

Sports

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Union/Towns communities celebrate athletes

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What thoughts go through your mind when you hear the word 'special'?

Thursday morning Towns and Union Counties truly redefined the word 'special' for all of us as the Towns County School System host-

ed the Towns/Union County Spring Special Olympics. This was a very exciting time for these young people as they competed in a variety of track and field events including relays, walking events, softball and koosh ball, soccer, and standing long jump.

There were almost 50 athletes representing the two

school systems.

The Towns County High School Chorus opened the ceremonies with a chilling performance of 'The National Anthem.'

The unique aspect of Special Olympics is that there is no pressure to win; no fear of losing; because all these young athletes are already winners and they all walk away with a medal.

They were there and ready to compete to the absolute best of their ability, and that they did. Dana Russell was there with her son who is in the first grade.

This is his first competition in the Spring Special Olympics. He did compete in the Fall Special Olympics in Union County last November.

"Everybody gets a medal," Dana Russell said. "They (teachers and paraprofessionals) look for areas of strength that they know kids will be successful at and they help them build on those strengths. They are very encouraging and supportive of the kids; it's so well organized."

You could sense the excitement of the athletes, but the enthusiasm and pride mirrored on the faces of the parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, and volunteers was irreplaceable!

The Towns/Union Special Olympics Committee is made up of the following people who dedicated a great deal of time and effort in making sure that everything went off smoothly and without a glitch: Amy Rosser, Chair Person; Erin Schuette, Towns County Special Education Teacher; Michelle Pyrluk, Towns County Special Education Director; Kristy Chapman, Union County Special Education Director; Bobby Kelly, Union County Assistant Special Education Director; and Becky Tracy, Parent Mentor for the Union County School System; and Gina Sullivan, Union County High School Secretary of Spe-



Supporters encourage a Union County athlete during last week's Towns/Union Special Olympics at Towns County High School. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



A Union County athlete participates in the soccer event during last week's Special Olympics at Towns Co. High School. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



The Reverend Jerry Helton provided extra motivation to our local athletes during the Special Olympics. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

cial Education.

The following statistics were provided by Amy Rosser, Chair Person of the Special Olympics, regarding the medals taken home by the athletes: Towns County Olympians took home a total of 35 Gold Medals; 20 Silver Medals; and 10 Bronze Medals. Union County Olympians took home a total of 6 Gold Medals; 11 Silver Medals; and 8 Bronze Medals. Names of the participants were withheld due to 'confidentiality.'

The Special Olympics Committee wanted to make sure that a very special thank you be extended to the following for their assistance with the athletic events: Jeannie Ledford, Towns County Physical Education Teacher, Union County Recreation Department, Young Harris Soccer Team, the Towns County Leo Club (Laurie Mains, Sponsor) and the UCHS FCCLA (Rhonda Colwell, Sponsor).

A special thank you was also extended to announcers,



Union County Athletes participated in many events during the Special Olympics, including the standing long jump. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Jeff Stowers and Pastor Jerry Helton; to the Barney Squad Senior Leadership group for their assistance with the activity booths; to the Lake Chatuge/Hiawasse Rotary

Club for providing lunch for everyone involved; and to all the volunteers that made posters, donated items, or just came out to cheer for and encourage these wonderful children.

Week Two of Spring Football includes cookout for team, family

By Todd Forrest
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The second week of Union County High School's spring football practices are in the books and the outlook for the 2012 season is starting to come into focus.

"We've had a good two weeks," said Head Coach Brian Allison. "We're getting a little closer to finding out what we have as far as depth and what we have to work with. We've had some players who are new to the program that we have been pleased with so far."

Despite Wednesday's practice getting rained out, the enthusiasm of the Panther players and coaches has not been dampened.

"There are a lot of new, young players on the field this year," said rising senior quarterback T Bentley. "We're trying to involve everyone on the field, come together as a team, and give encouragement to others all while learning and reviewing the fundamentals of

football."

So far, Bentley's offense has given the Union County coaching staff something to smile about.

