

Sports

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Lady Panthers starting to peak in time for postseason

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Union County (15-10, 8-3) will be riding a four-game winning streak entering the final week of the regular season.

Losers of seven of their last nine games, Union roared back with an undefeated week, sparked by a pair of non-Region wins over East Hall and Lumpkin, then capped off in front of the home crowd by sweeping a double header from Washington-Wilkes on Senior Night.

The Lady Panthers traveled to Lumpkin on Monday and have games at Rabun County and at North Murray slated for this week. Union was victorious in the first meeting against each of the three teams and will be looking for the season sweep.

Union has already locked themselves into the third seed in 8-AA and will host Washington-Wilkes in the opening round of the Region Tournament. The matchup will be a best 2-of-3 series beginning on Tuesday, Oct. 1st. If necessary, the third game would be played on Oct. 2nd. If the Lady Panthers take the series, they would secure their fifth consecutive State Playoff berth.

Union County 3 East Hall 1

The Lady Panthers paid a visit to Valhalla last Monday with the direction of their season at stake.

And despite being a non-Region game, Union left with a much needed confidence boost, thanks to a 3-1 victory over the East Hall Lady Vikings.

Freshman Laken Chambers' drove in all three runs on three hits that included a two-run homer (2). She also picked up the win, working a complete game, scattering six hits and striking out seven.

The Lady Vikings, however, struck first in the second inning thanks to a lead off double and a two-out single.

It would remain a 1-0 game until Union got two in the fourth. Sophomore Johnah Langston reached on an error, setting the stage for Chambers. The Lady Panther pitcher sent a high fly over the centerfield fence for a two-run blast.

Union added an insurance run in the fifth when junior Halle King reached on a leadoff walk. Junior Courtney Busbee got aboard on an infield single, and Langston



Madison Rich singles vs Washington-Wilkes Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman Kendra Tanner

loaded the bases when the East Hall shortstop couldn't handle a grounder. With the bags packed, Chambers came through again with a base hit to center, scoring King.

You could say Union was simply returning the favor for a loss to East Hall earlier this month at the Veterans' Tournament in Oconee County. But to Union County Head Coach Jessica Stewart, this game was about regrouping her troops and getting back to playing softball the right way – the Union County way.

The earlier loss to the Lady Vikings came in the midst of one of Union's worst losing spells under Coach Stewart's command. However, following a win over White County and an extra inning loss at Jefferson, Coach Stewart had a feeling that her Lady Panthers were about to find their groove with the post season right around the corner.

"These girls are capable of big things," Coach Stewart said last week after three tough Region losses. "We just need all aspects clicking at the same time. We've got to hit and can't make errors. I've told the girls this is the most important time of the year and if we get hot



Maddie Garrett and Head Coach Jessica Stewart Photo/Todd Forrest

now we will do well in the post season."

Union County 8 Lumpkin County 4

The positive mojo of the young softballers continued to build as they went to Lumpkin County and feasted on the Lady Indians' pitching staff to the tune of 8 runs on 12 hits.

Five Union hits went for extra bases including a two-run blast (3) of the bat of freshman Laken Chambers, staking Union to a 7-1 lead in the fifth inning.

"We are playing much better softball all the way around," Coach Stewart said. "We started hitting and both (Crystal) Busbee and Chambers are giving us an opportunity to win. I felt like the Jefferson game could have went either way and that proved to the girls that we can win the Region this year regardless of the probability of us going in the tournament as the No. 3 seed."

Chambers went 4-for-4 at the plate with 5 RBIs, two doubles, and a homer. Sophomore Maddie Garrett and Courtney Busbee each doubled and finished with a 2-for-3 day. King was 1-for-3 with an RBI



Sophomore Karley Nix with a base hit. Photo/Todd Forrest

advanced her into scoring position with a bunt and King scored her with an RBI single to left. Lumpkin got two in their final at bat thanks to a leadoff walk, a triple, and a single.

Union County 9 Washington-Wilkes 0

Chambers (8-5) threw a two-hitter as the Lady Panthers run-ruled the Lady Tigers in the first game of a double header.

As Union County honored seniors Madison Rich and Allie Stroman, the Lady Panthers quickly disposed of Washington-Wilkes so the Senior Night celebration could get started early.

Sophomore Karley Nix led the offense with a 2-for-3 day that included a double and a career-high 4 RBIs. Courtney Busbee doubled during a 2-for-3 performance that resulted in 2 RBIs. Crystal Busbee was 1-for-2 with a walk, a double, and a run.

Union County also got plenty of help from the freshmen on Senior Night with Chambers finishing 2-for-3 with an RBI, and the win from the circle. Kendra Tanner and Arrowood finished with two runs a piece.

The Lady Panthers snatched control of the game right off the bat thanks to a 6-run first inning. They would put up three more in the fifth to bring the mercy rule into play.

