

Sports

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Banton discusses FSU football camp, recruiting, and the Panthers defense

By Todd Forrest
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The 2017 Union County football season got underway Monday with the GHSA's mandatory one week conditioning period before official practice opens on Monday, July 31.

Then, a little more than two weeks later, Union will host its lone preseason scrimmage when Rabun Gap pays a visit to Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Thursday, Aug. 17.

Last season the Panthers held two preseason scrimmages but due to this year's spring game at Chestatee, Union is only allowed one fall scrimmage.

The regular season will get underway at Gilmer County on Aug. 25 where the two teams can hopefully avoid a lightning delay this time around. In week three (Sept. 8), Union's first home contest will bring Andrews, NC into town.

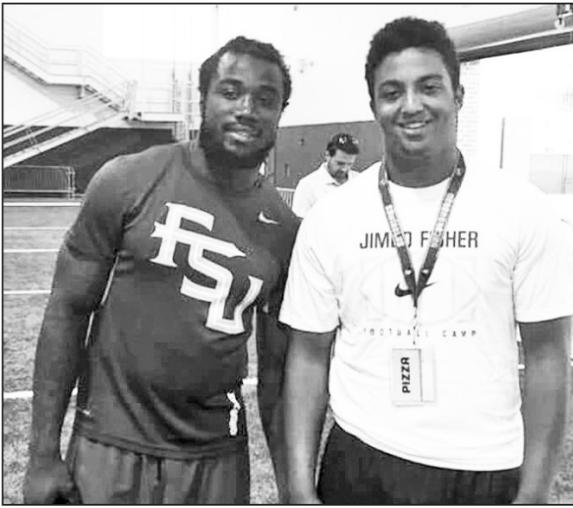
In the meantime, the Panthers have remained plenty busy attending camps and holding summer workouts as the month of August approaches.

Recently, the North Georgia News was able to chat with Union County quarterback Cole Wright regarding his visit to Army-West Point and a solid showing at the Mercer football camp.

This week, the North Georgia News caught up with the Panthers middle linebacker (a position that's often referred to as "the quarterback of the defense") RJ Banton.

In June, the Union County rising senior took a trip to Tallahassee, Fla. to attend the Jimbo Fisher Football Camp at Florida State University.

Last Friday, Banton took the time to fill us in on the Jimbo Fisher / FSU camp. He also provided an update on what he and his Panther teammates have been up to, and even offered a



Union County rising senior RJ Banton (right) with Florida State's all-time leading rusher Dalvin Cook. In April, Cook was drafted by the Minnesota Vikings and was in attendance at the Jimbo Fisher camp.

bit of insight on what to expect from the Union County defense this fall.

NGN: What was the highlight of the Jimbo Fisher camp for you, personally?

Banton: Getting to meet the (FSU) players and (FSU Head Football Coach) Jimbo Fisher, for sure.

It was a three-day fundamentals camp that allowed you to go to your specific position and have the FSU players and coaches help you get better at whatever it is you do.

There were also a lot of 5-star recruits who were there to prove themselves. It was just an all-around great atmosphere and a nice experience for me.

NGN: Are there any colleges that have shown interest in you, not only in football, but baseball as well, and who, if anyone, has stood out?

Banton: West Georgia and FIT (Florida Institute of Technology) have contacted me and there have also been a few colleges that contacted me about baseball.

I don't really have a favorite right now. They're all pretty even.

NGN: Locally, what kinds of camps have been going on lately? What have you and your Panther teammates been up to recently?

Banton: We hosted a (shoulder pad) camp on Tuesday and Wednesday with Chestatee and Commerce that went really well.

We were able to get a look at our weaknesses before the season starts and that's a really good thing. We have the opportunity to improve on our weaknesses and hopefully turn them into strengths.

The week before we hosted a 7-on-7 with Murphy, NC, Andrews, NC, Hayesville, NC, and White County. We won most of our games and tied with Murphy, so I think we did pretty well.

NGN: Will you be at inside or outside linebacker this year?

Banton: I'm at inside linebacker this season. Last season I played both inside and outside linebacker. I've played a little bit of defensive end too.

NGN: As for the defense's front-seven, how are you guys coming along during the off-



The participants at last month's Jimbo Fisher football camp. Banton is to the immediate right, and directly under the elbow, of the second coach (with hat) from the left. Photo/Wayne McGahee III, via Tallahassee Democrat

season and what can we expect this fall?

Banton: We have some young defensive linemen that look really good. We're also going to look a little bit different this year with (senior) Matthew Beise moving out to defensive end. We'll have (sophomore) Nathaniel Ledford at nose (tackle) and (junior) William Lueckert at the other end.

(Senior) Bryan Nelson will be one of the outside linebackers and (senior) Cole Dockrey has moved to the other outside linebacker from safety. It's a different look but I think it's going to really help us out, especially in the long run.

NGN: The secondary will feature several new guys this year, but how have the 7-on-7 tournaments aided their development?

Banton: We're going to have some new faces in the secondary but they have the potential to be just as good, if not better than last year. The 7-on-7 tournaments really helped out, especially with learning their reads. They have a really good shot at doing some great things this season.



