

Sports

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Panthers split at Social Circle; host first place Jefferson on Tuesday

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Social Circle - Union County baseball's hopes for its first Region Championship in more than 30 years was dealt a serious blow when they dropped the first game of a double header at Social Circle on Friday.

The Panthers struck for a run in the first but never scored again as the Redskins posted one in the fifth inning and the game winner in the bottom of the eighth.

Union poured on 17 runs in the second game as the Panthers pulled away in a 17-9 victory to force the split.

The Panthers now have their backs against the wall due to the loss. Union is two games back of first place Jefferson with four Region games to play.

The Jefferson Dragons come to town on Tuesday and Union is in a must-win situation if they want to remain in the hunt for the 8-AA title and a No. 1 seed in the Class AA State Tournament.

The Panthers are also two games ahead of third place Oglethorpe County and are trying to hold off the Patriots and Riverside for the one of the coveted top two spots and home field advantage in the first round of State.

"Regardless of the split, we are still in good shape of being able to host a state playoff series as long as we stay focused and take care of business," Union Head Coach Brandon Bradburn said.

At Social Circle, Calvin Duckworth worked 7-plus innings, striking out 6 and scattering 8 hits on 93 pitches. However, the Redskins quickly loaded the bases in the eighth and with no outs, a single to left brought in the game winner.

Union got on the board first when Zach Odom singled to left, then stole second to open the game. Jared Croskey followed with a single, advancing Odom to third.

Wes Aulet followed with a grounder to short that scored Odom for Union's only run of the contest.



Senior Zach Odom connects with a pitch. Photo/Todd Forrester

Each team went down in order until the top of the third when Union missed out on another scoring opportunity.

With two outs Croskey reached on an error and Aulet singled putting two on for the clean up spot, but T Bentley flew out to center to end the inning.

Duckworth would take a no-hitter into the fourth inning before giving up two singles and two stolen bases. But the junior would get out of trouble with a grounder out to first to keep the Redskins off the board.

Odom was left stranded in the fifth following a two-out single and after living dangerously in the fourth, Social Circle finally got on the board against Duckworth.

Two-out walks usually spell trouble and that was the case in the inning when Duckworth induced two ground outs before walking the next hitter on five pitches. The free pass was followed by an RBI double, knotting the game at 1-1.

Union went down 1-2-3 in the sixth and Duckworth escaped in the bottom half despite giving up a two-out double.

Duckworth led off the seventh with a walk but was unable to advance after two pop ups and a grounder back to the

mound.

The Redskins singled to left to begin the bottom of the seventh but Duckworth picked off the base runner at first, one pitch into the next at bat. He then got a strike out and a grounder to send the game into extra innings.

The Panthers again went down quietly in the top of the eighth before Social Circle ended it with a walk off single in the bottom half.

Union was limited to just four hits in the contest with Odom picking up two of them to go along with two stolen bases. Croskey and Aulet added a base hit a piece.

After sparking the Panthers against Riverside, the bottom of the Union lineup put up goose eggs in the hit column.

The fourth through ninth spot in the lineup was a combined 0-for-17 with a walk and six strike outs at Social Circle.

In the second contest, Union combined for 14 runs in the fifth and sixth innings to blow open a tie ball game.

The Panthers pounded out 9 hits and stole 7 bases but were aided by 7 Redskin errors and 13 walks.

Aulet came through with a 2-for-4 performance with 2



Senior Wes Aulet fouls off a two strike pitch. Photo/Todd Forrester

runs and 2 RBIs.

Odom doubled, scored three times and knocked in two. Bentley scored twice with an RBI. Duckworth drove in two while crossing the plate twice. Garrett Nix scored three times.

Returning from his grandfather's funeral, junior Lane Everett worked 4 2/3 innings, allowing 6 hits, 5 earned runs, walked 6 and struck out 5.

Sophomore Tyler Odom pitched 1/3 of an inning in the bottom of the fifth, recording a key bases loaded strikeout.

Freshman Joseph Mancuso picked up his first career win in two innings of work. He allowed 2 earned runs while walking four and fanning four.

