a wide-open Solorio in front of the goal.

The Panthers' offense exploded early in the second half as Bohms made it 4-0 in the 48th, courtesy of Mancillas, who split three defenders before hitting Bohms for a point-blank goal.

Solorio completed his hat trick in the 52nd when the

keeper failed to gather Nick Depalma's free kick, allowing Solorio to knock in the rebound.

Union's final goal came after Towers couldn't clear Mancillas' corner despite swatting away Kooper Ashcraft's header. Zach Depalma gathered the deflection and fed a crashing Mancillas from 8 yards out.

With his hat trick, Solorio becomes just the fourth Panthers' player (Kyler Robbins, Brian Smith, TJ Smith)



Junior Antonio Solorio's 16 goals are the most by a UCHS underclassmen since 2013. Photo/Todd Forrest

since 2012 to reach 16 goals in a season.

The Panthers turn their attention to top-ranked Model, which enters the Sweet 16 with an 18-0-1 record. Union County and the Blue Devils have a common opponent in Fannin County. The Panthers soundly defeated Fannin 7-0 in February, while Model edged the Rebels by scores of 2-1 and

3-0 in March.

As for the Rebels, they won their first-round playoff game 4-1 at Mt. Paran Christian, setting up a clash with 8-AA's Fellowship Christian on Friday. Elsewhere in 8-AA, top-seeded East Jackson dismantled Elite Scholars Academy 11-0 and Providence Christian sank Callaway 9-0. Meanwhile, fourth-seeded Fel-

lowship Christian knocked off Landmark Christian 3-2.

As a result of 8-AA's clean sweep in round one, all four teams have cracked the latest Class AA top-10 with Union County sitting at No. 4, East Jackson 5th, Fellowship 9th and Providence 10th.

The Panthers and Model get underway at 7 p.m. Thursday.

Track: UCHS takes 15 golds at Dawson ahead of 8-AA meet

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Dawsonville - Union County wrapped up its regular season during a three-team meet at Dawson County High School on Thursday, April 18.

The Union County men collected seven gold medals to take first place overall; the ladies placed second behind eight gold medals.

Winners on the men's side included JT Neal in the 200M race at 22.46 seconds; Benton Gregory in the 400M with a time of 51.28; Zander Rotko in the 800M at 2:10.73; the 4x200 relay team at 1:30.44; the 4x400 at 3:36.50.

In field events, Braden Plott won the long jump at 19 feet, 8 inches; Tyler Grasty took home gold in the triple jump at 41-7.5.

Girls' gold medalists included Ava Lloyd in the 200M with a time of 27.34; Noel Hyatt in the 400M at 1:08.24; Lola Hunter in the 1600M and 3200M with times of 5:39.80 and 12:32.30, respectively. Katie Byers won the 300M hurdles at 54.70; the 4x100 relay team clocked in at 53.15; the 4x200 took home gold at 1:53.83; Sofia Foster placed first in the shot put with a toss of 30-11.

Other boys' top-three finishes included Cade Dockrey - second in the 100M dash (11.70) and third in the high jump (5-4); Carter Deal - second in the 110M hurdles (18.22); Jacob Tuner - third in the 110M hurdles (18.81) and third in the 300M hurdles (44.20); Nolan Thompson - second in the 300M hurdles (43.54); the 4x100 relay team placed second at 43.58; the 4x800 relay team took third



Union County freshman Nomi Nelson placed second in the 100M with a time of 13.87 and second in the triple jump with a distance of 32 feet, 4 inches. Photo/Todd Forrest

with a time of 9:53.00; Jonah Kluth - second in high jump (5-6); Daniel McPhee - third in long jump (18-9); Jaxon Totherow - third in shot put (40-6.5).

Other girls' medalists

were Nomi Nelson - second in the 100M (13.87) and second in triple jump (32-4); Clara Kazmierzak - third in the 400M (1:10.31); Hannah Kazmierzak - third in the 800M (2:37.14); Natalie Payne - third in the



Union County sophomore Ava Lloyd -- followed by junior Giovanna Salazar -- took home a gold medal in the 200M race - crossing the finish line in 27.34 seconds. Lloyd has won the 200M in each of her last three events and has won four of her last five. Photo/Todd Forrest

3200M (15:16.56); Sara Patterson - third in the 300M hurdles (57.70); the 4x400 relay team placed second at 4:33.89; the 4x800 relay team was second at 10:51; Ariel McCarter - third in high jump (4-6); Byers - second

in long jump (14-7); Leslie Rash - second in discus (90-1) and second in shot put (27.11).

Union County opened the Region 8-AA meet at 10 a.m. on Monday, April 22 at East Jackson High School. The

meet wraps up on Wednesday, April 24 with events starting at 5 p.m.

East Jackson will host the State Sectionals on Saturday, May 4 and the State Championships on May 9-11.

Baseball: Panthers wrap-up season up by dropping four of five

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The Panthers lost four of five last week to close out the season, picking up a 5-0 victory over Andrews, NC on Monday, April 15, before suffering a three-game sweep to Banks County sandwiched around a 3-2 walk-off loss at Towns County.

Panthers 5, Andrews, NC 0 - Sophomore Colten Gibson and junior Tyler Richards combined for Union County's first shutout since 2022 - coming two years to the day of James McPherson's complete-game shutout vs. Rabun County.

Freshman Cayden Miller doubled, scored and drove in one during a 2-for-4 day at the plate. Junior Hayden Hughes added a two-run, pinch-hit homer during the Panthers' three-run sixth.

Gibson got the start, allowing 3 hits and striking out four in 4 innings. Richards collected the 3-inning save, recording 8 Ks while not allowing a hit.

