

# Panthers go 6-0 at Towns County, host three-day youth camp

**By Todd Forrest Sports Editor** sports@nganews.com

The Union County men's basketball team was back on the court last week for the first time since early-March's Class AA State Championship game, traveling to Towns County for three games on Tuesday, June 3 and concluding the week by hosting a three-day youth camp.

The Panthers varsity and JV squads each played three games at Towns County, finishing the day with a perfect 6-0 combined record. The varsity team had a strong start to the summer, easily defeating Hayesville, North Carolina, in their opener. They also pulled away from Towns County and Tallulah Falls, winning each game by double digits.

"We had one practice on Monday before we went over [to Towns] and didn't even have everyone there [at practice]," Garrett said. "But we went over there and went 6-0 as a program between the varsity and JV, so we're happy about that."

In the game against Hayesville, the hot-shooting Panthers got off to an impressive start, quickly establishing a 21-0 lead. They built their advantage to 42 points at one stage and ultimately won the

game by over 35 points. "We came out hot and were doing what we always do: Playing our 1-3-1 (defense) and getting some deflections and transition baskets," Garrett said. "We shot the ball really well. I didn't keep stats but we had at least ten 3-pointers, maybe 14 or 15. So that was a good game to start our summer with.

"Everybody shot it really well. Holden Payne shot it well and hit three or four 3s. Ethan Hogsed hit three or four and Ryland Chambers hit three or four. Jackson Nichols shot it well for us over the three games."

In the contest against Towns County, the first half saw a tightly contested battle, but Union County managed to increase its lead to nearly 20 points as the game progressed, winning by more than 15.

'We didn't shoot it as well as we did vs. Hayesville to teach fundamentals but so that one was close through- we wanted the kids to have



The Union County men welcomed more than 35 youngsters to last week's youth camp. Photo/Todd Forrest 'That was good because it gave us a chance to see what we would do in that situation. We started getting some inside looks for Vince (Marevka) and he established himself and we ended up pulling away.

Immediately following their win over the Indians, Union turned around and faced Tallulah Falls. And despite issues with cramping, the Panthers opened up some breathing room late, securing a 12-point victory.

'We had guys cramping like crazy," Garrett said. "Cade (Dockrey) and Holden (Payne) were in and out a lot so some other guys had to step up. Jackson Nichols played a lot more minutes in that one. We even pulled up a freshman, Jaylen Howard, from JV and he gave us some good minutes. I had to pull him off the sideline. I was like, 'dude, put your shoes on, we need you in the game."

"But we played well through some adversity, so I'm happy where we're at," Garrett added

The Union County JV picked up a win over Towns County and two victories vs. Smoky Mountain, NC.

Beginning Wednesday, June 4, the Union men hosted a youth camp for rising 2nd through 8th graders, featuring three days of excitement, bonding and fundamental skills.

"We definitely wanted

out the first half," Garrett said. fun," Garrett said. "It was also a chance for the kids to be around the [high school players] and learn some of the things we do in practice, and it allows the high school guys to start building relationships with some of the younger guys. It allows us to continue building the culture of Union County basketball.'

At the camp's conclusion on Friday, each youngster received a T-shirt and a few campers earned awards. Following the awards, everyone was treated to hot dogs and hamburgers.

"Bob Overstreet cooked those for us and TJ (Burgess) at Ingles provided all the groceries, so we definitely want to give them a shout out. I appreciated all they do."

Camper of the Week awards went to Wylder Cox, Gaines Hughes, Max Mashburn and Isaac Murauskas.

"I want to thank the high school guys for showing up everyday," Garrett said. "We even had a couple come in on Thursday or Friday after football, like Cade Dockrey, so it was good to get all those guys there. They are all invested in the program and that's great to see

This week, Union County is concluding a three-day Fellowship of Christian Ath-

### Learn to play Pickleball

The Blairsville Pickleball Club, in conjunction with the Union County Recreation letes camp at Piedmont University on Wednesday.

"We're taking a small group of varsity guys to Piedmont," Garrett said. "We'll play two games on Monday, four on Tuesday, then on Wednesday we'll play in their Overtime Tournament. We'll also have Hayden Price back, who was on vacation last week, so that will be nice getting him back out there.

'We're looking for more of the same [at Piedmont], not getting too deep into anything and just keep doing what we know. We want to get in shape, get into rhythm and not get anyone hurt."

