

# Sports

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## Lady Panthers sweep Super Regionals, advance to Columbus

### Union County meets Pierce County at 1 p.m. Wednesday in Elite Eight

By Todd Forrest  
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After ending its 11-year region title drought earlier this month, Union County (20-5) followed up that feat by qualifying for the Class AA Elite Eight in back-to-back seasons for the first time in a dozen years.

The Lady Panthers took care of business with three straight home wins during last week's GHSA Class AA Super Regional - a brand new format introduced this year that models the NCAA College World Series. Top-seeded Union County took care of a scrappy Murray County squad that entered as the fourth seed before eliminating the No. 2 and No. 3 seeds, setting up a Wednesday rematch with the Lady Panthers.

"[Murray County] came to battle, I was impressed and their record doesn't show what they can do," Union County head coach Carissa Owenby said. "That's a good ball team and they came to play, so we did a good job today getting the win."

Riding a 14-game win streak into Columbus, Union County opens the double-elimination Elite Eight tournament with Pierce County (18-11) at 1 p.m. Wednesday. The tournament concludes Saturday with the crowning of a State Champion.

"I think we got the jitters out last year so we're going back this year knowing what we're going to see down there [in Columbus]," Owenby said.

**Lady Panthers 10, Murray County 8** - Union County advanced to Columbus by overcoming a 5-0 deficit to take a 10-6 advantage into the seventh inning, where the Lady Panthers halted a late rally when right fielder Jewel Massey cut down an Indians' baserunner at home plate.

"Jewel Massey did a great job for us in right field all week and was a big reason we're moving on," Owenby said.

Two first-inning errors



Senior Chloe Potts smacks her first career homerun during Union County's second victory over Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest

by Union County resulted in three unearned runs charged to junior pitcher Sierra Burnette as Murray County built a 5-0 lead in its second meeting vs. the Region 8-AA champs.

The Lady Panthers responded with four runs in the bottom half of the frame, then added two in the third to even the score at 6-6. Union pushed across a run in the fourth inning for a 7-6 lead, then appeared to blow things open with three in the sixth.

A leadoff double and an error cut the Lady Panthers' advantage to 10-7 in the Murray County seventh until a running catch by Massey and a strikeout had Union one out away from advancing to Columbus. Another double made it 10-8, but a dropped third strike to the next Indians' hitter resulted in an errant throw into right field, where Massey came up firing and ended the game via a 9-2 putout.

Sophomore Sloane Dyer finished 4 for 4 with 3 RBIs in the win. Seniors Chloe Potts and Jaycee Seabolt went out with a bang during their final

home game, each belting solo homers while going 1 for 4 with a pair of runs.

Junior Georgia Patton doubled and drove in two runs during a 2-for-4 game; senior Caroline Karnes also went 2 for 4 with a double and a steal. Junior Katie Byers finished 2 for 4 with an RBI and a run, while Burnette turned in a 2-for-4 performance. Junior Gracie Gladding walked during a 1-for-3 day; freshmen Kaylee Rader and Peyton Grisham added one run each.

Trailing 5-0 in the first, Burnette singled and reached third on an outfield error, allowing Byers to plate the courtesy runner Rader with a groundout. Following a Gladding single, an error off the bat of Seabolt scored the other courtesy runner, Grisham. Later in the inning, a Patton double and a Dyer single sliced the margin to 5-4 after one frame.

Another dropped strike-three and a Union error made it 6-4 Murray County in the third, but Potts led off the bottom half with her first career homerun and junior Brooklyn Brown tied



Senior Jaycee Seabolt goes deep with two down in the fourth inning to give Union County its first lead of the game at 7-6. Photo/Todd Forrest

the game with a sacrifice fly. A two-out bomb from Seabolt put the Lady Panthers ahead 7-6 as Burnette settled down after the rocky first.

Patton's two-out RBI single made it 8-6 in the sixth, then Dyer's two-run base knock extended the margin to 10-6.

Burnette went the distance in her third win of the tournament, allowing nine hits, four earned runs and a walk while striking out six.

After her third win in two days, Burnette admitted to battling fatigue during the final game, but she added that it would take a lot more than sore muscles to keep her from leading her team into the Elite Eight.

