

Sports

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XC: Union County ladies fifth at State, Hunter places eighth

By Todd Forrest
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Carrollton - Freshman Lola Hunter finished eighth and junior Ellie Adams came in 18th to lead the Union County ladies to a top-five performance at Saturday's Class AA State Championships.

With the fifth-place finish, the Panthers (161 points) end 2022 as Class AA's top public school, holding off sixth-place Fannin County (193) and seventh-place Jeff Davis (218).

Fellow Region 8-AA squads Athens Academy (62) and Fellowship (152) Christian ended the day second and fourth, respectively. Savannah Arts Academy took home the state title with 41 points; Landmark Christian was third at 97 points.

Hunter crossed the finish line at 20 minutes, 58 seconds -- four seconds back of Vidalia's seventh-place sophomore Georgia Merideth. Athens Academy sophomore Adelaide Ellis came in ninth at 21:07, giving the Spartans three runners in the top 10, alongside third-place sophomore Maya Davis (19:55) and fourth-place senior Sarah Harrison (20:10).

Adams turned in a 22:41, edging Laney sophomore Raina Burns by 1.2 seconds. Fannin County sophomore Lindsey Holloway rounded out the top 10 with a time of 21:08.

Union County sophomore Lydia Wagner came in 35th place with a time of 23:29



Union County freshman Lola Hunter reached the medal stand with her eighth place finish at Saturday's Class AA State Championships in Carrollton.

-- three seconds better than ACE Charter freshman Eliza Hall. Other Panthers included sophomore Hannah Kazmierzak in 50th at 24:13, junior Natalie Payne in 52nd at 24:19 and sophomore Noel Hyatt in 61st at 24:43. Senior Ashley Shipes placed 101st with a time of 27:10.

Fellowship Christian senior Leah Noble came in 16th at 22:24 as the Paladins placed five runners inside the top 40. East Jackson junior Vada Hanna ended her day in 20th

with a time of 22:46 -- leading the Eagles to a ninth-place overall finish.

Senior Margaret Wade of Savannah Arts took home the individual title, crossing the line at 19:27 and was one of four seniors to finish among the top six.

Hunter ended as the race's top freshman, ahead of 25th-place freshman Alyssa Pennington (22:57) of Putnam County, who came in 19th with a squad of five 9th graders.

The Union County men



Union County junior Benton Gregory tries to break free from a pack of runners during Saturday's State Championship race.

finished 12th behind a 19th-place performance by junior Benton Gregory (18:37). Fellow 11th graders Zander Rotko (19:27) and Wes Seiler (19:28) came in 40th and 42nd, respectively.

The Panthers' day ended 2 points back of 11th-place Appling County and seven better than 13th-place Cook.

Athens Academy took home the Class AA State title with a second-place finish by senior Jackson Scruggs (17:22) and a total of three runners in-

side the top 10. Banks County individual performer, junior Pepper Davis (17:28) came in third and East Jackson sophomore Hayden Hodges (17:31) placed fourth.

Other Union County runners included 117th-place sophomore Alec Wilder at 21:25.28 and freshman Ty Hogged in 118th with a time of 21:25.55. Junior Anderson Clouse came in 139th at 21:48 and senior Ethan Rouse was 144th with a time of 21:56.

Senior Simon Schabert

of Model won the individual title, fending off Scruggs by 6 seconds. Providence Christian placed three runners in the top 25 to finish sixth overall, while East Jackson came in eighth with three individuals among the top 50.

Fannin County placed fourth overall with four runners in the top 40. Like Union County, the Rebels didn't feature a senior among their top five.

Other local teams at State included the Towns County boys in 10th, while individual runner Kya Smith placed seventh in the Class A (Div. 2) girls' race.

In Class A - Division 1, the Rabun girls came in ninth and Tallulah Falls was 12th. On the boys' side, Rabun County placed 16th and Tallulah came in 17th.

The Class AAA boys saw Pickens, Lumpkin County and Dawson County take home fourth, fifth and sixth, respectively. White County senior Nealeigh Broadwell won the individual girls' state title with a time 20:35, edging Pickens junior Becka Wise by seven seconds.

Dawson County, Pickens and White County finished fifth, sixth and seventh, respectively, in the team scores.

North Hall came in ninth and Chestate was 13th in the Class 4A boys' race. Meanwhile, the North Hall girls came in second and the Chestate ladies were 10th. The Jefferson boys placed seventh and the girls finished 14th in Class 5A.

