

Sports

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State Champion: Paxon Legatt shines in Macon

Payton Legatt, Eli Flowers place second at State Championships

By Todd Forrest
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Macon - Union County sophomore Paxon Legatt joined his brother Payton in a very exclusive club during the wee hours of Saturday, Feb. 15 when Paxon took home the second State title in the program's history.

"I've wanted this for a while, ever since I was a little kid," Paxon said. "But once it finally happened, I couldn't believe it."

On the heels of Payton's 157-lb State championship in 2024, Paxon, who finished the year at 41-1, delivered Union County its second-straight 157-lb title with a first-period pinfall win over Columbus' Gabriel Jacobus in the Class AA finals at a little past 1 a.m. on Saturday.

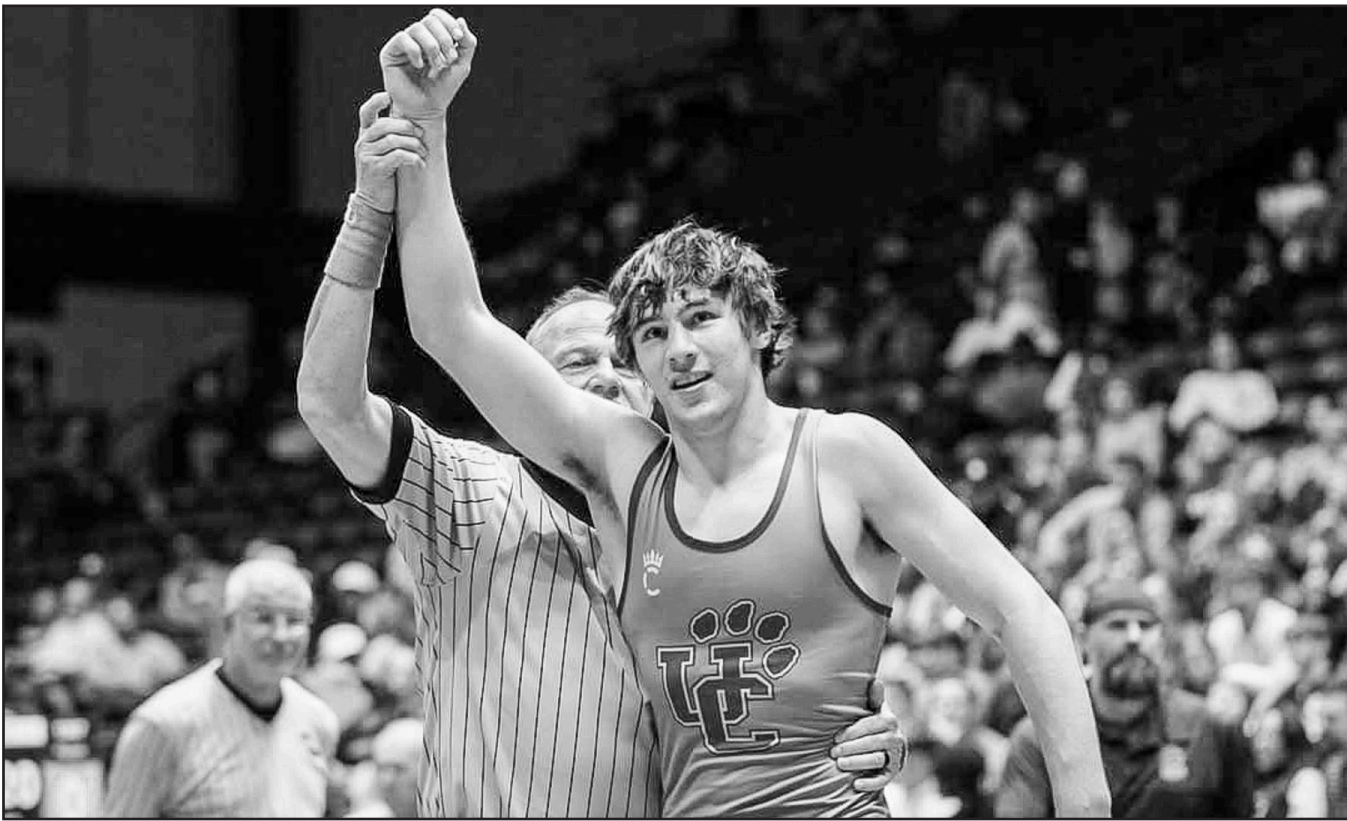
Paxon admits that coming in second last year, while watching his brother win state, provided extra motivation.

