

Sports

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Garrett ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work

New coaching staff looking to bring a fresh set of 'standards' to Lady Panthers basketball

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For the first time since the 2011-12 season, the Union County Lady Panthers will be under the guidance of a new head coach.

Former Union County boys assistant coach Corey Garrett became one of the youngest head coaches in the history of the girls basketball program at UCHS when he was handed the reigns earlier this spring.

Garrett, a 2007 Union County graduate replaces David Tucker, who arrived in Blairsville following the 2009-2010 season when he replaced outgoing boys basketball head coach Tim Hunter – a position Tucker held for three seasons.

Tucker replaced Jim Hughes as the girls coach in 2011-12 and coached both the boys and girls teams for two seasons. In 2013 Casey Jones was named head coach of the boys squad and Tucker remained the girls coach.

When Tucker's position opened in April, Garrett knew almost immediately that he would be tossing his hat into the ring. Although, after being a boys assistant this past season and coaching middle school boys basketball for two years prior, he assumed the next step up would be as a boys coach.

"I pretty much knew right away that I would (apply for the girls job)," Garrett said. "It's always been a goal of mine to become a head coach in some capacity at a basketball program, but I did think that (coaching boys) would be more likely due to the path that I was on."

Garrett learned the position was all his upon returning from spring break, so he immediately met with the returning team members the same day he got the gig.

"They all know me, I've coached just about all of them at some level so (getting to know them) wasn't a big deal," he said. "I just wanted to let them know that I would be the new



Corey Garrett (center) as an assistant boys coach during the Region 7-AAA Playoffs in February. Less than two months later he was named the new head coach of the Lady Panthers. Photo/Todd Forrest

coach, we went over some of the expectations and laid the groundwork. It was short and sweet."

Looking ahead to the 2017-18 season, Garrett acknowledges that despite returning four starters and 12-out-of-14 overall, the Lady Panthers are also coming off their first losing season in seven years.

"We've actually talked about the word 'expectations' and whether or not we want to use that word or the word 'standards,' and I went with 'standards' because I feel that, a lot of the time, 'expectations' can be result-driven and we're trying to stay away from that, especially during this first year," he said. "There are a lot of changes, there is a new system coming in, offensively and defensively everything is changing. Obviously, we do have some expectations but we're just trying to focus on doing things the way we want to do them."

"We know it's going to be a process and we know that if we fall in love with the process, and keep chasing that process,

we'll eventually get to where we want to go."

As far as X's and O's, one significant change that Union County basketball fans will notice this winter will be on the defensive end, according to Garrett.

"We're mainly focusing on defense early on, especially in the summer" he said. "Coach Tucker pretty much stayed in the 1-1-3 zone defense because that's what worked for him and it's great, but we're going to play a lot of man (defense), and that in itself is a process - taking a team (whose seniors have) played zone for three straight years and teaching them man."

"Offensively, I know Coach Tucker liked to get up and down the court and shoot a lot of threes. We're still going to shoot the 3-ball, that's not going away but we're going to look at what types of threes we want to take and play to each others strengths, instead of having everyone on the team free to pull the trigger from three. But we still want to play up-tempo, we want to push the ball, and we

want to get out and run. I told the girls that I want us to be able to score in transition and play transition defense, and if we can do both of those, I think we'll be pretty solid."

Meanwhile, Coach Garrett won't be the only new face on the sidelines this season as he'll be joined by a pair of brand new assistant coaches, beginning with former middle school girls coach and 1994 UCHS graduate Mandy (Bradley) Hunter.

"We're excited about Coach Hunter joining us," Garrett said. "Most of the girls had her in middle school so that will be a fairly easy transition."

Garrett will also be joined by first-year coach Seth Merritt.

Merritt is a 2011 Union County grad who played under Coach Tucker during his senior season of 2010-11 - winning 19 games along with the Battle of the States Christmas Tournament where he picked up MVP honors.

Merritt was recently hired as a math teacher at UCHS for

the upcoming school year.