"We definitely have experience at quarterback and running back," said Offensive Coordinator Howard McCombs. "We have some young receivers that I am really excited about. We're not going to be experienced at receiver, but I like the skill that we have at that position. I am really excited about that group."

Running Back/Linebacker Coach Justin Byers has been thrilled with the performance of Union's backfield during the spring.

"We've had an absolutely great turnout," said Byers. "It's been one of the best springs that I've been a part of since I've been here at Union County. We've got a great group of freshmen and a great group of experienced older guys. The tempo has been high, the enthusiasm has been high, and we've just really been pounding the fun-

damentals."

Defensively, Byers will have a talented group of linebackers at his disposal in the fall.

"We've got a good core of linebackers," said Byers. "They are very smart kids that know how to set our defense up know how to get things going and enjoy making contact. You couldn't ask for anything better."

The Panthers don't have a Spring Game scheduled but Allison wouldn't rule out the possibility of having a scrimmage game this week.

"We are working towards having a scrimmage, but we're not going to have it if we're not improving fundamentally and in our technique," said Allison. "If we feel like we are ready to have a scrimmage then we will do it. We've been adding some live stuff into our practices and doing some seven-on-seven work, then we'll see where we're at offensively."

Coach McCombs echoed Coach Allison's comments about looking at the big picture and the need for continued improvement.

"We have a lot to learn but we're starting that process in the spring so they will have all summer (to work on skills)," said McCombs. "If the receivers can learn the offense, I will be really excited with our skill position players. We have experience on the offensive line and have seen lots of improvement in the guys who didn't play much last year. We're just trying to put it all together and this is just the start of that process."

On Thursday night, the Union County Quarterback Club held a cookout for players, coaches, and family. Union County hats, t-shirts, and Zaxby's gift cards were awarded during a raffle. Tsali Bentley, president of the Quarterback Club, stressed the importance of the club and the need for the community to support these kids.

"We're very proud to sponsor the football team and the coaches," he said. "We try to get the community to support the team. We appreciate



Coach Gary Butler looks on as Union County lineman practice blocking at last week's spring practice. Photo/Todd Forrest

the community coming out on Friday night. These kids have worked very hard. It is going to be a terrific year for our athletes, our coaches and our club."

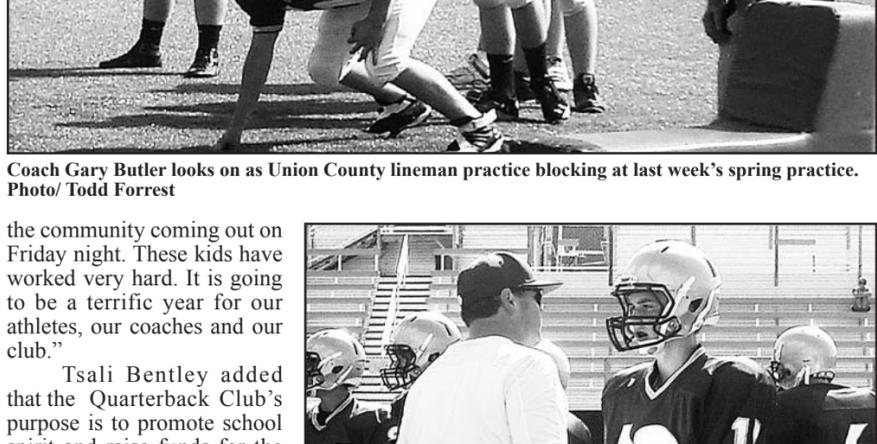
Tsali Bentley added that the Quarterback Club's purpose is to promote school spirit and raise funds for the team's needs. Bentley and the Quarterback Club would also like to thank Coosa Creek Embroidery for sponsoring the cookout and providing raffle prizes. Also a special thank you goes out to Zaxby's for donating all the gift cards that were used for raffle prizes.



Coach Cullen Robertson instructs a Panther quarterback during last week's spring practice. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County football players practice tackling drills during spring practice. Photo/Todd Forrest



Last week, the Union County Quarterback Club hosted a cookout for players, coaches, and their families.