

Sports

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Henry punctuates storied HS career with Piedmont signing

By Todd Forrest
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Union County four-year starter Houston Henry will continue his basketball career at Demorest's Piedmont University following last month's signing day ceremony at UCHS.

"[Piedmont] felt like home," Henry said. "The campus, the area, the community everything about it. It felt like a second home for me."

Henry, a three-time All-Region selection, begins the next chapter after wrapping up a storybook career as a Panther by leading Union County to the State title game as a senior. During his four years at UCHS, the point guard set a school record with 626 assists while amassing 1,517 points, 560 rebounds and 240 steals.

As a senior, Henry earned a First-Team All-State nod, recording two triple-doubles while averaging 18 points, 8 assists, 6 rebounds and 3 steals a game. At the same time, his Panthers team reached the State finals and notched 26-6 record in a region that also included the Private School State Runner-up (North Cobb Christian).

As a junior, the Panthers topped 20 wins for the first time in 17 years and won back-to-back regular season region titles with Henry averaging 19 points, 6 assists, 5 rebounds and 3 steals per game.

It was after his junior campaign that Henry began



Union County senior point guard Houston Henry, alongside family, signs with Piedmont University during last month's signing day ceremony at UCHS. Photo/Todd Forrest

considering Piedmont as an option when he was approached by then-Piedmont head coach Greg Neeley during an AAU tournament in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

"He was there and he saw me and came and spoke with me -- that's when we started to bond," Henry said. "After that we texted and stayed in touch throughout the summer. I had a visit in early August and we built a good relationship."

After accepting an offer from Piedmont, Henry's future was put into limbo when Neeley

departed and the school hired University of North Georgia assistant JC Cavin as its new head coach. Cavin, who served as an assistant at Piedmont under Neeley from 2020-2024, was familiar with Henry and quickly put any doubts to rest.

"I talked to him last night and I like him," Henry said. "He's seen me play before and he's familiar with me, so I feel like we're going to do some good things this year."

During his sophomore season, Henry's Panthers won 19 games and advanced to the

Sweet 16 after winning the regular season region title.

While starting as a freshman, Henry helped Union County qualify for its first region championship game in 21 years, allowing the Panthers to host a State playoff game for the first time in program history.

The year before Henry's arrival, Union County failed to win a game, and four years later, he departs on the heels of the program's most successful season in 54 years.

"Piedmont is getting a



Houston Henry graduates as the only player in UCHS history with at least 1,500 points, 500 assists, 500 rebounds and 200 steals. Photo/Todd Forrest

good one, both on and off the court," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said. "I'm super excited for him and his family. I know this is something he's worked for since he was tiny, and now he's got it. Now it's time to see what he does with it."

Henry received a few JUCO and prep school offers, but at the end of the day, it

came down to a choice between Piedmont and Berry.

"Piedmont felt more like a family," he said. "It felt more like home and I felt like I'd be a better fit there."

In closing, Henry thanked his family and everyone who's coached him throughout his basketball career.

Henry is the son of Hank and Meg (Collins) Henry.

Olympics: Class of 2026 goes back-to-back as Class of the Year

It doesn't look as if the Class of 2026 is going to give up their stranglehold on UCHS' Class of the Year trophy anytime soon.

During last Friday's Olympics event, the juniors took home the Academic championship, en route to their second straight Class of the Year title.

Since 2007, the Olympics have become an annual tradition at UCHS. The event is a year-long competition, which each class able to score points for school spirit, participation in extra curricular activities, good behavior and other areas.

Last Friday, the Olympics closed out with the athletic contests, where students from each grade battled it out in a variety of athletic competitions ranging from football throwing, 3-point shooting, soccer penalty kicks, spike

ball, sprinting, golf, weightlifting, tug of war and many others.

Next spring, the Class of 2026 will look to make it three-in-a-row, however, the Class of 2027 could have something to say after taking home the Athletic Cup trophy at this year's Olympics.