Swimming: Nushtayev breaks two UCMS school records at Habersham

UCHS boys place sixth, girls finish seventh at Saturday's Rockin' Raider Swim Meet



The Union County High School 2022-23 swim team.



The Union County Middle School 2022-23 swim team. Andrew Nushtayev set school records in the 50 backstroke and 50 butterfly on Saturday.

UCHS TOP 10 FINISHES

Rockin' Raider Swim Meet

200 Medley Relay	200 Freestyle
• Girls A Relay: 5th	• Eli Gwynn: 6th
• Girls B Relay: 10th	• Courtney Foster: 5th
200 IM	50 Freestyle
• Reese Jones: 7th	• Nicholas Nushtayev: 3rd
100 Freestyle	200 Freestyle Relay
• Nicholas Nushtayev: 3rd	• Boys Relay: 8th
100 Backstroke	• Girls A Relay: 7th
• Eli Gwynn: 8th	50 Freestyle
100 Freestyle	• Lily Helton: 4th
• Reese Jones: 6th	• Courtney Foster: 7th
• Grace Cook: 7th	• Grace Cook: 8th
• Olivia Loyd: 8th	500 Freestyle
Overall	• Lily Helton: 4th
• Boys: 6th	
• Girls: 7th	

UCMS TOP 10 FINISHES

Rockin' Raider Swim Meet

200 Medley Relay	50 Backstroke
• Girls Relay: 4th	• Andrew Nushtayev: 1st
50 Butterfly	• John Tippens: 9th
• Andrew Nushtayev: 3rd	100 IM
100 Freestyle	• Clara Kazmierzak: 5th
• Wyatt Chandler: 6th	• Kimberly Simpson: 9th
• Ian Lander: 10th	50 Freestyle
100 Freestyle	• Ava Wheeler: 9th
• Clara Kazmierzak: 3rd	50 Backstroke
200 Freestyle Relay	• Isabel Hoover: 7th
• Girls Relay: 4th	Overall
	• Boys: 6th
	• Girls: 4th

Football: Panthers finish third in 8-AA, visit Model on Friday

By Todd Forrest
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Third-seeded Union County (7-3, 3-2) will travel to second-seeded Model on Friday during the first round of the Class AA State Tournament following the Panthers' 35-14 home loss to Fellowship Christian in Thursday's regular-season finale.

Despite entering as a heavy underdog vs. the Paladins, Union County remained within striking distance into the fourth quarter, trailing 28-14 following Cayden Tanner's second touchdown pass.

"[Fellowship] is a very good team and have a lot of guys that will play college football," Union County head coach Micheal Perry said. "I was extremely proud with how our guys competed and never gave up. Cayden Tanner put it all on the line. I know he's banged up, but he never gave up and competed until the very end."

Fellowship eventually put the game out of reach at 35-14 with 8:47 to play, moving 65 yards on seven plays and capping the drive with a 27-yard touchdown run.

After the two squads traded turnovers to begin the game, Fellowship converted a third-and-3 by going 18 yards for the score at the 4:23 mark of the first.

The Paladins made it 14-0 later in the quarter after a penalty negated a muffed punt and returned possession to the visitors at midfield. Two plays later, Fellowship punched it in from the 1-yard line with 2:06 left in the opening frame.

With 3:13 remaining in the half, Fellowship senior quarterback and University of Houston commit Caleb McMickle



Griff Young jukes a Fellowship Christian defensive back. The senior receiver caught 12 passes for 110 yards vs. the Paladins. Photo/Todd Forrest

converted a third-and-goal via a 13-yard scoring strike, extending the margin to 21-0.

The Panthers answered before the break, taking advantage of a kickoff out of bounds and driving 65 yards on eight plays, converting two fourth downs along the way.

Starting at the 35, sophomore Connor Schuknecht rumbled for 16 yards. Four plays later, Union moved the chains with a fourth-and-2 completion over the middle to junior Tyler Grasty for 25 yards. Later, the Panthers faced fourth and inches from the 20 when Fellowship was flagged for pass interference. On the very next play, Tanner found senior receiver Griff Young in the endzone with 22 seconds left.