Trailing 3-2 after three innings, Union tied things up in the fourth thanks to a lead off double by Everett. With Nix pinch running for the pitcher, freshman Lance Rich advanced Nix to third with a grounder out. Duckworth followed with another grounder that scored Nix.

Jackson Burks and Chase Barnett walked but were left stranded when Zach Odom went down swinging.

Everett didn't allow a hit in the fourth and that allowed Union to open the flood gates

in the fifth.

Croskey walked, stole two bases and scored on an Aulet single. Bentley walked, Everett walked, Duckworth and Rich followed with RBI singles. Burks brought in another run with a bases loaded walk and Barnett brought in Rich with a base hit.

Then later, with two outs, Aulet singled home Burks.

The Redskins put up two in the fifth, knocking Everett out of the game and cutting the Panther lead in half at 10-5.

In the sixth, Cody Davenport and Duckworth walked and scored. Tyler Odom singled and Barnett walked, before Zach Odom doubled to the opposite field. Croskey singled, Aulet walked, Everett reached on an error, Davenport was hit by a pitch, and Jake Sisum brought in another run on a grounder to second.

Social Circle got three in the sixth before Mancuso retired the Redskins with a strike out. They would add one more in the seventh but again, Mancuso got the final out of the game when he caught the Redskins' batter looking at strike three.

Zach Odom, Croskey, and Davenport each stole two bases, while sophomore Hunter



Centerfielder Jared Croskey

Hughes added another.

"People looking at our schedule or results are probably thinking we 'slipped up' to Social Circle, but they had two excellent pitchers they threw against us in game one," Bradburn said. "We played both games very hard, we just hit some balls hard right at them and they pitched and played defense really well."

Up next for the Panthers is first place Jefferson who leads Union by two games atop the 8-AA standings. The Dragons escaped by the skin of their teeth when they hosted the Panthers last month, winning 3-2 in 11 innings.

On Thursday, Union visits Hayesville, NC for a 4:30 p.m. meeting with Coach Jeff Vardo's Yellow Jackets.

The Panthers resume Region 8-AA action on Tuesday, Apr. 16th when they visit Riverside Military Academy for another crucial 8-AA showdown. Union will be looking to secure one of the top two spots in the Region while Riverside is battling to remain in the mix for one of the four State Playoff spots. The Panthers defeated the Eagles 5-4 last month but had to rally from a 4-3 deficit in the seventh after letting a 3-1 lead slip away.

"We still feel pretty bad about losing the first game (at Social Circle), but I always tell my guys they have to hate losing more than they love winning," Bradburn said. "We are ready to jump back into action against Jefferson, Riverside, and finish up with a Region doubleheader against Washington Wilkes."

Mountain Gymnastics refuses to settle despite breakout performance in Gainesville

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Being the best at what you do takes patience and lots of practice and then allowing the chips to fall and hope your perseverance pays off.

Coach Shelley Thomas and her group of assistant coaches don't have much of an off season, if any, as they and their talented crop of young gymnasts work year-round preparing for the State Meets in late-April.

With only one meet between the MGC Competition Team and the State Meet, our young gymnasts rose to the occasion with three girls placing First All-Around and five posting an All-Around score of .35 or above.

Eleven-year-old Erin Raper had a spectacular performance on the beam scoring a 9.7 out of 10 to go along with three other first place finishes en route to a Prep-Op 1 overall best score of 37.225.

Erin scored a 9.13 on the vault, 8.95 on the bars, and a 9.45 on the floor exercises.

In the Prep-Op 1, 9-year-old division, Emma Patterson took first place All-Around with a score of 35.525. She placed first on the bars and the floor and second on the vault and the beam.

In Level 3, 9-year-old Haley Craig was first All-Around, posting an overall score of 35.775. She was first on the vault with a 9.10 and second on each of the other three events.

Six-year-old Caymin Thompson scored a 9.30 on the floor, giving her a first place finish in the event and a second All-Around finish.

Jacey Lee finished first on the beam in the 9-year old division and third All Around.