The Class of 2025 were shutout at this year's event but picked up hardware in the past. In 2023, the then-sophomores took home both the athletic and academic trophies but weren't able to overtake the seniors for Class of the Year.

As freshmen in 2022, the Class of 2025 finished first in attendance.

A year ago, the Class of 2024 earned both the academic and athletic trophies, but the Class of 2026 was able to slip past them for the Class of the Year trophy.



The juniors (Class of 2026) were crowned Academic champions and the overall Class of the Year at last Friday's Olympics.



The sophomores (Class of 2027) won the Athletic championship at last week's Olympics.



Senior Ethan Lester competes in the one of the athletic events on Friday.

Hayden Hughes continues baseball dreams at Truett-McConnell

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Union County two-sport star Hayden Hughes chose the diamond over the hardwood last month when he signed a scholarship with Cleveland's Truett-McConnell University.

"I considered playing basketball [at the next level], but I always told my mom and dad, if I had a choice between the two, I would choose baseball, it's always been my dream," he said.

After setting nearly every UCHS 3-point record during his basketball career, Hughes helped lead the Panthers baseball team to the most wins since 2016 and the program's first playoff berth in three years.

This past spring, despite missing the first month of the year due to the basketball playoffs, Hughes finished third on the team with a .327 batting average and a .797 OPS. He ended the year with three doubles, 15 RBIs, 17 runs and a .914 fielding percentage as Union's smooth-fielding shortstop.

He also logged nine strikeouts and a win over seven innings on the mound.

"I've always wanted to [play at Truett-McConnell]," he said. "[UCMS baseball coach Lane Everett] called and put in a word for me. I was able to get a workout and after I worked out for them, they texted me, so I called back and we were able to get everything



Union County senior Hayden Hughes, with parents, during his signing day ceremony last month at UCHS.
Photo/Todd Forrest

worked out right there on the spot. It's a super nice [campus] and I loved it over there, so I had pretty much made my decision that's where I wanted to go.

"It felt like home. It's a town just like here and it's not too different. I'm far enough where I can get away from home, but it's close enough that if anything happens I can be back in 45 minutes."

As a junior, Hughes led the Panthers with a .810 OPS, a .456 slugging percentage and two homers. His .281 batting average, two doubles, a triple,

10 runs and seven walks were all good enough for second on the team.

Over the last two years, Hughes was coached by Chris Robbins, however, Hughes has referred to Robbins as 'coach' for most of his life.

"I remember teaching Hayden [in P.E. at Union County Primary School] as a young kid, and if you've been around ball long enough you know, who can walk it, who can talk it, and who can do both, and he's definitely one of those kids," Robbins said. "Even from kindergarten, he

had a ball in his hand, probably because of his dad, but you could see his hand-eye coordination. Obviously, Hayden will do well. I talked to the coach [at Truett] and told him, not only is he getting a ball player, he's getting a guy who comes from good stock, and he'll do what he has to do to make his team better."