The second half got underway with a Fellowship fumble and a Union County punt, but the Paladins' second drive featured an 88-yard run on the very first play. Trailing 28-7 near the midway point of the third, the Panthers punted once again, but senior Wilson Walker's kick pinned Fellowship at its 3-yard line.

The Union defense forced a three-and-out and the offense took over with excellent field position at the Paladins' 36 with 2:02 left in the third. Schuknecht moved the chains with a pair of first-down runs on third-and-short, setting up first-and-goal from the 8-yard line. On the next play, Tanner hit Jensen Goble over the middle and the junior maintained pos-



Junior Jensen Goble (12) hangs on for the TD catch following a vicious hit from senior middle linebacker Kyle Elphick (11). Photo/Todd Forrest

session despite taking a shot from a Fellowship linebacker in the back of the endzone.

"[Goble] takes hits like that every game and each time you think, 'well that's it for him' but he gets right back up each time," Perry said. "He's just a great high school football player."

The fourth quarter opened with Union County kicking off to the Paladins in a 28-14 contest.

Tanner ended the day 29 of 46 with 280 yards, two touchdowns and one interception. Young hauled in a career-high 12 grabs for 110 yards and a score. Goble had nine catches for 105 yards and a touchdown.

Schuknecht rushed 15

round one, while North Murray visits Athens Academy.

Region 8-AA's No. 4 seed East Jackson will travel to 7-AA Region champ Rockmart on Friday.

"Model has a really good running back that also plays linebacker," Perry said. "Their nose guard plays center and some of the secondary guys are on offense, so they have a lot of guys that play both ways. Hopefully, we can use that to our advantage and we can hurt them with tempo."

According to Perry, Model features a 3-4 base defense featuring a pair of solid defensive ends. One of them is really big and is drawing a lot of interest from colleges because of his size, but [Model] definitely won't be anything like what we've faced the last two weeks."

When asked about Model's 24-0 victory over Fannin, Perry claims that if they played a rematch right now, the score would be much closer.

"I think Fannin had some key injuries during that game, so if they played again, I believe it would be a much different outcome."

Model owns a 56-13 season-finale victory at Gordon Central, who lost 10-6 at Armuchee on Aug. 19. The Panthers routed Armuchee 42-10 in Rome on Sept. 9.

Union County and Model will kickoff Friday at 7:30 p.m. Model High School is located at 3252 Calhoun Hwy NE, Rome, GA 30161.

The two squads last met during the 2014 first round when Model scored the final 22 points in the win. The Joe Mancuso-led Panthers held a 29-28 fourth-quarter advantage in Blairsville but eventually fell 50-29.

UC basketball hosts Hoopfest, scrimmage Tuesday at East Hall

By Todd Forrest
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Both Union County basketball teams will take the floor Tuesday, Nov. 8, when they travel to East Hall for a pre-season scrimmage contest at 6 p.m.

The Lady Panthers are under the direction of first-year coach Brad Cochran and return three starters from last year's Sweet 16 squad. Senior Corinne Hill and junior Lara Turner are back after starting the previous two seasons. Hill and Turner are joined by sophomore guard Ariel McCarter, who became a fixture in the Lady Panthers' starting five last December.

Additionally, Union County added sophomore post Katelyn Brown, who appeared in 27 games as a freshman for Class 7A Woodstock High School during the Wolverines' 19-win campaign.

Corey Garrett enters his fourth season as the Union County men's coach after leading the Panthers to a post-season berth each of the previous three seasons. In 2021-22, Union County advanced to the 8-AA Region Championship game for the first time in 21 years and hosted a State play-off game.

The Panthers feature a

pair of returning starters in sophomores Jude Ellis and Houston Henry. Senior post Eli Underwood also returns after two seasons as a part-time starter in the Union County frontcourt.

The regular season begins Friday, Nov. 18 vs. North Hall. However, the season opener could be rescheduled if Union County football advances to the second round of State.

The Panthers will host rival Towns County on Tuesday, Nov. 22.

On Friday, Nov. 4, Union County high school and middle school basketball hosted the first annual Panthers Hoopfest. The event featured player introductions, cheer presentations, a skills competition and a 3-point shootout.