Others competing were 8-year-old Brandy Barlow (fourth All-Around) and 9-year-old Kaitlyn Daves (fifth All-Around).

In Prep-Op 2, 9-year old



The MGC Competition Team points at each one of their ultimate goals: to score a 9.0 in an event and get their star on the wall as a member of the 9.0 Club. Photos by Todd Forrester



Erin Raper

Reagan Ledford scored an outstanding 9.425 on the vault, 11-year-old Evelyn McBride put up a score of 9.30 on the floor exercises, and 9-year-old Addicyn Dockery also scored a 9.30 on the floor, giving each first place respectively, in each event.

The next meet will be the Zenit Invitational this Friday and Saturday in Canton before the State Meets begin.

"All the girls have qualified for State by scoring at least 29 All-Around so they are looking really good for State," Coach Thomas said.



The 35 All Around Club: Haley Craig, Jacey Lee, Caymin Thompson, Jordan Swanson, Emma Patterson is not pictured.

Since the first meet back in December, Coach Thomas has seen substantial growth in her squad during the past four months.

"We have improved tremendously since December 1st," Coach Thomas said. "Right now it's all about routine and getting them polished for state. We are fine-tuning every little thing. We're not quite as hands on as we were, so we pretty much have our skills down, we're just fine tuning."



Reagan Ledford

Joe Collins

Tips from the Range

The golf swing is an athletic motion. It depends on balanced force to properly move the club head away and back through the hitting area. It is impossible to achieve maximum speed through impact without moving the center of balance to the back foot and then returning it to the front foot. We call this motion the "weight transfer".

When watching a major league baseball pitcher, you notice that the force of the action is from the back leg to the front leg during the pitch. The baseball is then released toward home plate at an amazing speed. If the pitcher stood flat footed and tried to release a pitch then his career would be short lived because the ball would have no speed. This force from the back leg to the front leg is the same theory we use in golf to accelerate the club at a really fast speed.

The proper weight transfer is totally dependent on having a solid stance and good posture because the balance of the motion must remain centered. If you lose your balance anywhere throughout the swing then the weight transfer will be blocked. You will end up hitting the ball with your hands and arms instead of allowing the club to follow the rotation of the body.

You must be very careful in trying to execute the proper weight transfer. It requires a rotation of the torso and not a sliding of the hips to move the weight to the back foot. This is where you will experience difficulty in your efforts to "load" the back foot.

The start of the backswing is primarily done with the chest and shoulders. Notice that when you have successfully addressed the ball there will be a triangle in front of the chest formed by the connection of the arms to the shoulders with the grip at the bottom and the shoulders at the top. The triangle is in the center of the

chest and should stay in front of the chest as the weight is transferred to the back foot. Maintain the triangle by keeping the forward arm straight. Do not let the turning of the upper body pull your balance to the front of your feet or the proper weight transfer will not happen.

Once the weight is on the back foot, simply let the arms relax to the top while trying to keep the forward arm straight from set-up to the finish of the backswing. The straight forward arm will guide the club head back to the original position you had when the backswing started.

Notice that the movement from address to the top of your arc is called the "backswing" because that is just what it is. Simply turn the chest and let the club swing to the top. Shoulders will lead the hips on the backswing and then the hips will lead the shoulders on the downswing. You really need to follow this order or your downswing path will be outside the backswing path and across the ball through impact.

Now that the backswing is completed and your center of balance, or your weight, is on the back foot, give a good push from the back foot and let the hips start to reverse their turn back to the ball. This is the start of the downswing and the beginning of the weight shift to the front foot. Simply follow this transfer of weight from back to front and let the club fall slightly inside the takeaway path. Keep your head behind the ball well in to impact and let the arms release naturally.

The weight transfer is an important key in helping you find accuracy and distance because, when done properly, it allows you to maintain balance throughout the entire swing. Without the proper transfer, the correct swing is almost impossible and consistency is virtually nonexistent.

The great Lee Trevino said it best when he said, "the more I practice, the luckier I get," so practice this package of fundamentals and you too will become "luckier."

Good luck and I will see you on the course!