Next week, Union County will play at the University of North Georgia and at Lake-Point Sports in Emerson.



Camper of the Week award winners: (L-R) Max Mashburn, Isaac Murauskas, Gaines Hughes, Wylder Cox and UCHS head coach Corey Garrett. Photo/Todd Forrest



Campers participate in shooting drills on the third day of UCHS' bas-ketball camp. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Lady Panthers basketball camp to feature an All-Star cast of instructors

The Union County Lady Panthers and head coach Thomas Nelson will host a girls' basketball skills camp from June 17-19, welcoming rising 6th through 12th grade girls to participate in three days of focused training with experienced college coaches and former players.

The camp will run daily from 9 a.m. to noon at Union County High School. Registration is \$60 per athlete.

A strong lineup of collegiate coaches will lead the instruction, offering athletes a chance to sharpen their skills sistant Coach at Young Harris and learn from some of the College, will be present for all

The instructors include: Ronnie Carr, drafted by the sistant Coach at Piedmont Uni-Atlanta Hawks out of Western Carolina University. He made the first 3-point field goal in college basketball history (Nov. 29, 1980). Carr was a two-time All-Southern Conference and an All-Freshman team selection who averaged 18 points per game as a three-year starter. Led the conference in scoring in 1982 and scored 20 or more points in almost half of his games.

Allie Craig Cruce, As-

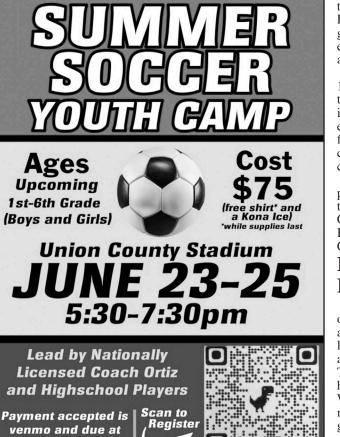
Christian Buckmire, Asversity, will lead sessions on June 17

Marcus Hunt Jr., Assistant Coach at Shorter University, will instruct on June 18.

Tiek Fields, Head Coach at Truett McConnell University, will coach on June 19.

This camp offers a valuable opportunity for young athletes to receive personalized instruction and build foundational skills heading into the upcoming basketball season.

To register or for more information, contact tnelson@



Lsasharksunion@gmail.com

time of registration

Department, will hold free beginning pickleball classes every Tuesday evening starting at 6 PM, weather permitting.

Classes will start April 1st and continue through October 28th. No registration is required, and all required equipment is provided. Certified instructors will teach the classes, and all ages are welcome!

The classes will take place at the outdoor courts at the Union County Pickleball Complex at 108 Chase Drive, Blairsville (next to the Rec Center). N(Jun11,Z3)CA

## **Mountain High Hikers Schedule**

Mountain High Hikers offers three hikes in the local area each week: Tuesdays - a long hike from 8-14 miles and a shorter hike of 5-8 miles. Thursday we lead a leisure hike usually around 5 miles. We also maintain over 100 miles of trails in North Georgia and Western NC area and run trail maintenance hikes on Thursdays each week.

For more information visit http://www.mountainhighhikers.org. NT(Jun11,Z2)CA

region's top basketball minds. three days. ucschools.org.



Union County head basketball coach Thomas Nelson and the Lady Panthers during last summer's team camp at the University of North Georgia. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Lady Panthers 9th-10th grade wins Piedmont's FCA tourney

#### By Todd Forrest Sports Editor sports@nganews.com

**Demorest** - The Union County Lady Panthers sent two teams to last week's Piedmont University Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp, where both squads finished 5-1 in pool play and the younger squad took home first in the final day's Overtime Tournament.

"It went very well," Union County head coach Thomas Nelson said. "It was a varsity tournament but our younger team only lost one game over three days. The older team lost only two games all week.'

Competing against the same varsity competition as the rising-11th-12th graders, Union County's younger team came out on top after winning five of six over the first two days.

Despite playing without rising-sophomore Samantha Combs and upcoming-freshman Scout Henry, Union County's 10/11 team defeated Hart County in the championship round of day three's Overtime Tournament.

The young squad was led by rising-sophomores Lilly Cook, Gracie Miller and Emry Sosensky. The freshman class was anchored by Bristol Davis, Hailey Marshall and Mya



The Union County Lady Panthers attend church services at last week's FCA basketball camp at Piedmont University.