Junior Lara Turner won the girls' Skills Challenge. Photo/Todd Forrest

Mountain High Hiking weekly schedule

Mountain High Hikers offer three hikes each week: Tuesdays, a long hike from 8 to 14 miles; a short hike from 5 to 8 miles; and a Thursday leisure hike from 3 to 5 miles. We also do trail maintenance on Thursday and some outside events. Check us out on our website: mountainhighhikers.org. NT(Nov9)Z2CA

Union County Recreation Department Monthly Hikes for Adults

Introducing a new program at the Union County Recreation Department! Dustin Rogers along with Mickey and Patrick will be guiding monthly hikes for adults 18 and up. The first one is scheduled for Wednesday, November 9th to see the waterfalls of Blood Mountain! The hike will be moderate to difficult. You will meet at the Union County Sports Center at 9 AM to carpool to the different locations. Please bring a sack lunch, water, and snack. Please register at the Union County Sports Center by November 7th. Registration fee is \$5. Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.

NASCAR 2022

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Logano Gets Second Cup Series Championship

All the accolades in Sunday's NASCAR Cup Series race went to Joey Logano. He not only dominated the race, leading 187 laps of the 312 lap race, but his victory allowed him to claim his second Cup Series title.

"We did it! We're champions again, yes!" said Logano. "Oh, my God, I'm so excited. Thank you to everybody, my team. You guys are amazing. Gave me a good race car, good pit stop there at the end, got us up in front. Boy, that was just intense there at the end."

"It's all about championships. That's what it's all about, and we worked so hard the last couple weeks trying to put ourselves in position. And everything that happened in 2020, I knew we just wanted to have a solid run and do this today."

Ryan Blaney, who was not a contender in the final race for this year's championship was runner-up.

Ross Chastain, who was one of the four drivers in contention for the championship finished third in the race, and second in points.

"I gave it everything I had there at the end," said Chastain. "But what a ride it's been. It's pretty wild to think we fought for the championship today."

"Wish we could have won, but it's so good to realize what we have accomplished. I feel blessed and fortunate."

Chase Briscoe was fourth, followed by Kevin Harvick, William Byron, Kyle Busch, Denny Hamlin, Kyle Larson, and Christopher Bell.

Bell wound up third in the final standings.

"Yeah, it's just tough," said Bell. "It's unbelievable how much your pace is better just getting — you take the same cars that are running 10th, 15th and put them in the front, and their pace is always going to be better."

"There were a couple things that we definitely could have done different today, but ultimately the 22 was lights out all weekend, winning the pole and being super strong in practice. We were just kind of playing catch-up, the rest of us were playing catch-up to him. The best car won the championship for sure."

Chase Elliott, the 2020 Cup Series champion and 2022 Regular Season champion, saw his championship hopes end following a spin during a restart. He ended the season in fourth-place.



Logano Gets Second Cup Series Championship

"Yeah, I'm not sure," he said. "I'm not sure. Looking forward to the off-season, and really proud of our team for the fight that we put in today. I felt like we just kind of peaked right there before we crashed, and I felt like we got our car driving pretty good, we just had our best pit stop of the day, so that was all really solid. And heck, we were right there next to the 22."

"I thought we had a shot at it all the way up until we didn't, and that's unfortunately the way it goes sometimes."

GIBBS WINS XFINITY RACE AND CHAMPIONSHIP

Ty Gibbs held off Noah Gragson in the final laps of Saturday's Xfinity Series race to win the NASCAR Xfinity Series championship.

Gibbs, Gragson and Justin Allgaier swapped the lead much of the race, but Gibbs had the fastest car in the closing laps. Gragson made slight gains over the final 10 laps but couldn't challenge Gibbs for the lead.

"Definitely have made some mistakes in the past and last weekend, but the best thing for me is to move on. And that's what I did today in my race, and we won," said Gibbs.

"Just moving on and learning from my mistakes. I can't go back and change the past; and if I could, I would. But that's the — we can't do that, and the best thing for me is to learn from it."

Gibbs was the wild card in the finale four after ruffling a few fenders in his second Xfinity season. Gibbs got in a fistfight with Sam Mayer after one Xfinity race and NASCAR fined him \$75,000 for a Cup Series pit road incident that nearly sent Ty Dillon's car spinning into other team crewmembers.

Gibbs took his aggressiveness to a new level last week by taking Brandon Jones out of the championship round just to win a race.

the roof, put his hands on his hips and look downward in disappointment.

After a valiant battle — all 200 laps of the race at Phoenix Raceway — he finished runner-up to season-long rival Ty Gibbs — a mere .397-seconds away from the title capping a career-defining season of triumph and statistical career highlights.

