

Sports

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Young arms of Chambers and Lawn steer Union to 3-0 start at Lanier

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Gainesville - The Union County Lady Panthers (3-0) opened the 2014 campaign with three wins and the Red Division championship at last weekend's Lanier Pointe Invitational.

Union took out two State Tournament teams from 2013 on their way to claiming what was arguably the toughest bracket of the entire tournament.

Sophomore ace Laken Chambers picked up two wins, going the distance in each one. In the final game, freshman Jillian Lawn fired a two-hit shutout against a solid Banks County squad in her first high school outing.

The Lady Panthers pounded North Hall 7-2 thanks to a four-run first inning, shutout a State qualifier from Class AAA Banks County 4-0, and took out an Elite 8 squad from Class A, the Commerce Lady Tigers, by an 8-3 score.

"Overall we were the Red Division champions and I was pleased on how the girls worked together and played this first weekend," Union Head Coach Jessica Stewart said. "We hit the ball well, had solid pitching and played good enough defense to win."

After Friday's contests were washed out, the Lady Panthers faced Class AAA's North Hall in the opener on Saturday. Chambers struck out seven, yielding five hits and one earned run. She also got the offense rolling in the bottom of the first with an RBI double, scoring senior Crystal Busbee.

Junior Karley Nix followed Busbee's opposite field single with an infield single, putting two aboard for Chambers.

With freshman Braden Poteete running for Chambers, Nix scored when senior catcher Courtney Busbee singled to left, spotting Union to a 2-0 lead. Senior Hallye King made it a 4-0 game with a two-run double, bringing Poteete and Courtney Busbee home.

North Hall got one back in the second and another in the third to make it a 4-2 game but the Lady Panthers put the Lady Trojans on ice with a three-run third.

Chambers led off with a single to right and Poteete entered as a courtesy runner. Courtney Busbee doubled to left, putting two runners in scoring position with nobody out. Junior Maddie



Union County sophomore ace Laken Chambers paced her team with her arm and her bat at Lanier on Saturday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Garrett cleared the bases with a double, then with two outs, sophomore Kendra Tanner made it a 7-2 game with an RBI groundout.

Chambers continued to roll from the circle, surrendering just one hit in the final four innings to slam the door on the opposition. Garrett and King each drove in two runs for the Lady Panthers. Chambers and Courtney Busbee added two hits and an RBI each.

In the second game Union faced Commerce, who returned their ace Ansley Bowen, along with much of their lineup fresh off a 20-win season and a trip to Columbus last fall in the Class A Public Elite 8. However, the Lady Panthers used nine hits and took advantage of Commerce's shaky defense in an 8-3 victory.

Bowen was knocked out of the game in the fifth after allowing seven hits and five runs - two earned.

It appeared as if first game jitters caught up with both squads in the second game as two of the tournament's top teams kicked the ball around, combining for seven errors, three charged to Union.

The Lady Panthers struck first when Crystal Busbee singled

to lead off the game. Karley Nix moved her into scoring position and Chambers drew an eight-pitch walk. Freshman Logan Seabolt ran for Chambers and with two on, Courtney Busbee singled home her sister Crystal.

"I think the first inning set the tone for this game," Coach Stewart said. We spend a good bit of time talking about execution and that is exactly how we started off the season. We got a few more runs to finish out the game. I was proud of the 9 hits we had, however we did commit 4 errors so we will need to work on that. Laken pitched a great game only giving up 2 runs."

The Lady Tigers responded with two in their half of the first thanks to a walk, an error, and two infield singles. Their 2-1 lead appeared to be safe with Bowen in the circle as Union could only muster one infield single in the second and third innings. In the fourth, a clutch two-out single by Tanner scored Garrett, knotting the game at 2-2.

Chambers dodged a bullet in Commerce's half of the fourth as two singles were wasted when a base running miscue derailed their



In her first high school appearance, freshman Jillian Lawn fired a two-hit shutout and doubled against Banks. Photo/Todd Forrest

hopes to regain an advantage.

With momentum on the side of the Purple and Gold, the Lady Panthers seized the opportunity and posted three runs in the fifth for a 5-2 lead.

Once again, leadoff hitter Crystal Busbee kickstarted the inning with a leadoff double and scored when Chambers reached on an error. Seabolt entered for Chambers on the base paths and Courtney Busbee brought her in with a double to left. With one out, Garrett scored the Union catcher with a sacrifice fly to center.

