

Sports

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Garrison captures State Title, Webb comes in fifth

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CARROLLTON - Freshman Emma Garrison sent shock waves throughout Georgia on Saturday after defeating more than 190 of the top runners in the state to give Union County its seventh State Championship.

The favorite to win and defending State Champion, Westminister's Sahara Fletcher, tapped out after 1.5 miles of the race when Garrison continued to stretch a lead that she grabbed early.

"Fletcher may have thought that Emma was a rabbit sent out to set the pace really fast to knock a lot of the girls out of contention," Union County Head Coach Jackie Hughes said. "She was still behind Emma after the first 1.5 miles then after that she just dropped. She may have just figured out that this is not a rabbit, this is the real thing."

Union's freshman held off Wesleyan's Caroline Reed and Ellie Bradach to finish in the top spot, checking in at 19:56.

"I normally try to start out strong and keep getting faster," Garrison said. "I worked really hard over the summer with the goal of breaking the school record and I did that earlier in the year. I just wanted to do my best today."

Even more impressive is that only two of the Top 15 runners, including Garrison were from public schools.

Garrison is also UCHS' first female State Champion.

Coach Hughes has seen tremendous growth with her freshman runner over the season, and isn't surprised that she peaked at the right moment.

"The last few races she's been jumping out to an early lead," Coach Hughes said. "As she's gained confidence in herself she has started taking a few more chances. In the earlier races she would pace herself and stay with the lead pack and not necessarily be the leader but stay with the leaders. As she gained confidence she started jumping out into the lead and maintaining it. The last several races we ran she just took off, got the lead, and never looked back."

The Union County Lady

Panthers finished seventh overall behind Wesleyan, Westminister, Lovett, Bleckley County, Jefferson, and Thomasville.

Union's Rachel Todd finished 45th in 23:42, Rachel Vester was 47th at 23:53. Rounding out the Lady Panther Top-Five were Stephanie Busse in 61st at 24:42 and Ansley Garrison in 80th at 25:03.

Other runners for Union included Alyssa Arnold in 94th at 26:03 and Kenna Bauman at 134th in 28:37.

Union County's Jeremy Webb finished fifth after battling it out with the 2011 State Champion, Jordan Flowers of Wesleyan for Fourth Place.

Webb, who finished 26th at last year's State Meet, got caught back in the pack early on but battled his way into the Top 5.

"When we started off, I got stuck in the first turn and it probably cost me about eight spaces," Webb said. "I just followed Coach Hughes' advice to not give all of my energy going up the hills and get them after the top, and that worked for me for most of the race."

Coach Hughes was also impressed with Webb's ability to work his way through the field.

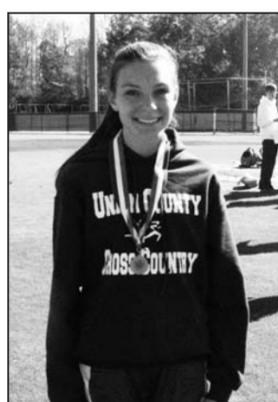
"He did really well," Coach Hughes said. "He was in seventh coming by me the first time, then he worked his way into fourth, until he was passed at the very end by just a hair."

Webb came in at 17:50 to lead Union County to a 14th overall finish. Model's Chris Akins brought home the State Title in 17:07 with Second Place going to Chattooga's Damien Porter - only 10 seconds ahead of Webb.

Cristian Garcia came in 85th for Union at 20:19, Will Stone in 105th at 20:46, Aaron Stafford in 109th at 20:51, Ryan Rogers in 119th at 21:01, Jacob Cook in 128th at 21:16, and Andrew Nelson at 24:05.

"I'm very pleased with Jeremy's performance," Coach Hughes said. "I was pleased with the whole crew. Team-wise I was very pleased. At one time, I would have been happy with a 22nd place finish for the boys so I'm very pleased with a 14th place finish. The girls finishing in the Top-10 was outstanding. This has been a memorable season from the very beginning."

With Webb being a se-



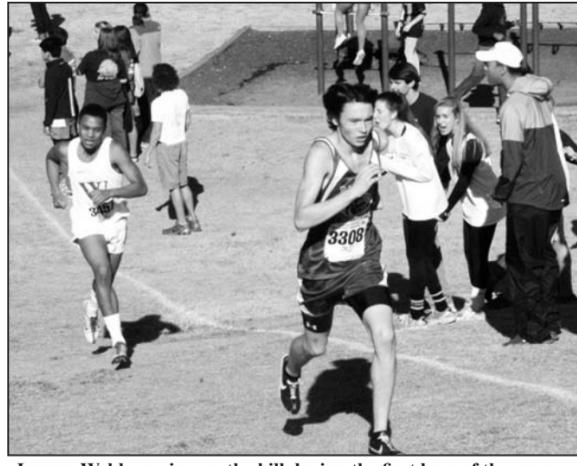
Emma Garrison



Jeremy Webb



Coach Hughes and the Lady Panthers before the start of the meet.



Jeremy Webb coming up the hill during the first loop of the course.



Emma Garrison had already distanced herself early in the race.

nior and Garrison only a freshman, both have two different futures ahead. Webb would like to continue running at the next level, while Emma Garrison plans on breaking more records at Union County High School.

"I want to run at the college level and major in Physical Education and become a Cross Country coach at a high school or college somewhere," Webb said.

Webb set out to break Chris Jones' State Meet time, but was unable to accomplish that. Although, Coach Hughes was quick to point out that this isn't the same Carrollton course that Jones ran.