It hurt. But Gragson remained buoyed by his career-best effort in NASCAR's spotlight.

"Execution on pit stops, we just needed to be better, but still proud of everyone's efforts," Gragson said.

Allgaier was third, followed by Landon Cassill, AJ Allmendinger, Sheldon Creed, Riley Herbst, Daniel Hemric, Austin Hill, and Sammy Smith.

Final top 10 Xfinity Series drivers: 1. Gibbs, 2. Gragson, 3. Allgaier, 4. Josh Berry, 5. Allmendinger, 6. Hill, 7. Mayer, 8. B. Jones, 9. Hemric, 10. Herbst.

NOTE: On Saturday night, hours after Ty Gibbs took home the Xfinity Series trophy, his father, Coy Gibbs passed away in his sleep.

ZANE SMITH TAKES TRUCK TITLE

After two frustrating runner-up finishes in the Truck Series, Zane Smith finally won his first title in a two-lap overtime shootout.

Holding off defending champion Ben Rhodes by .236 seconds at the end of a wild final two laps of Friday night's race, Smith put it succinctly after a celebratory burnout at Phoenix Raceway.

"The third time's the charm," exulted an emotional Smith, who said he was crying throughout the final lap after wresting the lead from Rhodes one circuit earlier.

The victory was Smith's fourth of the season, and it was a clean sweep. Smith earned the pole position in Friday's time trials and won both stages before claiming the victory and the series title.

championship and compete in selected NASCAR Cup Series races, starting with the Daytona 500.

Ben Rhodes was second, followed by Chandler Smith, John Nemechek, Stewart Friesen, Grant Enfinger, Corey Heim, Tanner Gray, Kayden Honeycutt, and Carson Hocevar.

Final top 10 Truck Series drivers: 1. Zane Smith, 2. Rhodes, 3. C. Smith, 4. Majeski, 5. Nemechek, 6. Friesen, 7. Enfinger, 8. Eckes, 9. Crafton, 10. Hocevar.

JOHNSON RETURNS TO NASCAR AS OWNER/DRIVER

Jimmie Johnson, the seven-time NASCAR Cup Series champion has entered an ownership agreement with Maury Gallagher and Chairman Richard Petty at Richard Petty Motorsports.

The team currently fields the No. 43 Chevrolet of Eric Jones and the No. 42 Chevrolet of Ty Dillon, who will be replaced by Noah Gragson for the 2023 season.

The team will enter a third car in a handful of events for Johnson himself, including the season-opening Daytona 500. It will be his 20th appearance in NASCAR's biggest race, if he makes the show.

Johnson, a winner of 83 NCS races and two Daytona 500s, hasn't started a Cup race since the 2020 season finale at Phoenix, where he finished fifth.

Racing Joke: A high ranking NASCAR official who was visiting a mental institution made a telephone call, but was having difficulties getting his number. Finally, in exasperation, he shouted to the operator, "Look here, girl, do you know who I am?"

"No," she replied calmly, "but I know where you are."

Racing Trivia Question: How many Cup Series titles did Rusty Wallace win?

Last Week's Question: Which Cup Series driver rescued a fellow driver from a burning car in 1975, and went on to be presented the Carnegie Medal for bravery? Answer: During practice for the 1963 Daytona 500, Tiny Lund rescued fellow driver Marvin Panch from his burning race car. Panch asked Lund to replace him in the Wood Brothers-owned Ford. Lund agreed and went on to win the race. Lund was awarded the Carnegie Medal for Heroism for saving Panch. Lund was named one of NASCAR's 50 Greatest Drivers.

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The Blue Ridge Mountain Jeepers meet on the 2nd Friday every month. We will meet temporarily at Mimm's Distillery at 10 am, due to the permanent closing of the Blairsville Skillet Cafe.

Weather permitting, we ride once or twice a week on various kinds of rides: street rides, forestry roads, and more challenging rides such as Beasley Knob. We invite all Jeep enthusiasts to join us. Check us out at www.blueridgemountain-jeepers.com or attend a meeting. We would love to meet you!



Mountain! The hike will be moderate to difficult. You will meet at the Union County Sports Center at 9 AM to carpool to the different locations. Please bring a sack lunch, water, and snack. Please register at the Union County Sports Center by November 7th. Registration fee is \$5. Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions.