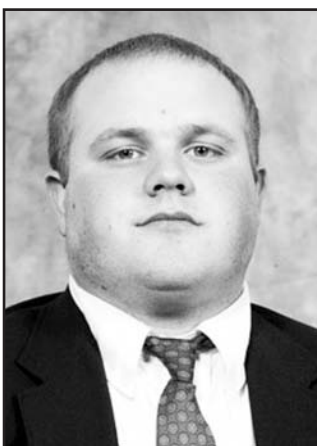


Sports

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Blairsville's Curtis Turner setting fine example in the SEC

By Todd Forrest
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Curtis Turner

Union County's Curtis Turner has taken his workman-like approach to the Southeastern Conference.

Turner, a 1998 Union County graduate is the Strength Coach for Men's Basketball at Vanderbilt University under Head Coach Kevin Stallings.

Turner's job entails all the aspects of player development away from the actual skills of the game. With strength, speed, and conditioning becoming a year round pursuit for today's athlete, Turner actually spends more time with the team than the coaching staff.

"Strength coaches wear a lot of hats in the program and usually go way beyond our normal job description," Turner said.

Turner's journey began at Union County High School, under Head Football Coach Brian Allison, who he credits for setting him on his current path.

"Coach Allison took over the football program when I was a junior and he brought instant credibility," Turner said. "He made it clear that you would have to pay the price to be part of the team, but we bought in, trusted his vision."

It didn't hurt that Turner attended high school with the likes of Jack Lance Jr., Luke Colwell, John Hill and others who were dedicated to their craft.

"I loved everything that went into being on a team at UCHS," Turner said. "I grew up with a lot of sports geeks that simply fell in love with

the idea of being part of something bigger than ourselves and making UCHS a competitive program in all areas."

Following his graduation in May of 1998, Turner, with the help of Coach Allison, found a home at Tusculum College as a student assistant.

"It was a great but humbling experience," Turner said. "Most days began early, watching the weight room as the players lifted and ended late washing the uniforms post practice."

From there it was off to Kennesaw State for a year before Turner reached out to Coach Allison one more time.

"He got me in touch with Clemson University about the possibility of becoming a student assistant, Turner said. "I started on Day One of the 2000 pre-season football camp and stayed in that position until I graduated in 2003."

The staff at Clemson had produced 14 head or assistant strength coaches which provided Turner with the opportunity to work around some talented coaches, but there is one coach in particular that stands out.

"Coach Joey Batson has meant a lot professionally and

personally," Turner said. "It is rare that you meet someone that you almost instantly understand and should be emulated. That's what we all saw in Coach Batson. He sits in the same position today as Director of Strength and Conditioning at Clemson and should be there as long as he desires."

While working with the Tigers, Turner says that his most memorable moments took place behind the scenes, returning to Athens, wearing enemy colors, and the tradition of touching Howard's Rock before running down the hill onto the playing field, which has been referred to by some as "The Most Exciting 25 seconds in College Football."

"I remember my first flight with the team, and my first trip to UGA and Sanford Stadium," Turner said. "My favorite memory though, as any Tiger can appreciate, is running down the hill with the team before kickoff in Death Valley."

A year prior to Turner graduating from Clemson, Assistant Strength Coach John Sisk left Clemson to become the Director of Speed, Strength and Conditioning at Vanderbilt and Turner knew that he wanted to follow one of his mentors to Nashville.

And when a job opened up, Turner was at the top of Coach Sisk's speed dial.

"It helped that I knew the right people, but I also got the job because I worked my tail off to earn it," Turner said. "I'll always be thankful to Coach Sisk for taking a chance on hiring me right out of college to be part of his staff. Sisk coaches at Georgia Tech now, giving me a reason to watch the GT/UGA rivalry again."

Currently, Turner works exclusively with the Commodore basketball program, which, for the first time since 1974, produced three NBA draft picks in 2012 - two in the First Round.

The Atlanta Hawks took John Jenkins with the 23rd pick in the first round. Festus Ezeli also went in the opening round by going 30th to the Golden State Warriors. With the first selection of the second round, the Charlotte Bobcats selected Jeffery Taylor.

Turner credits much of his success with Vanderbilt's basketball program to the late, Union County Head Basketball Coach Allen Ross.

"I was greatly influenced by Allen Ross," Turner said. "Coach Ross is one of the best coaches I have been around at any level. I use some of his drills, as well as his mindset in development with my current athletes. There were, and still are, a lot of great people and coaches in the Union County school system."

During a typical Vanderbilt road game, Turner remains with the team right up until the opening tip. About an hour before tip-off he warms up the team and the action doesn't slow down until they are back on the bus four hours later.

For Turner, his impact on the student athletes runs deeper than anything that shows up in the box score.

"I understand the importance of having people around that care about you, help further your development, and push you to do things that you couldn't do on your own," Turner said.

"That's why I believe in the value of athletics and that being a student athlete stands for so much more than wins



Curtis Turner with the Vanderbilt Men's Basketball Team

and losses and what we buy a ticket to see on the field or court. These athletes are being stretched mentally, physically, and emotionally in extreme directions few experiences in life can duplicate."

Turner continued to stress the importance of preparing student athletes for the real world that awaits them after they leave the university.

"It's hard to put a value on sending young women and men into the world equipped with the experience of being forced to face fears and learn to deal with failure alongside learning the pursuit of excellence and handling success," he said.

With all that Turner does for the Vandy community, his roots run deep in Union County and as he reflects on his days in the purple and gold, cherished memories come to mind.

"The feeling that the community is behind you is honestly one of my favorite memories," Turner said. "I wanted to talk to people after the game on Friday night, at youth league games on Saturday, church on Sunday, and all around town through the week.

It was fun to have my family so involved with my dad Robert

filming every game and my mom Teresa, sister Pam, and grandmother Catherine as my biggest supporters."

Despite having his plate full up in Music City, Turner always finds the time to reunite with his Union County friends to reminisce and hearken back to the good old days.

"Blairsville is home to a lot of special people that I enjoy seeing and keeping in touch with," Turner said. "But there are a few old friends that I meet up with just about every time I'm home, like Jack Lance and Luke Colwell, both of whom I spent some time with while in town for the Fourth of July," Turner said.

"Jack and Luke, along with their great families, have put up with my nonsense for years and have been unbelievably great friends through support and encouragement that we all need in our lives."

Turner also looks locally for inspiration and tools that he can take back to the SEC.

"John Hill has been a loyal friend, who has walked a lot of the same roads I have personally and professionally and has been an inspiration

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Coach Allison's Panthers: ready, set, go

By Todd Forrest
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It's officially football season in Union County. The 2012 Union County Panthers football season officially began on Wednesday the 25th with five days of conditioning.

Then the pads will be on starting on Aug. 1 as the Panthers tighten up their chin straps for an action packed football season.

The summer heat hasn't deterred this dedicated group of young men from joining the coaching staff in voluntary off season workouts and camps during the summer months.

On July 11 and 12, Union County attended a passing camp at Sonorville High School. There were seven teams participating in the camp and Union County threw against four of them. With Dalton, Rome, SE Whitfield, Gordon Central, Cass, and Sonorville in attendance, Union County was one of the smallest schools participating in the camp.

But Head Coach Brian Allison is enthusiastic about his

offense and believes the coaching staff will have enough tools at their disposal to put points on the board.

"I feel good about our kids at receiver, it's made it really easy and we're close to where we need to be at our skill positions. We have some flexibility there."

The rain created some slippery playing conditions, but overall Coach Allison was pleased with his team's performance.

"I thought it was a pretty good camp for us despite the field being sloppy," Coach Allison said. "I thought defensively we had a pretty good day."

The Panthers hosted their own camp on the 16th and 17th. The team lifted before the camp then participated in 7-on-7 drills and lineman drills along with Hayesville NC, Robbinsville NC, Sonorville, Gilmer County and Lumpkin County.

Another plus for Coach Allison this season is having the luxury of three capable quarterbacks. Some competition at that spot will only

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Sophomore Jacob Rogers and Coach Robertson. Photo/Todd Forrest



Coach Setzer and junior lineman Luther Jones. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panther bats pound Fannin, Gilmer in scrimmage

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County Lady Panthers hosted three scrimmage games last Tuesday at the Union County High School Softball Complex.

The Lady Panther varsity squad started both games before the junior varsity played the final three innings.

In a rain-delayed opening game, Fannin County took care of Gilmer County 7-1.

Union County took the field in Game Two and jumped out to a 4-1 lead over Fannin County and never looked back. The Lady Panthers went on to dispose of the rival Lady Rebels in a 10-6 win.

In the final game, Union County, again posted double-digits on the home side of the scoreboard in a 10-4 victory over the Lady Bobcats of Gilmer.

Senior Bailey Byers took the mound first for the Lady Panthers. After giving up two singles, a walk, and hitting a batter, the junior settled down

and got out of a bases loaded jam, allowing just one run in the opening frame.

The varsity squad would then turn it over to the Junior Varsity and sophomore Crystal Busbee came on in relief of Byers.

"The JV did really well," Head Coach Jessica Stewart said. They hit well and Crystal pitched well for us. She only gave up one run."

In Game Two, junior Chelsea Cook started and threw three innings until Busbee entered once again to close out the win over Gilmer.

The Lady Panthers practiced on Monday before heading to North Georgia College in Dahlonega for a summer league tournament on Tuesday.

The tournament will close out Union County's summer leagues and the first official practice begins on Aug. 1st.

The regular season opens on Aug. 10th when Union takes part in the two-day Lanier Point Tournament in Gainesville.



Sophomore Crystal Busbee leads off the game for the Lady Panthers (Top), senior first baseman Hannah Hughes cuts down a runner at the plate (Bottom left), senior Shawanna Brown swings at a pitch against Fannin County (right). Photos by Todd Forrest

UC 2012 Football Schedule

Aug 23 @ White Co. (Scrimmage)	Oct 19 @ Greene Co
Aug 31 @ Towns Co	Oct 26 @ Rabun Co
Sept 7 vs Fannin Co	Nov 2 vs Social Circle
Sept 14 vs Andrews	Nov 9 @ Jefferson
Sept 21 - Bye Week	
Sept 28 vs Wash. Wilkes	
Oct 5 @ Oglethorpe Co	
Oct 12 vs Riverside	

Union County High School's Homecoming is currently scheduled for Oct. 12th vs Riverside.

QB Club Phone-a-thon

Jacque Bentley and Kathy Mancuso, fall football program co-chairs, had a very successful phone-a-thon last week.

Ten players participated ranging from ninth grade to 12th grade. Thanks to Joseph Mancuso, Sam Gilbert, Dylan Byers, Ralston Drake, Luther Jones, Matthew Spiwak, Mekiah Martin, Cody Davenport, Jared Croskey, and T Bentley for their time and contribution in raising money for the team.

Several full page ads were sold as well as smaller

sizes. One business admitted to throwing the program ad solicitation letter that they received in the trash, but said that since a player had personally called and asked for the business, that they would advertise and requested another ad form be sent to them.

Thanks to Jacque and Kathy for another successful endeavor.

The program has a goal of raising \$1,500 more than last year's income of \$ 6,500.

Please do what you can to help our efforts.



UC players fist pumping when receiving a commitment for an ad.