"Yeah, it kinda did [motivate me]," he said. "I came so close last year and I wanted it really bad and that made me work a little bit harder."

Paxon punched his ticket to the finals with a 94-second pin over Holy Innocents' Finn Ferrero. During the quarter-finals, he pinned Coahuilla Creek's Shawn Bailey in 67 seconds.

He opened the tournament with a 59-second pin vs. Dalton Storm of Pike County.

Looking ahead to next year, Paxon has no plans of resting on his laurels, realizing



Sophomore Paxon Legatt brought home Union County's second wrestling State title in as many years. Photo/Jaime Legatt

As for Payton Legatt, the senior fell 1-point short of repeating as State champion, dropping a gut-wrenching 1-0 decision to Ringgold's Jaxon Delgado in the 165-lb finale.

Like his brother, Payton also pinned his way to the finals, knocking off Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe's Tamorris Johnson in the semis with a third-period victory, Franklin County's Hunter Nichols via a first-round win and Holy Innocents' Cal Jenkins with another first-round stoppage.

At 113 lbs, sophomore Eli Flowers came out on the wrong end of a 12-9 decision vs. Cook's Ja'Shad Wallace, a match that saw business pick up over the final two minutes as both competitors entered the third period tied at 4-4.

Flowers held an 8-5 edge with under a minute left, but Wallace's 1-point escape, followed by a 3-point takedown had the Union sophomore in a 9-8 deficit. Flowers' escape with 19 seconds left tied things up, but six seconds later, Wallace scored a 3-point takedown to propel him to a State title.

At 190 lbs, senior Asa Smith-Foot finished fifth, scoring a 16-4 major decision vs. Sakai Bennett (Butler) in the fifth-place match. In earlier action, he opened with a second-period pin over Kaleo Willcoxson (Morgan County), followed by a 14-8 loss to Coahuilla Creek's Jackson Lowery.

In the consols, he recorded a 15-9 technical fall against Holy Innocents' Phillip Griffin and a disqualification victory vs. Miller Grove's Demond Hutchins but suffered a pinfall loss to Jonas Watkins (Lake-

view Ft. Oglethorpe).

Aiden Hyatt came in fifth at 126 lbs with a second-period pin vs. Adam Mozingo (Ringgold) during the fifth-place bout after pinning Mozingo to begin the tourney.

Mason Smith (East Jackson HS) dropped Hyatt to the consols with a 15-0 technical fall, but Hyatt rebounded by picking up a 16-6 major decision over Braydon Powell (Rockmart) and a 10-0 major decision against Jonathan Vicente (North Murray).

He fell into the fifth-place match via a pinfall loss to Cedric Montgomery (Columbus).

Thomas Gary (132 lbs), Ayden Lee (215 lbs) and Jackson Arthur (285) also competed at State but were eliminated following an 0-2 start.

In girls' action, Kristyn Kraft (140 lbs) and Jada Taylor both lost their first bout but answered with wins in their second matches. However, both took losses in the next match.

Kraft dropped a 13-4 major decision to Valrie Medina (Lowndes HS) but bounced back with a 16-0 technical fall over Christian Holt (Westside-Macon). Her tournament ended in a 6-2 loss to Amiya Edwards (Jackson County).

