

Sports

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Lady Panthers take down Class AAAA's 6th ranked Walnut Grove Union sweeps Oglethorpe, shutout Rabun, and abuse North Murray; improve to 10-0

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The Lady Panthers (10-0, 3-0) made quite a statement at the University of North Georgia softball tournament on Friday by knocking off 6th ranked Walnut Grove from AAAA.

Clinging to a 4-2 advantage, Union was able to make the score stick, successfully fending off Walnut Grove (10-1) - handing the Lady Warriors their first loss of 2014.

Although, at times, it seemed like the Lady Panthers were trying to keep Walnut Grove within striking distance by committing seven errors. However, Union's sophomore ace Laken Chambers kept the opposition in check by firing a complete game five-hitter, fanning four, walking two, and allowing one earned run.

Riding high following a win over arguably the toughest team on their schedule, Union battered Class AAA's North Murray (4-5) in four innings with a 13-0 victory. Chambers fired a two-hit shutout - improving her record to 8-0 on the year.

In her win over Walnut Grove, she recorded just four strikeouts but none bigger than her two-out, two-on, K in the top of the second to keep it a scoreless game.

The Lady Warriors were able to get on the board in the third when consecutive, two-out doubles resulted in a run.

In Union's half of the third, Crystal Busbee drew a one-out walk allowing Chambers to tie things up with a double to center.

Courtney Busbee opened the bottom of the fourth with an opposite field single to kick start a three-run inning. Kelsey Nix lined a double to left - scoring Courtney Busbee. Sophomore Lydia Arrowwood brought Kelsey Nix home with a double of her own and Crystal Busbee reached on an error, that scored Arrowwood to make it a 4-1 game.

"We had a big fourth inning to break away and eventually come away with the win," Union Head Coach Jessica Stewart said. "Kelsey and Lydia both had two big hits a piece to provide most of the offense."

Both teams went down 1-2-3 in the fifth inning but Walnut Grove made some noise in the sixth putting two aboard with one out. Chambers would settle in and get out of the jam with a fly out and a pop up.

Union picked up back-to-back singles in the sixth but were unable to punch across the insurance runs.

With one out in their final at bat, the Lady Warriors took advantage of two Union errors, a wild pitch, and a walk, to make it a 4-2 game. With the tying run on second, Chambers induced a grounder to first base to squash the rally.

"Laken had a great game and seems to be in the zone and focused," Coach Stewart said. "Defense had two errors but I was proud of them because Walnut Grove hit the ball hard at us a couple times."

Prior to Friday's wins, the Lady Panthers were coming off a 1-0 Region win over a much-improved Rabun County (5-4, 2-2) on Thursday.

Chambers fired a one-hit shutout, striking out five while not allowing a walk.

"Laken pitched a gem,"



Senior leadoff hitter/shortstop Crystal Busbee avoids a tag and scores an early run during the first game with Oglethorpe County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Coach Stewart said. "She only gave up one hit and was on the mark with all her pitches."

Chambers also came through at the plate with a two-out double in the bottom of the sixth inning that just missed leaving the ball park. Instead, her line drive smacked halfway up the centerfield fence presenting the home team with a prime scoring opportunity. With freshman Braden Poteete entering as a courtesy runner for Chambers, junior Maddie Garrett singled to left, scoring Poteete.

The Lady Panthers were limited to five hits in the contest but two of them came with two outs in the sixth.

"They (Rabun) have a new coach this year and already split with the defending region champion Social Circle," Coach Stewart said. "They have a couple young players that are very talented, one especially being their pitcher. She kept us off balance and we struggled until the 6th inning."

Clinging to a 1-0 lead in the top of the seventh, Chambers retired the Lady Wildcats in order for her first shutout of the season.

The Union vs Rabun pitching duel concluded in less than an hour. Neither pitcher allowed a walk and the defenses behind them were lights out, playing error-free softball.

"Laken came up with a big hit then we ran Braden Poteete for her and Maddie Garrett came up with a huge hit which scored Braden," Coach Stewart said. "I was very proud of that region win, the girls hit when they needed it and played flawless defense. This was definitely a team effort and it took all of them to get that win."

In the doubleheader with Oglethorpe (2-8, 1-2), it took a while for the Lady Panther bats to wake up, but when they did, it was all over but the crying. Chambers went deep in consecutive at bats in the first game and Garrett left the yard in the seventh inning of game two. She also made a running catch in centerfield to save at least two runs. Sophomore Kendra Tanner tripled in both games of the doubleheader, as well.

In the first contest, it was a 2-2 game entering the bottom half of the fifth before Union posted five runs in the inning and another in the sixth for an 8-2 final.

Chambers took the ball and struck out a season-high eight batters. In seven innings of work she allowed five hits, two walks, and



Maddie Garrett had a big day at the plate during game two of the doubleheader with Oglethorpe. Photo/Todd Forrest

two unearned runs. Hallye King finished with a 2-for-3 day at the plate with 3 RBIs.

In the second meeting, it was a 5-4 game in Union's favor before they put up four runs in the fifth, one in the sixth, and two in the seventh for a 12-4 victory. The score could have been even more one-sided had the Lady Panthers not committed seven errors.