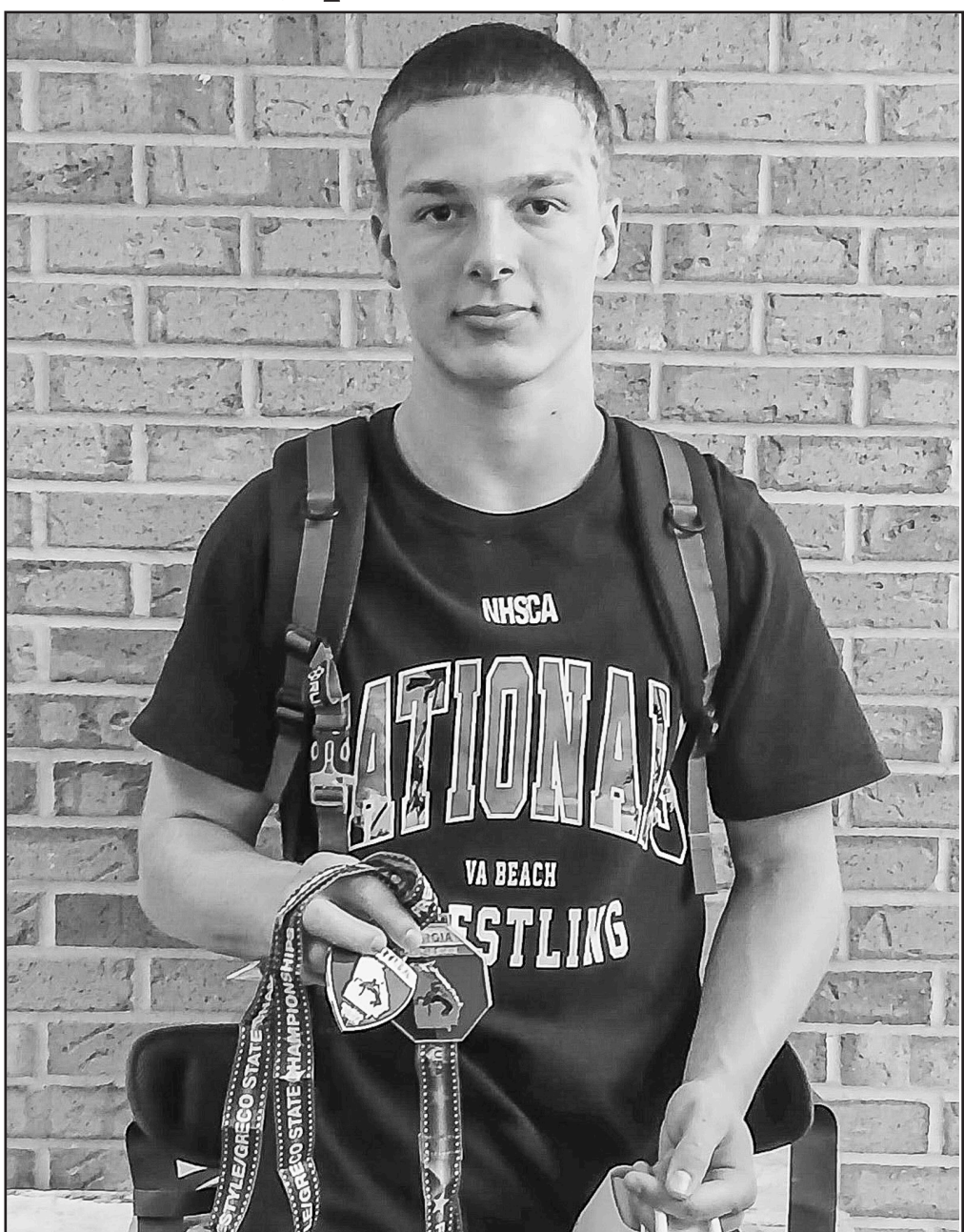
During his sophomore campaign, Hughes led the way with 12 RBIs and finished second with a .316 batting average and a .747 OPS.

"I really want to thank my mom and dad (Kevin



Hayden Hughes has been a UCHS staple at the shortstop position for the last three years. Photo/Todd Forrest and Kelly Hughes)," he said. "They've done so much for me, taking me to travel tournaments. And my dad, he's been my coach since I was little and he's always been my own personal mentor. If I'm doing something wrong, I don't have to ask him because he already knows what it is." Hughes plans on majoring in business.

Kilpatrick wins two USAW Georgia State titles, qualifies for Nationals



UCHS sophomore wrestler, Kevin Kilpatrick, won two State championship titles in the Olympic Styles at the USAW Georgia State Wrestling Championships on May 10. His placements qualify him for Nationals. Kilpatrick went undefeated in the Freestyle and Greco-Roman Cadet 16U / 165 lbs divisions, winning every match by technical superiority and with zero points scored against him. Kevin Kilpatrick has 11 USAW Georgia State Wrestling titles and is a two-time State finalist. Kilpatrick will continue his training and aims to represent Team Georgia as a member at the Cadet (16U) National Duals in Herriman, Utah this June. He will then travel to Fargo, North Dakota as a qualifier for the USMC FS/GR Nationals this summer in July.

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