"I've pitched three games in two days during travel ball, but never in high school, so I was a little tired, but it's something you just have to work through this time of year," she said. "Other than the line drive that caught a piece of my pinky, I felt good and could have kept going if we needed to play another game."

**Lady Panthers 12, Cal-**

**laway 2 (5 innings)** - A three-run homer by Burnette ended the game in the fifth inning to cap off Union County's second win of the day on Tuesday, Oct. 18.

A four-run second allowed the Lady Panthers to mount a 5-0 lead before the Cavaliers answered with two in the third. Union County responded with three in the fourth and four in the fifth to take the 12-2 victory.

Burnette drove in three runs, tripled and homered during a 2-for-4 game. Byers had a triple, 2 RBIs and a pair of runs while going 1 for 2; Gladding finished 1 for 2 with a double, a walk and 2 RBIs.

Patton laced two doubles and scored twice during a 2-for-3 game. Karnes went 1 for 3 with a pair of runs and an RBI. Rader added two runs, Brown scored once and Potts drew a walk.

Burnette fanned seven over five innings, giving up two unearned runs and six hits. She also helped herself to some early run support, leading off the game with a triple, allowing

her courtesy runner, Rader, to score on Byers' sacrifice fly.

Patton doubled and scored in the second, and a Byers triple pushed the lead to 4-0 before she came around to make it 5-0 after two innings.

Two Union errors led to a pair of Callaway runs in the third, but they returned the favor when three errors helped pave the way for the Lady Panthers' three-run fourth.

Leading 6-2 after the Cavaliers kicked the ball around early in the inning, Gladding raked a two-run, two-out double to open up an 8-2 margin. The fifth and final frame saw Patton double and Karnes bring her home with a two-out single. Brown reached on an error, keeping the inning alive for Burnette, who belted a three-run shot to left field.

**Lady Panthers 6, Murray County 5** - Union County survived an upset bid from fourth-seeded Murray County in Tuesday's opener of last week's GHSA Class AA Super Regional.

Leading 4-0 in the second, the Lady Panthers took their foot off the gas, allowing Murray to race ahead 5-4 in the fifth. Patton opened the Union fifth with a base hit and moved to second on Dyer's bunt. With one away, Karnes lined an opposite-field single that evened the score at 5-5.

Burnette escaped a sixth-inning jam, working around a leadoff walk and a one-out error. With two away in the bottom half, Gladding drew a two-out walk and courtesy runner Lily Helton moved to second on a passed ball. After Seabolt reached to put runners at the corners, the Murray County shortstop booted a Potts grounder to score Helton for a 6-5 lead.

Union County escaped with the win thanks to three ground ball outs induced by Burnette in the seventh.

Byers and Patton each finished 2 for 4; Gladding went 2 for 2 with a double and a pair of walks. Karnes scored once and drove in a run during a

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## Volleyball: Mt. Paran Christian ends Union County's season in Sweet 16

### Union County rallies from 2-0 deficit to stun Murray County in opening round

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The Union County Panthers mounted a heroic comeback to upset second-seeded Murray County on Wednesday, Oct. 26 in Chatsworth.

Trailing 2-0 with their season on the line, Union County volleyball and the Class of 2023 dug deep to pull out one more classic postseason performance.

The third-seeded Panthers opened the Class AA State Tournament last Wednesday at Region 6-AA runner-up Murray County, and immediately dropped the first two sets, 25-22 and 25-17.

Union County took set three 25-19 before evening the match with a 25-22 win in the fourth set. During the fifth and final set, the Panthers edged the Indians 15-12 to advance to the program's fourth-straight Sweet 16.

Unfortunately, Union County ran into a buzzsaw in round two when they traveled to Kennesaw to face State title



The Class of 2023, Haleigh Helcher, Kaylee Ashcraft, Mattie Brookshire, Sofia Swartz, Saylor Noe and Presley Berry, depart UCHS with nine State playoff victories. Photo/Todd Forrest

favorites Mt. Paran Christian. The Eagles entered Saturday's Sweet-16 matchup with a 43-6 record, following

a 3-0 shellacking of Drew Charter. In the win, Mt. Paran outscored Drew 75-12 in the three sets.

During their win over Union County, the Eagles took the opener 25-10. The final two sets also went to the home team

by scores of 25-8 and 25-7.