Commerce never threatened again although they picked up a run in their final at bat after a Union error and a passed ball led to an unearned run. Chambers improved to 2-0 following the victory, giving up two earned runs, six hits, three walks, and striking out two. Courtney Busbee finished 3-for-3 at the plate with 2 RBIs and a double. Tanner was 3-for-3, Crystal Busbee went 2-for-4, Lawn finished 1-for-3 with a double and 2 RBIs. In the third and final game of the evening, the Lady Panthers squared off with Banks County, a former Region 8-AA foe until 2011-12. Yet this wasn't the same Lady Leopard squad that Union

would awaken after getting out of a defensive jam.

Kelsey Nix reached on an error to open the sixth and Tanner followed with a base hit. Then Lawn came through with her bat, driving in the first runs of her high school career when she doubled home Kelsey Nix and Tanner, making it a 7-2 game. Later in the frame, Karley Nix scored Lawn with an RBI groundout for an 8-2 advantage.

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used as a doormat for most of the previous decade. Instead, they were coming off back-to-back State Tournament appearances as a member of a tough Region 7-AAA that includes recent State Champs in Buford and White County, to go with the always stout Dawson County and Fanning County squads.

In a matchup to determine the bracket champs, Coach Stewart gave the ball to Lawn. In her first high school outing the Lady Panthers' freshman stifled the Banks County lineup, tossing a two-hit shutout, walking one, while surviving three Union errors.

The Lady Leopards led off the first with a base hit but Lawn settled into a groove and didn't allow another hit until the sixth inning.

In the early going, both pitchers brought their A-game and the contest remained scoreless until the top half of the fourth when Chambers broke the tie with an RBI double, scoring Karley Nix who reached on a bunt single.

In the seventh, Union tacked on three insurance runs for good measure. Garrett led off the inning with a single to center. Courtney Busbee was hit by a 1-0 pitch, and King moved both runners into scoring position. Kelsey Nix smacked an opposite field single scoring both Garrett and Courtney Busbee. A two-out single by Crystal Busbee brought in Kelsey Nix, giving Union a 4-0 lead entering Banks' final at bat.

A hit-by-pitch and two errors brought the tying run to the plate, but the Lady Panthers caught a break when Union's freshman outfielder Anna Owenby snagged a line drive in right and caught a Lady Leopard baserunner napping at first for a double play, ending the threat.

Garrett went 2-for-3 with a double and an RBI and Kelsey Nix was 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs.

"We struggled hitting this game," Coach Stewart said. "Jillian pitched a great game. She only gave up two hits with one walk and pitched a shutout in her first varsity appearance."

Last Wednesday in a scrimmage, Union defeated Dawson County 11-1.

On Tuesday, Union County will travel to Blue Ridge to take on Fanning County from Class AAA before hosting Class AAAA's White County on Thursday, both games at 5:55 p.m.

Allison: tackling, blocking the focus of Friday's scrimmage at Sonoraville

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Football season is here. The wait is over.

After hours in the weight room during the winter, spring practice, summer workouts, conditioning, and preseason practices, the Panthers will get the chance to put a helmet on someone that isn't wearing the same color headgear on Friday.

After nine months of preparation, drawing X's and O's, and putting their players through game-like simulations, the Panther coaches will get their first look at how their team will react in a full contact, full speed, gametime situation.

"What I want to learn on Friday is how well we tackle, and offensively, how well we block," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "I think we can throw and catch because we've done that all summer long."

As for Panther fans who are willing to make the trip to Sonoraville, this will also be their first look at Union County's explosive offense who return nearly everybody from 2013, including First Team All-Region selections, junior quarterback Joseph Mancuso and senior receiver Jacob Rogers.

"I'll be paying close attention to how well we execute the offensive and defensive



Left: Coach Allison works with lineman during an after school practice last week. Right: defensive backs practice coverage and their ball hawking skills. Photos/Todd Forrest




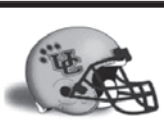
plays that we've put in at this point," Allison said.

As for how much playing time the starters will see, that has yet to be determined, but Allison expects them to play at least one half.

Sonoraville High School is located in Gordon County on Hwy. 53, west of Fairmount and southeast of Calhoun. The physical address is 7340 Fairmount Hwy SE, Calhoun, Ga. Kickoff is at 7 p.m.



Returning quarterback Joseph Mancuso looks to lead a high octane offense that returns everyone at the skill positions. Photo/Todd Forrest

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UCHS Panther Football Team and Coaches
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* Door Prizes * Bring your camera for photos

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Meet the 2014 Panther Football Players.
Take your picture with your favorite player.**