RJ Banton and the Union County defense will be looking to wreak havoc on opposing offenses in 2017. Photo/Todd Forrest

UCHS Softball to host summer league games beginning 4 p.m. Wednesday

By Todd Forrest
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Mount Airy - Union County softball continues to prepare for the upcoming season and last week they returned to Habersham Central for another round of summer league double-headers.

This time, the Lady Panthers suffered a 2-1 loss to host Habersham Central before tying Jackson County 3-3 in the second game.

Four Union County errors led to a pair of unearned runs in the game one loss. At the plate, the lineup could only generate one run while scattering five hits.

The only multi-hit performance came from rising junior Aladriel Arnold. Meanwhile, rising sophomore Mary Wischmeyer, rising junior Madeline Tanner, and rising senior Katelynn Hodges - a transfer from Effingham County - each finished with one hit.

Rising senior Jillian Lawn started in the circle and rising junior Aubree Pack took over in relief.

In the Lady Panthers' 3-3 tie with Jackson County 3-3, hits were provided by rising senior Braden Poteete along with rising juniors Skyler Ludlum, Bailey Rayfield and Madeline Tanner.

Rising freshman Trinity



After an injury cost her the 2016 season, the bat of rising-junior Bailey Rayfield will be a welcomed addition to the Union County lineup this fall. Photo/Todd Forrest

Queen got the start for Union County with Pack tossing three scoreless innings in relief.

The Lady Panthers will host four summer league games on Wednesday with Union seeing action at 4 p.m. (vs White County) and at 7 p.m. (vs Gilmer County).

Thursday they will travel to Stephens County for a summer league doubleheader at 5 and 6:30 p.m.



Rising junior Skyler Ludlum at the dish. Photo/Todd Forrest

Date	Location	Opponent	JV	Varsity
AUG. 10	HOME	NORTH HALL	4:30	6:00
AUG. 12	HOME	NORTHWEST(DOUBLEHEADER)	N/A	12:00/2:00
AUG. 15	AWAY	LUMPKIN	4:30	5:55
AUG. 16	HOME	WHITE	4:30	5:55
AUG. 17	AWAY	DAWSON	4:30	5:55
AUG. 22	HOME	EAST HALL	4:00	5:55
AUG. 23	AWAY	WHITE	4:30	5:55
AUG. 24	AWAY	RABUN	N/A	5:00
AUG. 26	HOME	CHESTATEE	N/A	12:00
AUG. 29	HOME	FANNIN	4:30	5:55
AUG. 31	HOME	GAC	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 6	HOME	RABUN	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 7	HOME	LUMPKIN	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 12	AWAY	NORTH HALL	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 14	HOME	DAWSON	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 15/16	AWAY	MORGAN COUNTY TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
SEPT. 19	AWAY	EAST HALL	4:00	5:55
SEPT. 21	AWAY	CHESTATEE	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 26	AWAY	FANNIN	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 28	AWAY	GAC	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 30	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 2	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 4	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT 11/12	TBA	1ST ROUND STATE TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT 18/19	TBA	2ND ROUND STATE TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT 26-28	COLUMBUS	ELITE 8	N/A	TBA

Union County High School 2017 softball schedule.

Butternut Creek Ladies Golf Association presents 32nd Sadie Hawkins Golf Tournament Saturday, August 12, 2017

Ladies, it's time to 'Pick your Partner' and sign-up in our Annual Sadie Hawkins Golf Tournament at Butternut Creek Golf Course. Let's make it another 'special day' for our heritage golf tournament - the 32nd this year! What a history!

Sign-in 12:30 - Lunch 1 PM - Play at 2 PM
Deadline for signing up - August 5th
Cost \$45 Per Person - Prizes for 'Closest to pin' along with Flight Winners and a 'Surprise Winner'

Format: Couples Select Shot
Make Checks payable to BCLGA Sadie Hawkins Golf Tournament and send check to Betty Taylor, P.O. Box 295, Blairsville, GA 30514 or call Betty Taylor at 706-745-2248; cell 706-781-9910 or Lilly Adams at 706-745-2725; cell 706-781-4529 by August 5, 2017 or you may sign-up in Pro Shop - 706-439-6076.

Player Name	HDCP/GHINN#	Telephone

MUSA Fall Registration

Mountain United Soccer Association's fall soccer registration is open for boys and girls ages 4-16.

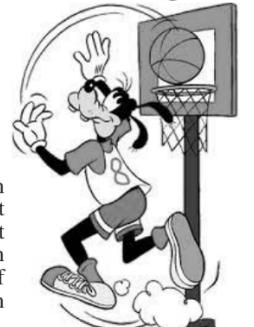
You may register online at www.mountainssoccer.org. Registration deadline is Aug. 9. Players registered after deadline will incur a late fee and will be placed on roster waiting list.



Volunteer coaches also are needed. Questions: email: musa.soccer@gmail.com

NEW Start Smart Basketball Program

Union County Recreation Department 2017 Start Smart Basketball Program Ages: 3-5



Beginning this fall, Union County Recreation Department will now be offering Start Smart Basketball! Your child can learn the beginning fundamentals of the sport of Basketball in a fun and safe-noncompetitive setting.

All Start Smart sports beginner programs are led by a highly qualified Program Director for Union County Recreation Department.

Session One Registration begins on July 5, 2017 and ends August 3, 2017 at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.) Registration can be completed in person or online! If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer at (706) 439-6074. Season runs from September 5 through October 12 with 15 sessions.