Totherow. "It's a big step from 8th grade to high school and they got in there and got after it, Coach Nelson said.

Rising-sophomore Livia Haney played with the juniorsenior group that featured senior Mady Adams, juniors Julian (AL).

McKenna Hood, Ella Akins, Regan McCarter, Nomi Nelson, Reagan Trlica and others.

Over the first two days, both Union County squads defeated East Jackson, Franklin County, two Habersham Central teams (young/old) and Percy

Both teams lost to a Class 5A private school from Alabama that didn't participate in the Overtime Tournament.

The older group were eliminated by a combined Habersham Central team in the first round of the OT tourney via a halfcourt shot at the buzzer.

"We only had one practice before the camp but I just wanted to see us compete," Coach Nelson said. "We're going to be a young team, predominantly freshmen and ticipate in a tournament at sophomores. I just wanted to

together."

The Lady Panthers host a three-day youth camp through Wednesday. Then, on Friday and Saturday, Union will par-LakePoint Sports in Emerson. make sure they would go out The Lady Panthers open the weekend with Sumter County.

The Lady Panthers join together in prayer at last week's FCA basketball camp. Photo/Thomas Nelson Mountain Lions Land Academic Honors and Coaching Talent

Young Harris College Athletics continues to rack up milestones that reflect a season of growth, excellence, and new beginnings in the Enchanted Valley. A couple of departmental updates this week include softball academic excellence and an addition to the coaching staff for the women's basketball program.

**Two Mountain Lions** Selected to CSC Softball Academic All-District Teams:



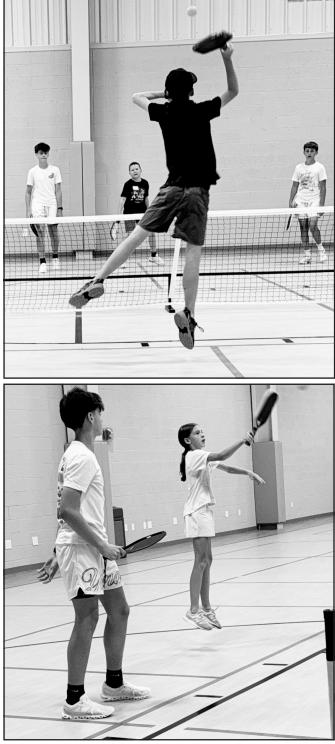
Local Kids Discover Energy, Fun, and Life Skills at Pickleball Camp at the Union County Recreation Center

there and get after it and play

Last week, local kids swapped their video game controllers for pickleball paddles and hit the courts at a five-day youth camp hosted by the Blairsville Pickleball Club. The excitement was palpable as young players jumped into learning the basics of one of the fastest-growing sports in America.

Held in collaboration with the Union County Recreation Center and the local 4-H club, the camp wasn't just a place for casual fun-it was a launchpad for kids to discover a new passion, hone athletic skills, and make new friends. Packed with activities, laughter, and encouragement from volunteer coaches, the camp created an environment where kids could thrive both as athletes and as individuals.

Each day focused on fundamentals like serving, scoring, and returning the ball, but it didn't stop there. The camp introduced the kids to critical lessons in teamwork, strategy, and resilience, ensuring they left the courts stronger in both mind and body. "It was so fun playing with other kids!" said Ēthan Ērwin, 10. "I really love this sport, especially the serving and returning. I started playing when I was 9, and I think more kids my age will start playing it as they get older.' Ethan's sister, Bristol, had her own proud moment: "In this class, there was one part I was struggling with, and I finally got it right after about 10 tries. I was so happy!" She's now weighing her options between pickleball, tennis, and soccer. "We play pickleball about three times a week, and I love it. I also like tennis, so I'm deciding which sport I want to focus on more seriously. Maybe soccer too-I don't know yet!" The camp gave kids not only the physical tools to succeed in a sport but also life lessons that extend far beyond the court. "Teaching middle school kids to play pickleball is about more than just the game," said Margaret Ralph, an IPTPA Certified Pickleball Instructor who volunteered as a camp coach. "It fosters teamwork, strategic thinking, and resilience-all essential qualities for success in life. It's amazing to see how quickly these kids picked it up." Along with exercises to strengthen hand-eye coordination and improve fitness, the camp encouraged kids to manage their emotions under pressure, work together as teammates, and celebrate each other's achievements. Many of the players left the camp feeling more confident than when they arrived, ready to step into bigger challenges both on and off the courts. Martina Gibboney, Club Vice-President and a certified pickleball coach, loved seeing the kids dive into the sport. "Pickleball is about more than staying active-it's about building connections," she said. "It was heartwarming to watch these kids encourage each other and grow, not just in their skills but in their confidence. Some of them are already talking about teaching their families how to play!" For some kids, pickleball ignited an entirely new love for sports. They learned that staying active can be fun