Taylor was on the wrong end of a pin to Kinley Wallace (Cross Creek) in the opener before answering with a 3-0 decision over Patricia Phillips (Newton). Efa Oju (Woodward Academy) notched a first-period pin over Taylor in the consolation bracket's second round.

Panthers second at region tournament, host State on Tuesday

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Eton - Seventh-ranked Union County (22-5) hosts 27-seed Pierce County (8-14) on Wednesday after the Panthers earned the sixth overall seed in the upcoming Class AA State Tournament by finishing second to North Cobb Christian during last week's 7-AA region tourney.

A Panthers win over Pierce would result in a Sweet 16 matchup this weekend vs. 11-seed Westside-Macon or No. 22 North Murray in Blairsville.

Last week, Union County avenged January's region loss at Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) in the 7-AA semis but couldn't get over the hump vs. North Cobb Christian during the Panthers' fourth-straight trip to a region title game.

No. 7 Panthers 77, LFO 61 - Union County jumped ahead 20-9 after a quarter and was never threatened in an easy win over the Warriors during last Friday's region semifinal contest at North Murray High School.

"We knew going in we'd either get North Murray or LFO and I got a good sense pretty quick that most of the guys wanted LFO," Union County head coach Corey Garrett said. "I was excited when I saw they wanted another shot at LFO. And you could see it in the way we played with extra energy. They were hungry for that win."

Houston Henry led the way with 23 points, 10 assists, five boards and five assists and the Panthers hit 11 for 24 (46%) from 3-point range. Hayden Hughes hit 6 of 11 from downtown to finish with 23 points, four steals and three rebounds.



L-R: Corey Garrett (Coach of the Year) and All-Region Team selections Houston Henry, Hayden Hughes and Maddox Young were honored during the Region 7-AA Tournament at North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest

Leading 20-9 after one, the Panthers allowed consecutive LFO buckets to begin the second, but that's as close as they would get as Union answered with an 11-0 run to open up a 31-13 lead.

LFO used two more baskets to cut the halftime gap to 31-17, but the third quarter was all Union County, outscoring the Warriors 29-19 to mount a 60-36 lead entering the fourth.

Kaden Combs finished with 14 points, four rebounds, four steals and three assists. Maddox Young went for 9 points, six boards, two assists and two steals. Vince Marevka

scored eight rebounds and pulled down eight rebounds.

The Panthers forced 23 turnovers (16 steals) while only committing nine.

No. 7 Panthers 58, No. 3 North Cobb Christian 76 - The Union County men couldn't end their 44-year region title drought, surrendering an 8-0 run to start the second half, dropping the Panthers into a 54-37 hole they couldn't climb out of.

"We decided to go with a 2-3 [zone] and I still think it was the right decision, but [North Cobb] came out and hit some 3s. We knew we were

gambling, but we hoped we could catch them on an off night, but they hit their shots so that gamble didn't work out in our favor."

Henry scored 23 points and Young had 18, but they didn't get much help as the rest of the squad combined for just 17 points.

"We didn't play our best game and that's what we needed to have a shot," Garrett said. "We didn't get Hayden enough touches, and for us to be successful, he's got to be getting shots."

North Cobb opened up some breathing room in the first



Senior Kaden Combs had 14 points, four rebounds, four steals and three assists during last Friday's win over LFO. Photo/Todd Forrest

frame, turning its 10-9 lead into 18-13 at the quarter's end. But the Panthers climbed to within a point at 22-21 before North Cobb turned it up a notch and stretched its lead to double digits before the Panthers clawed to within 46-37 at the break.

After the Eagles' 8-0 run to begin the second half opened up a 17-point cushion, Union fought back to within 63-53, but a North Cobb 3-pointer late in the third extended the gap to 66-53 to begin the fourth.

The Panthers were held to a season-low 5 points in the fourth quarter and North Cobb Christian cruised to the

region title.

Hughes finished with 10 points, Marevka had 4 points and Combs added three.

Up next: Union County hosts Pierce County at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday in the first round of State.