The Union County seniors finish their storied careers with a 9-4 record in the state

playoffs with three of those defeats coming by way of Atlanta-area private schools.

# Football: Panthers edge East Jackson, remain in 8-AA title hunt

By Todd Forrest  
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Following its record-breaking performance in a shootout win over Providence, the Union County offense overcame an off-night vs. East Jackson with the help of a fourth-quarter touchdown pass and two late defensive stops.

With two weeks remaining in the regular season and a home playoff game on the line Friday at Athens Academy, the Panthers sit at 7-1 overall and 3-0 in Region 8-AA on the heels of its dramatic 21-17 win over East Jackson.

For the second time this year, the Panthers erased a halftime deficit to secure the victory when Ethan McBride pulled down a Cayden Tanner touchdown pass with 5:21 remaining.

However, that wasn't how Union County head coach Michael Perry drew up the game-winning score.

"Ethan actually missed a signal and ran the wrong route," Perry said. "But fortunately for us, sometimes it's better to be lucky than good."

With McBride lined up as the outside receiver on second-and-goal at the six, the East Jackson press coverage bumped the Panthers' junior toward the sideline, where he stopped to look for the football five yards beyond the goal line. Meanwhile, East Jackson allowed Union's inside receiver, Jensen Goble, a free release to the outside, and he attempted to outrun his defender toward the back corner of the endzone. As everything played out to his left, Tanner took the shotgun snap and lofted a pass in the direction of his inside slot receiver. But standing between the two was McBride, who lept into the air and high-pointed the throw as Goble slipped behind this teammate, narrowly avoiding a collision.

Leading 21-17 with 5:21 remaining, the Panthers put their fate in the hands of a defense that allowed a season-high 49 points in the previous outing and surrendered a go-ahead touchdown two minutes earlier. This time, the Purple Swarm delivered a critical three-and-out, handing the ball back to Tanner with 4:00 on the clock.

The penalty turned second-and-4 into second-and-19, allowing the Union defensive line to pin its ears back with a minute to play. On the ensuing snap, junior lineman Lane Lance applied pressure up the middle, stripping the Eagles quarterback at the 5-yard line, where junior David Heredia sealed the victory by jumping on the fumble with 53 seconds left.

"We were dealing with a huge offensive line, but Lane Lance played excellent," Perry said. "That strip sack he had at the end of the game was amazing and I just can't say enough about that kid."

After the game, Walker discussed what the Panthers' defense learned about itself over the last two weeks.

"We learned that we have stay confident and just do our job," he said. "We know how to play football and once we remembered that when everyone does their job, we're capable of stopping just about anything that anyone throws at us."

"We were upset with our performance last week, so we knew we had to do a better job tonight. We were extra-focused in practice all week, and I'm extremely happy with how we responded."

Offensively, Tanner recovered from an inconsistent first half to top 300 yards for the second-straight week. The junior finished 25 for 35 with 308 yards, three scores and no picks. He added 17 yards rushing on nine carries.



Elijah Helton (28) and Lance Lance (66) meet the Eagles' running back at the line to stuff East Jackson on fourth and inches. Photo/Todd Forrest



Jensen Goble notched career highs in catches (10) and receiving yards (146). He matched his career-best with two TD catches. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union County picked up a timely first down when Tanner hit junior Tyler Grasty for 10 yards on second-and-9, melting over 2 1/2 minutes off the clock before handing possession back to the Eagles. Senior Wilson Walker booted a 41-yard punt that rolled dead at the 24-yard line with 1:20 remaining.

Following his squad's adventures in the punting game vs. Providence, Coach Perry and his staff spent the week cleaning up that phase of special teams.

"Punt protection was much better this week and it's something we worked on extensively during practice," he said. "We worked on it everyday so I'm really proud of those guys."

East Jackson started the series by connecting on a 6-yard pass over the middle to keep the clock running. But after the play, the Eagles committed a monumental unsportsmanlike conduct penalty when the frustrated receiver slung the ball out of bounds instead of handing it to the nearby official.

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smallest guy on the field put the entire offense on his back one more time.

Goble secured Tanner's pass inside the 10 with a defender draped on his back, and after shaking that initial tackler, Goble lowered his shoulder on an Eagles' safety at the 3-yard line and powered his way into the endzone.