"This was a whole new State Course this year," Coach Hughes said. "They added another 100 meters and increased the difficulty with some extra hills. He wasn't running the same course that Jones ran so it's kind of hard to prepare. I still think that his improvement from last year was really, really good. I'm very pleased with his performance."

Meanwhile, Emma Garrison doesn't plan on becoming

complacent despite winning her first-ever State Meet.

"I want to keep trying harder at each and every meet and I really want to see if I can get below the 19-minute mark."

Her coach believes that as long as she continues to work hard, she will have no problem getting her times under 19 minutes.

"I definitely see her breaking 19:00," Coach Hughes said. "The course yesterday, the times that were being posted were about a minute slower than from what they have been in the past. I think that had to do with the changes they made to the course. For her to be able to post a 19:56 on that course, I could see her easily breaking 19:00 at Unicoi or Murphy in the coming years."

"Of the 16 kids that went to Carrollton, Jeremy was the only one who had been to the state meet before," Hughes added. "There were five freshmen, one sophomore, and one senior that ran for the girls, and two seniors, a junior, three sophomores, and a freshman that ran for the boys. To be so



Coach Hughes gives the Panthers some last minute instructions. Cross Country Photos by Todd Forrest

young, they handled the pressure and nerves of the State Meet very well."

Coach Hughes also wanted to thank everyone that played a part in the magical 2012 UCHS Cross Country season.

"I would like to thank, United Community Bank for their donation to the team on the trip to State," Coach Hughes said. "I also want to thank the community and the

parents for their support of the program and the kids. We had a lot of people in Carrollton and that was a long way to travel for a meet. We've gotten a lot of support and the parents have been great this year. My biggest thank you goes to the kids for all of their hard work. They were the ones who made this season a great one. I could go on and on about how great this group of kids are."

Dragons post 21 in second quarter as Panthers fall 42-7

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JEFFERSON - The Panthers' season came to a close on Friday night following a 42-7 loss to 9th-ranked Jefferson (9-1).

The Dragons held a 6-0 advantage after one quarter before scoring 21 straight points that put the Panthers in a 27-0 hole at the break.

Jefferson stretched its lead to 42-0 with 10:42 to play before Union's freshman running back Nick Whittle broke off a 28-yard touchdown run with just over two minutes left.

Union County and its coaching staff were behind the 8-ball all evening long as the Panthers looked for anything to build upon.

Jefferson only punted once the entire game while holding the Panthers without a first down until the third quarter.

"We just got beat by a team that was better than us," Union County Head Coach Brian Allison said. "This game was a measuring stick to determine where our program needs to be headed."

To make matters worse, senior quarterback T Bentley was knocked out of the game, forcing freshman Joseph Mancuso into the game for the entire second half.

When it was all said and done, we started 10 ninth or 10th graders out of 22 positions, so that is bright for the future of Union County football," Coach Allison said. "I thought some of our young guys came in and played well and I am really proud of them."

Mancuso moved the



Craig Jones and Cody Davenport lead the Panthers onto the field for the final time. Photo/Todd Forrest

chains for Union early in the second half when he hit senior Josh Kim for a first down strike.

The freshman quarterback then hooked up with sophomore Jacob Rogers for another first down, inside Dragon territory. The Panthers would take advantage of two Jefferson penalties to reach the Red Zone but a Mancuso pass was picked off in the end zone on fourth down.

"It was definitely an exhilarating experience, my adrenaline was flowing" Mancuso said about being inserted into the game against a team like Jefferson.

"It was crazy but I wanted to go in. I had prepared for it."

The Dragons scored on the first possession of the game, going 64 yards, chewing four-and-a-half minutes off the clock.

Jefferson connected on a 17-yard touchdown pass to take a 6-0 lead after Kim blocked the

extra-point attempt.

A three-and-out by the Panther offense was followed by a Jefferson punt, and another Panther punt to end the first quarter.

The Dragons converted a 4th-and-2 early in the second quarter that led to a 1-yard scoring run. The Panthers snuffed out the two-point conversion attempt and Jefferson held a 12-0 advantage with 9:43 left before halftime.

Again, the Panthers would go three-and-out and Jefferson took over at midfield.

Less than two minutes later, Jefferson found the end zone again to make it a 19-0 game.

The Dragons stretched their lead to 27-0 when they scored on a 3rd-and-Goal from the 1-yard line, with 2:10 showing on the clock.

Late in the third quarter the Panther defense made a play when senior Clay Burnette picked off a Bryant Shirreffs' pass. The play would be wiped

off the books after Union was flagged for a highly questionable unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, giving the ball back to the Dragons.

A few plays later, Jefferson added another score from a yard out to take a 34-0 lead into the fourth quarter.

Less than 10 seconds into the final frame, Union suffered from a botched punt snap forcing senior kicker Eric Hougrand to throw the ball out of the back of the end zone for a safety.

Following the free kick, Jefferson connected on a 34-yard touchdown pass on the first play of the series.

The Panthers would reach the end zone on Whittle's 28-yard run with 2:15 remaining in the contest.

"We made a lot of mistakes in that ball game. The most disappointing was the penalties we had called on us. We're going to correct that in the off season and continue getting



Cody Davenport lowers the boom at Jefferson. Photo/Todd Forrest



The UC defense awaits orders from the sideline. Photo/Todd Forrest

better. The Union County seniors leave UCHS with two winning records and the best home record since 2001.

"I'm extremely proud of these seniors' work ethic and dedication throughout the season and for the last four years," Coach Allison said. "They had two six win

seasons and hopefully they've got this program headed in the right direction and we can build on what they have accomplished to this point. I'm really proud of all that they have done. They came to work every day. It wasn't always perfect and it wasn't always right but their hard work is what I will always remember about them."