With freshman pitcher Jillian Lawn getting her second start of the season, the defense didn't do much to take the pressure off their young righty.

"We hit well but also had seven errors for Jillian to work with," Coach Stewart said. "She battled through and the offense backed her up. Maddie Garrett had a big homerun. Oglethorpe is a good solid team with eight seniors."

Luckily the Lady Panther bats - Lawn's included - came to the aid with 12 runs worth of support.

Tanner was an extremely tough out for the Lady Patriots going 3-for-4 with a triple, 3 runs, 2 RBIs, and a walk.

Tanner also made significant contributions during Union's four-run fifth. Following a Garrett walk and a Courtney Busbee

single, Tanner stroked a RBI single to center that scored Garrett. Courtney Busbee would also cross the plate due to a throwing error.

Kelsey Nix brought home a run on another Lady Patriot error as the visitors unraveled. Lawn stepped to the plate and singled up the middle to score Tanner. A new pitcher and two batters later, Oglethorpe walked the bases loaded to give the Purple and Gold a 9-4 lead.

Tanner added another RBI single in the sixth, making it a 10-2 game. In the seventh, Arrowwood led off the inning with a base hit setting the stage for a two-run blast by Garrett.

The win gives Lawn a 2-0 mark this season following her complete game vs Oglethorpe where she struck out two, walked one, allowed six hits, and only one of the four runs she surrendered was earned.

Her catcher, Courtney Busbee helped the freshman's cause with a 2-for-4, game that included 3 runs and a double. Kelsey Nix had a double and 2 RBIs and Hallye King smacked a RBI double.

In Union's 8-2 win in game one, the Lady Panthers doled out 15 hits to Oglethorpe's five.

"Both games in the double-



Sophomore Kendra Tanner laces a base hit into right field vs Oglethorpe County last week. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Hallye King smokes a two-run double in the second inning of game two vs Oglethorpe. Photo/Todd Forrest

header were closer than what the score showed," Coach Stewart said. "In the first game we didn't go ahead until the 5th inning. They have a decent pitcher and a very solid hitting team. We had a big day at the plate to make up for it with 5 girls going for multiple hits."

Deadlocked in a 2-2 tie entering Union's half of the fifth, Coach Stewart's lineup surged ahead with five runs, all coming with two outs in the frame. The offensive onslaught began with a one-out double by Crystal Busbee. Following a strikeout, Chambers came to the plate with two outs and sent the first offering she saw high and deep into the parking lot beyond the purple "2009 Elite Eight" sign in centerfield.

The two-out bomb brought new life to the Lady Panthers lineup. With the bases cleared Garrett kept the inning alive with a single to right followed by Courtney Busbee's single to left. Kelsey Nix loaded the bases when the Oglethorpe first baseman couldn't handle her grounder.

That set the stage for King who brought in Garrett and Courtney Busbee with a base hit to left, giving her team a 6-2 lead. Tanner walked and Arrowwood recorded an RBI single making it a 7-2 game entering the sixth.

The Lady Panthers picked up another run off another big fly by Chambers - her third of the year - with one out in the sixth, giving the sophomore an 8-2 cushion when she returned to the circle.

Courtney Busbee went 3-for-4 at the plate, scoring three



Lydia Arrowwood singles in Union's 1-0 win over Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

times. Crystal Busbee was 2-for-4 with 2 runs, Chambers was 2-for-3 with 3 RBIs, Garrett was 2-for-4 with an RBI, Kelsey Nix singled and scored, Tanner tripled and walked, and Arrowwood was 1-for-3 with an RBI.

In Union's 13-0 win over North Murray, the Lady Panthers posted 10 runs in the fourth to end the game via the 'mercy rule.'

Chambers pitched a four-inning shutout while only yielding two hits.

Garrett was 3-for-3 with a triple, two doubles and 3 RBIs. Chambers went 2-for-3 with 2 RBIs, Crystal Busbee was 1-for-3 with a double and 3 RBIs. Lawn went 2-for-2 with a triple and Kelsey Nix finished 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs.

King and Courtney Busbee also drove in runs for Union. Poteete scored twice, fellow freshman Logan Seabolt scored once, and Karley Nix also scored a run.

"We jumped on them early and continued to hit throughout the entire game and added great pitching and defense for a complete win," Coach Stewart said.

On Monday the Lady Panthers traveled to Dawson County. On Thursday, Union will visit Greene County for another Region 8-AA doubleheader beginning at 4 p.m.

Going into Dawson County on Monday, Coach Stewart was three wins shy of 200 for her career - all coming at Union County. Coach Stewart came to Union County in 2006 and led the Lady Panthers to the Elite 8 in Columbus. Since then, she has won two Region Championships, just missed a third in 2012, and made three appearances in the Elite 8, including a State Runner Up finish in 2010.



Freshman Jillian Lawn gets the win vs Oglethorpe. Photo/Todd Forrest



Laken Chambers (left) and Kelsey Nix (right). Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County Lady Panthers Head Coach Jessica Stewart approaches her 200th coaching victory - all coming at UCHS. Photo/Todd Forrest