Crystal Busbee doubled and Rich singled to open the game. King loaded the bases with a walk and Chambers scored Crystal Busbee with an opposite field single. Courtney Busbee hit into a fielder's choice that scored Rich,

8-AA Region Standings

| Team | OVR | LEAG |
|----------------------|---------|--------|
| Jefferson | 19-5-0 | 11-1-0 |
| Current Streak: 3 W | | |
| Social Circle | 18-5-0 | 10-2-0 |
| Current Streak: 1 W | | |
| Union County | 15-10-0 | 8-3-0 |
| Current Streak: 4 W | | |
| Oglethorpe County | 13-10-0 | 5-7-0 |
| Current Streak: 2 L | | |
| Rabun County | 9-14-0 | 4-7-0 |
| Current Streak: 2 W | | |
| Washington-Wilkes | 9-14-0 | 3-9-0 |
| Current Streak: 4 L | | |
| Greene County | 0-12-0 | 0-12-0 |
| Current Streak: 12 L | | |

The 8-AA standings are set with the exception of fourth place Oglethorpe County and fifth place Rabun County.

If Rabun defeats Union on Tuesday, the Lady Wildcats would move into the fourth spot and host Oglethorpe County in the No. 4 vs No. 5 series.

Union County will open Region 8-AA play at home on Oct. 1st with Washington Wilkes at 4 and 6 p.m.

The "if necessary" game would be Oct. 2nd at 5 p.m.

If victorious, Union

Garrett smacked a base hit, then Karley Nix singled in two. Langston brought in the fifth and sixth run on an error by the Washington-Wilkes first baseman.

Both offenses would remain silent until the fifth when Chambers led off with a base hit. Courtney Busbee followed with an RBI double. Karley Nix's two-run double ended the contest in the fifth at 9-0.

Union County 15 Washington-Wilkes 8

On three different occasions it appeared Union would run-ruled Washington-Wilkes in the second game, but that wasn't the case.

The Lady Panthers held an 11-2 lead after two innings but we unable to score in the third or fourth innings to put it away. Union eventually made it 12-2 but the Lady Tigers put up six runs in the fifth to make it a game again at 12-8. However, three more Union runs in the sixth and Chambers returning to pitch the final two innings of the contest was enough to put Washington-Wilkes on ice.

With the Lady Tigers returning to Blairsville next week for the first round of the Region Tournament, Union was looking to make a statement, and the offense certainly did. The Lady Panthers will face Washington-Wilkes in a best 2-out-of-3 series beginning on Oct. 1st with Union's fifth consecutive State Playoff berth on the line.

"We were playing in honor of Rich and Stroman and the girls were fired up and came out hitting well," Coach Stewart said. "We needed that just in case we see them in the First Round of the Region Tournament."

Courtney Busbee, Kelsey Nix, Rich, Garrett, and Tanner each drove in two runs. While Karley Nix, Chambers, and King added an RBI a piece.

Crystal Busbee (7-5) got the win, working 5 innings, allowing 8 hits, 4 earned out, and striking out five.

Chambers gave up one hit in 2 innings, striking out five in the save.

Union County traveled to Lumpkin County on Monday before rounding out Region play on Tuesday at Rabun.

The regular season concludes on Wednesday when the Lady Panthers visit North Murray for a makeup game.

Union County Softball honors its seniors

By Todd Forrest
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Union County Softball said goodbye to its two seniors last Thursday night at the Union County Softball Complex.

Madison Rich and Allie Stroman were freshmen when Union finished second in State after winning the program's first Region 8-AA Championship.

The following year they were on Union County's second straight 8-AA Championship winning team.

Last season, both were full time starters and helped lead Union back to the Region Title Game where they came up one run short.

Now they are looking to go out with four State Playoff trips on their resume and a third Region Championship when the dust settles next month.

"It has been a joy to coach and watch Allie and Madison over the years develop into productive athletes and young ladies," Union County Head Softball Coach Jessica Stewart said. "They have both become an important part of our team and program. They are very dedicated and I truly appreciate being able to coach the two of them."

Madison Rich: Madison is the daughter of Ricky and Sabrina Rich and has played softball for 13 years and for five years at Union County High School.

Her most memorable moments were the State Championship Game her freshman year against Buford. Camping and going into the haunted house during her sophomore year. Making Coach "Stew" mad by singing on the bus rides, and playing every season with Allie (Stroman).

"I would like to thank



Union County's Allie Stroman (second from left) with family during Senior Night festivities. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County's Madison Rich (second from right) with family during Senior Night festivities. Photo/Todd Forrest

God first and most of all because without him, none of this would be possible," Rich said.

She thanked her parents and Matthew and Mimi for coming to her games throughout the years, supporting her no matter what, and always being her No. 1 fans.

"I also want to thank Allie (Stroman) for never giving up and sticking with me to the end, and always being there for a pick-me-up," she said.

Finally she thanked Coach Stewart, Coach Cagle, and all of the other coaches who have helped her along the



Stroman and Rich embrace way, and of course her teammates to become the player she is.

Allie Stroman: Allie is the daughter of Jay and Tonya Stroman and has played softball for 13 years and for four years at Union County High School.

Her most memorable moments were the camping trip during her sophomore year when the coaches took the team to a haunted house and "Cagle thought all the particles in her pictures were ghosts."

Watching Coach Cagle and Coach Stewart zip-line at the team camp, beating Jefferson on "our field," and getting to play every season with one of her best friends, Madison Rich.

Her future plans are to attend either Mercer or Vanderbilt University and major in Biology. Then become a pediatrician and provide health care to the children in the United States and around the world.

She would like to pass her bat down to her younger sister Holly Stroman.

"I love her very much," Allie Stroman said to her freshman sister, Holly.