Union County broke a scoreless tie in the bottom of the third when Miller doubled and Gibson scored him via a Wildcats' error. Richards bumped the lead to 2-0 in the fifth when his RBI single plated freshman Bentley Rich.

Sophomore Lane Haney led off the sixth with a pinch-hit single, setting the table for Hughes' big fly. The Panthers added another run when freshman Junior Davis walked and came around on Miller's two-out base knock to center.

Rich finished 0 for 2 with a run on two walks; Richards went 1 for 2 with an RBI; senior Will Doyle doubled during a 1-for-2 day; Hughes and Haney each went 1 for 1.

Davis, Rich and Richards added a stolen base for Union County.

Panthers 2, Towns County 3 - The Indians manufactured the winning run in the bottom of the seventh courtesy of a leadoff walk, a stolen base and a one-out sacrifice fly in Hiwassee on Thursday, April 18.

Union County used four pitchers, limiting the Indians to 6 hits after the Panthers built a 2-0 lead in the first vs. Towns County senior ace Zane Floyd.

Sophomore Maddox Patton led off the game with an infield single and junior Travis Tracy was hit by a pitch. Hughes' one-out single put Union on the board and sophomore Gunnar Akins made it 2-0 with a base hit to left before the Panthers left the bases loaded.

Sophomore Eli Gwynn kept the Indians off the board for 2 2/3 before giving way to Akins, who eventually ran into trouble in the third.

A leadoff double, an error and a walk had the bases loaded before Akins fanned the next two batters. However, Matthew Chastain lined an 0-1



Junior right-hander Tyler Richards ended the 2024 season with a 7 2/3 scoreless-innings streak, allowing 2 hits and recording 11 strikeouts and a save over that span. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman outfielder / pitcher Junior Davis doubled at Towns County and went 1 for 4 vs. Banks. He finishes the year with a team-best 7 stolen bases. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Hayden Hughes finished the year swinging a hot bat - recording a hit in 7 of his final 9 games. During his hot stretch, Hughes slashed .379/400/.655 with a 1.055 OPS. He drove in 5 runs with 2 homers, 2 doubles, 4 runs. Photo/Todd Forrest

pitch into left center, tying the game at 2-2.

A double play erased Patton's leadoff single in the fifth and Hughes worked around a two-out single in the Towns County half of the frame.

Hughes doubled and stole third to open the sixth but two strikeouts and a groundout kept Union County off the board.

Patton recorded the final out of Towns' sixth thanks to senior Moses Stevens' diving stab at first base after the Indians moved two runners into scoring position against Hughes.

During the Union sev-

enth, Brown was hit by a pitch and Doyle singled to start the inning, but the Panthers failed to push across the go-ahead run.

Floyd led off the Towns County seventh with a walk then advanced to second on a fielder's choice and stole third. With one out, Connor Chastain's fly-out to center was deep enough to score Floyd.

Hughes finished 2 for 3 with a double and an RBI. Patton went 2 for 4 with a run; Akins drove in one during a 1-for-3 day; Stevens went 1 for 3; Davis finished 1 for 2; Doyle went 1 for 1; Tracy scored a run.

On the mound, Gwynn went 2 2/3 scoreless innings, allowing a hit and a walk. Akins struck out four while giving up 2 unearned runs, 2 hits and a walk over 1 2/3. Hughes recorded one punch out and allowed 3 hits in 1 2/3.

Patton allowed a walk and one earned run during an inning of work.

Panthers 1, Banks County 7 (GM 1) - Union County opened its final region series of the year on Tuesday, April 16, suffering a 7-1 loss in Homer.

Banks County got 4 runs in the first and added three more in the second off Brown.

inings in Friday's nightcap.

Akins turned in a gem on the mound, allowing one hit over 5 scoreless innings, but the Panthers' offense couldn't muster a hit after Connor Swanson's two-out double in the fifth.

Patton and Swanson were hit by a pitch in the first frame, resulting in a 2-0 edge when Haney's single cleared the bases.

A double play ended the Union threat in the third before the Panthers stranded two runners during the fourth.

The Leopards got a run off Hughes in the sixth, cutting their margin to 2-1 via a hit batter, a single and an error.

Banks County manufactured the tying run in the seventh following a leadoff double and a stolen base.

The Panthers worked a leadoff walk in the bottom half but another double play ended the threat, sending the game to extras, where Banks took advantage of two Union errors in the eighth to grab a 3-2 lead.

Swanson and Haney were plunked to open the Panthers' eighth, but a strikeout and a lineout to center had Union down to its final out.

Gwynn worked a four-pitch walk to move the winning run into scoring position, but the game ended when the Leopards' second baseman snagged senior Eli Sosensky's flare into shallow right field.

Patton and Haney each finished 1 for 3; Patton went 1 for 2; Doyle had a pair of walks. Gwynn, Sosensky and Stevens also drew a base on balls. Davis added a stolen base.

Hughes allowed 3 hits and 3 unearned runs over 3 innings.

Golf: Panthers, Lady Panthers sink Fannin County at Butternut



Freshman Hayden Price's 35 led the unbeaten Union County men to a 162-203 victory over Fannin County at Butternut Creek Golf Course last week. Huston West fired a 38, Will Henson shot 42 and Turner West had a 47. The Panthers visit Banks County's Chimney Oaks Golf Course on Thursday, April 25 ahead of next week's Region 8-AA Championship at Jennings Mill in Watkinsville. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Hope Patton's 56 (L) and sophomore Sofia Charboneau's 44 (R) were the team's top-two scores during Union County's 100-110 victory over Fannin County last week at Butternut Creek Golf Course. The Lady Panthers travel to Banks County's Chimney Oaks Golf Course on Thursday, April 25 in their final tune-up ahead of next week's Region 8-AA Championship at Watkinsville's Jennings Mill. Photo/Todd Forrest