Young Harris softball Gracie Hughes standouts (1B/P) and Shelby Duncan (3B) have been named to the 2025 College Sports Communicators (CSC) Academic All-District Softball Team, recognizing their excellence both on the field and in the classroom. The CSC Academic All-District program honors the nation's top student-athletes across four divisions for their combined academic and athletic achievements. Hughes and Duncan were among the 32 student-athletes from Conference Carolinas selected for this honor.

Hughes, a junior pitcher and first baseman from Woodstock, Georgia, earned a spot on the Conference Carolinas All-Defensive Team following a career-best season. She tallied 344 putouts, nine assists, and just one error defensively, while posting a .388 batting average with 14 home runs and 59 RBIs across 44 games. Hughes also notched a .784 slugging percentage and contributed to the circle with three wins and two saves over 13 appearances. Off the field, she excelled academically with a 3.98 GPA.

Duncan, a junior third baseman, started all 45 games this season and was named to the All-Conference Second Team. She finished the regular season with a career-high .421 batting average, collecting 64 hits – including 13 doubles, three triples, and four home runs – while driving in 21 runs and stealing 15 bases. Duncan also posted a .625 slugging percentage and maintained a 3.58 GPA in the classroom.

Both student-athletes will now advance to the CSC Academic All-America ballot. National Academic All-America® honorees will be announced on June 17.

#### **YH Welcomes Teal Davis** to Women's Basketball

The Young Harris College women's basketball program has added Teal Davis to its coaching staff ahead of the 2025-26 season. Davis will serve as an assistant coach

and lead the newly established Developmental Women's Basketball team. Originally from Belton, South Carolina, Davis brings a wide range of coaching, leadership, and ministry experience to the Enchanted Valley.

"I'm really excited to have Teal join our coaching staff," said Head Women's Basketball Coach Lindsey Huffman, "She has a passion for recruiting and for the student-athlete. Her work ethic and recruiting experience will be very impactful on our program. Teal is a great person and a winner. I can't wait to see her do big things in the Enchanted Valley!'

basketball at Milligan University from 2017–2021, where she earned a degree in Exercise Science. She later completed her master's degree in excited to join the Young Sports Management from East Tennessee State University. Following her playing career, Davis created and launched Team Unlimited, a Tennessee-based AAU basketball

program, which she has successfully led since 2021. Over the last five years, she has also served in various sports ministry and nonprofit roles throughout the region, using basketball as a tool for impact and empowerment in Tennessee. Most recently, Davis was the assistant coach and JV head coach at Montreat College for the 2024-25 season, where she gained collegiate coaching experience while continuing to develop players on and off the court. Now, Davis joins the Mountain Lions during a time of growth and opportunity for the women's basketball program. She will oversee the day-to-day opera-Davis played collegiate tions and competitive development of the new developmental team while assisting with recruiting and varsity support.

Davis shared, "Super Harris' Women's Basketball staff! I'm looking forward to joining a winning culture led by Coach Huffman, and I'm excited for an opportunity to grow and learn!" NT(Jun11,Z14)CA

whether it's through playing matches, practicing serves, or cheering each other on.

The Blairsville Pickleball Club also offers free beginner classes for kids (with a participating adult) and adults throughout the summer, with sessions every Tuesday night at 6 p.m. at the Union County Recreation Center's outdoor courts. The classes are a great opportunity for families to pick up a paddle together and learn why pickleball captures

the hearts of players across all ages and skill levels.

For kids like Ethan and Bristol, pickleball isn't just another summer activity-it's a door to new experiences, friendships, and opportunities to grow into confident young athletes. Next time you're looking for a way to keep kids active, learning, and smiling, try putting a pickleball paddle in their hands-you never know what they might discover. N(Jun11,Z17)CA



At Meeks Park in Blairsville,Ga