"Jensen Goble is a huge part of our offense, and thank goodness for him because he kept coming up with big catches for us all game and I'm really proud of him," Perry said. "That little sucker is tough. He gets nailed every single game, and I'm thinking, 'uh oh, he's probably out for the year' but he just pops right back up."

With Union back in front 14-10 with 43 seconds left in the third, the defense forced a three-and-out, but East Jackson countered with a three-and-out of its own, setting up a 62-yard scoring drive to mount a 17-14 advantage with 7:19 remaining.

After losing the lead via an 11-yard Eagles' touchdown pass, Union County took over at the 20 and Tanner led the team on a seven-play, 80-yard drive to go on top for good.

Schucknecht opened the series by gashing the defense for 38 yards up the gut. Two plays later, he picked up 14 yards on second-and-five, then a screen to Goble went for 16, setting up McBride's game-winner.

No defensive stats are available for the East Jackson or Providence games.

At Banks County on Oct. 7, Walker led the way with 14 tackles, senior Gage Barnes had 11 and senior Elijah Helton recorded 10 stops. Senior Sam Page finished with seven tackles, while juniors Heredia and Kooper Ashcraft had six each. Lance added a team-high two tackles for loss; Ashcraft and Barnes chipped in one sack apiece.

**Up next:** Union faces its toughest test of the season when they travel to Athens Academy on Friday. With a win, Union County can secure home field advantage in the first round of State. However, according to Perry, the Spartans feature a defense unlike anything his team has seen since last year's late-season meetings with Rabun County and Lovett.

## XC: Union County aims for region 8-AA title Tuesday at Athens Academy

By Todd Forrest  
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The cross country post-season opens this week when Union County visits Athens Academy at 4:45 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon at the Region 8-AA Championships.

Tuesday will mark the program's first race at the Athens Academy course under head coach Paige Dyer.

Entering the region meet, the Union County ladies are led by freshman Lola Hunter, who won the first two races of her high school career.

Other UCHS girls that could make an impact this week are Ellie Adams, Lydia Wagner, Ashley Shipes, Hannah Kazmierzak, Noel Hyatt and Natalie Payne.

The Union County men are led by juniors Benton Gregory and Wes Seiler. Other runners to keep an eye on are Zander Rotko, Anderson Clouse, Ty Hogsted, Alec Wilder and Ethan Rouse.

Qualifiers from region will advance to the State Championships in Carrollton on Saturday Nov. 5.

The AA boys get underway at 8 a.m. with the girls to follow at 8:45 a.m.



Lola Hunter can become Union's first freshman girl to win a region title since two-time State Champ Emma Garrison in 2012. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Softball... continued from 2B

2-for-2 day. Potts doubled and knocked in a run while finishing 1 for 4. Burnette went 1 for 3 with a walk and Seabolt's day ended 1 for 4 with a run. Brown and Helton scored one run for Union County. Byers and Karnes added one stolen base apiece.

Burnette surrendered eight hits and one earned run over seven frames. She fanned four and walked one during her 112-pitch opener.

**Up next:** Union faces Pierce County at 1 p.m. Wednesday in the first round of the Class AA State Championship tournament in Columbus.

Located in Blackshear, the Bears finished fourth in Region 3-AA's regular season with a 6-9 record before placing third in the region tourney. Pierce secured a spot in Columbus with three-straight Super Regional wins - two over second-seeded and sixth-ranked Dodge County and one vs. Region 4-AA Champion Thomson.