"Adding Seth will be a huge help," Garrett said. "We're looking forward to having him on the staff."

Since returning from spring break, the players have been participating in individual workouts twice a week while the first team practice was held last Tuesday.

Another focal point this summer, according to Garrett, is getting the team into the habit of hitting the weight room two or three times per week.

"We're practicing or playing pretty much everyday in June," he said. We've also been focusing on lifting a little bit, along with working on our speed and agility."

The Lady Panthers will take part in two camps this summer where they'll have plenty of opportunities to become acquainted with Garrett as they take the court with the new coaching staff at the helm.

This week, the Lady Panthers are at the University of North Georgia for a three-day camp that began on Monday.

Next weekend, they will visit Young Harris College for another three-day camp beginning on Friday the 16th.

"We're going to slow things down in July," Garrett said. "We're still going to try and get into the weight room a couple days a week to continue focusing on strength, speed and agility, and just getting ready for the upcoming school year so we can start back with the individual workouts."

In closing, Garrett wanted to make certain that he thanked his wife Alexis, -- who he recently married in October -- his father, Stanley and his brother, Caleb for their support while he chased his dream of becoming a head coach.

"When you take (a head coaching job) it can be a little bit selfish at times because you take yourself away from other people (family and friends) so much," he said. "I just got married in October, and now, here I am taking a head coaching job just a few months later, so that was kind of a shock."

"Obviously, I want to thank my wife Alexis, along with my dad and my brother. They've known that I've been doing something like this for the last few years, so they've been very supportive."

And last but not least, I want to thank the (Union County schools) administration for their support and confidence in me."

Practice for the upcoming 2017-18 season will begin in October with games getting underway in November.

Returning for Garrett on the court will be two all region selections in senior guard Bailey Daniel and sophomore post Kait McCarter, while all region forward Ashley Fair was the only starter to graduate.

During his playing days at UCHS, Garrett led the team in scoring, rebounding, and blocked shots as a senior in 2006-07.

That season the Panthers won 22 games under first-year head coach Tim Hunter and finished second in the sub-region.

Garrett would go on to play college ball at Young Harris.



Former head coach David Tucker (far right) leaves UCHS with two region runner up finishes and five state playoff appearances. Prior to UCHS, Tucker was at Walker Valley in Cleveland, Tenn. Photo/Todd Forrest



Corey Garrett (standing-middle) has also served as an assistant baseball coach under Robby Roxbury for the past two seasons. Photo/Todd Forrest



Seth Merritt, a 2011 UCHS grad, will join Garrett's coaching staff this fall. Merritt, a three-year basketball starter, led Union in scoring as a senior when the Panthers won 19 games in Coach Tucker's first season at UCHS. Now Merritt will take over for the man who took over his Panthers' team in 2010. Photo/Todd Forrest

Correction: Union County girls golf

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In last week edition of the *North Georgia News*, Page 2C incorrectly stated that **Mary Wischmeyer** placed 17th with a 180 (+36) at the Class AAA State Golf Championships.

The article should have said: **Grace Wischmeyer** placed 17th with a 180 (+36) at the Class AAA State Golf Championships.

The *North Georgia News* would like to apologize for this mistake.

As for Grace Wischmeyer's performance at the tournament: luckily for the Union, the play of Wischmeyer kept her squad in contention.

After opening with a round of 22-over (94), Wischmeyer turned in a top 13 performance on day two with an 86 to help Union overtake Bremen for second with a 259 on day two - the second lowest score

of the day by nine strokes.

On day two, Wischmeyer picked up a birdie on the par-4 sixth hole during a stretch that saw the junior shoot 1-under par over eight holes.

Following a double-bogey on the third hole, Wischmeyer recorded back-to-back pars on four and five.

Her birdie on six led to

three straight pars to close the front nine with a 39 - Union's lowest nine hole score of the tournament.

After picking up consecutive pars to kick off the back nine, Wischmeyer triple-bogeyed the 12th to end her string of eight straight holes without a bogey.