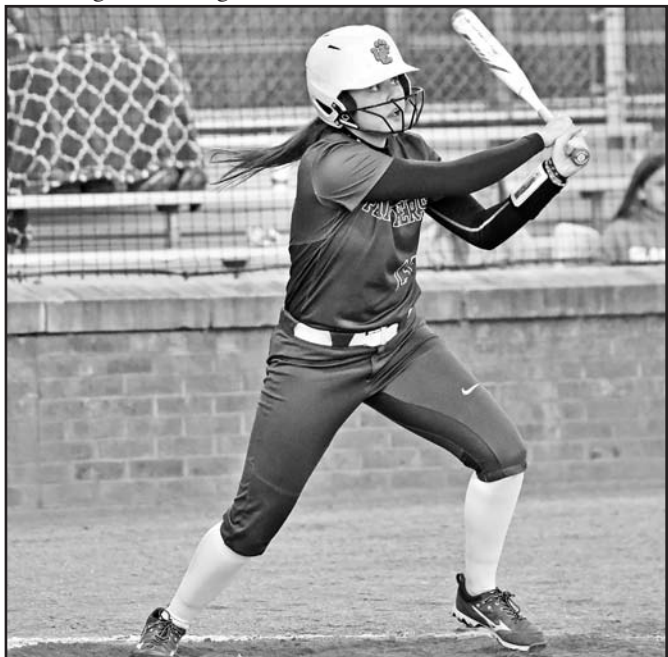
Win or lose in game one, Union County will face either fifth-ranked Mt. Paran Christian (28-5) or third-ranked ACE Charter (31-2) on Thursday. The other side of the AA brackets feature eighth-ranked Rockmart (24-3) vs. No. 2 Appling County (24-2) and No. 1 Jeff Davis (29-1) vs. No. 7 ELCA (24-7).

"Last year in Columbus, we struggled early and then we fell apart as a team," said Burnette, when asked what the Lady Panthers learned from their two losses in Columbus last fall. "But this year, I feel like our bond is much stronger and I think that give us a better chance to overcome adversity and advance further."

The Lady Panthers have already faced some adversity earlier this season. On Sept. 6, Union County sat at 6-5 overall following three-straight losses.

Two days later, they opened Region 8-AA play with a trip to defending region champion Banks County. The Lady Panthers left Homer with a 7-4 victory, sparking the current 14-game winning streak.

"We've just been hitting the ball," Owenby said regarding that early-September turnaround. "Sierra has been doing a great job [pitching] and we're all just doing our jobs. Once we started working together, everything just came together."



Sophomore infielder Sloane Dyer had 3 RBIs during a 4-for-4 day in Union's clincher over Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Local Racing report: Tri-County

By Blake Lynch  
Racing Reporter  
North Georgia News

**Brasstown, NC** - Tri-County Racetrack hosted its final scheduled race of the season - The Tar Heel 53, presented by Jacky Jones Automotive Group and track promoter Ray Cook.

The payoff for the Super Late Model race was \$ 20,022 -- a track record. The pit started filling up on Wednesday night with some drivers camping at the track. FloRacing Night FK Rod was present to televise the race.

**Street Stock:** The first race of the night was street stock and No. 95 Alex Vance took home the win, breaking Charles Devine's winning streak. No. 14 Devine was second. No. 01 Jacob Lynch was third. No. 21 Troy Turner was fourth. No. 16 Jim Weller came in fifth.

**Open Wheel:** No. 12c Syc Strickland brought home the win. No. 108 Chuck Southard was second. No. 95c Stevie Clark was third. No. 37 Michael Barnett placed fourth. No. 55 Brad Sosbee was fifth.

**Crate B:** No. 149 Seth Speed was the winner. No. 3L Mark Ledford was second. No. 7 Keith Rollins was third. No. 3 Floyd Self as fourth. No. 30 Josh Wooten was fifth.

**602:** No. 117 Dylan Beaver took home the win. No. 03 Dante Curtis was second. No. 17 Brandon Stroud was third. No. 100 Copper Twiggs was fourth. No. 27 Joe Denby was fifth.

**Super Lates Models:** This race brought out names like Johnathan Davenport and Brandon Overton to the track, but the winner of the night was No. 17m Dale McDowel. No. 76 Overton was second. No. 44 Chris Mad-

den was third. No. 42K Clay Knight was fourth. No. Garrett Albertsons was fifth. No. 49 Davenport didn't win but did have the fastest qualifying time of the night.

**FWD:** No. 32 Jim Exum took home the win. No. 59 Matt Cordin was second. No. F3 John Fulford was third. No. 6A Austin Kinsey was fourth. No. J3 Josh Deese was fifth.

The racing season has ended once again. Cook would like to thank everyone that supported the track, including the fans and the drivers.

You may support your local drivers by becoming a business sponsor. The drivers work many hours in and out of season to put on the weekly show. Coming from a family that can have up to six cars at the track, there is always something to do. See y'all next year.