"[Pierce] isn't very big but they are athletic for sure and apply a lot of man-pressure defensively," Garrett said. "They are probably the most athletic team we've seen. But one thing that helps us, I don't think they see zone [defenses] a lot and our 1-3-1, or even our 2-3, could give them problems."

Lady Panthers open State tourney Tuesday vs. Coahulla at home

Union County wins three of four at region tourney, finish third

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Eton - The No. 9 Union County Lady Panthers (18-11) are hosting the first round of the Class AA State Tournament following a third-place finish at last week's 7-AA Region Tournament.

Despite placing third in the 7-AA tournament, without the services of sophomore point guard Regan Trlica over the final three games, the Lady Panthers' No. 16 spot in the power rankings was enough to earn the final host seed, resulting in a fourth meeting with region foe Coahulla Creek on Tuesday at 5 p.m.

Union County earned a spot in the region semis and likely a home playoff game by blowing out Coahulla Creek 57-26 in Thursday's region quarterfinals.

The Lady Panthers opened the region tourney with a 58-38 win over North Cobb Christian on Tuesday, Feb. 11. After cruising past North Cobb Christian and Coahulla Creek, Union County couldn't keep pace with sixth-ranked Sonorville, suffering a 52-30 loss on Friday.

Union County bounced back by avenging an earlier loss to Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO), taking down the Warriors 48-36 in Saturday afternoon's consolation game at North Murray High School.

No. 9 Lady Panthers 58, North Cobb Christian 38 - Union County pulled away from a 21-19 halftime lead, outscoring the Eagles 20-10 in the third and 17-9 in the fourth.

Hope Taylor poured in 16 points, nine rebounds and two blocks on 8 of 13 from the floor. Sloane Dyer had 14 points, two rebounds, two assists and two steals.

Ariel McCarter went for 8 points, seven rebounds, four assists and two steals. Trlica had 7 points, five boards, four assists and two steals. Aubrie Akins added 6 points, four rebounds and an assist.

Nomi Nelson scored 3 points; Katelyn Brown had 2 points, four rebounds, four assists and a steal; Mady Adams chipped in 2 points and four rebounds.



All-Region Team selections: (L-R) Ariel McCarter, Hope Taylor, Aubrie Akins, Katelyn Brown, Regan Trlica and Sloane Dyer. Photo/Todd Forrest

No. 9 Lady Panthers 57, Coahulla Creek 26 - Union County defeated Coahulla Creek for the third time, limiting the Colts to only 9 first-half points before pulling away via a 34-17 second-half.

"I was so proud of our girls," Coach Nelson said. "These seniors have played together for a really long time and I was proud to see them step up together. It wasn't a one-man show; it was a team effort, and they were able to pull together and get us a big win."

The Lady Panthers raced out to an 11-5 lead after one and a 23-9 advantage at the break. The lead grew to 32-12 during the third, eventually expanding to 41-19 to start the fourth.

Union County scored the first 5 points of the frame, putting Coahulla Creek away at 46-19 just shy of the 4-minute mark.

Taylor led her team with 13 points, 10 rebounds and two blocks. Dyer had 11 points and six rebounds; McCarter stuffed the stat sheet with 9 points,

eight boards, six assists and six steals; Brown delivered 9 points, 13 rebounds, four assists and two blocks.

McKenna Hood had 6 points, eight rebounds, three assists and a steal; Adams had 4 points and four boards; Nelson chipped in 3 points, three assists, a rebound and a steal; Akins added 2 points, six boards and one assist.

Tatum Fisher and Ella Akins added one rebound each.

No. 9 Lady Panthers 48, LFO 36 - Hood's second-half efforts helped Union County pull away late, leading her team with career-highs of 13 points (10 after halftime) and 15 rebounds.

McCarter finished with 10 points, seven rebounds, six steals and five assists.

Clinging to a 20-19 half-time lead, Union County's final deficit of the day came at 22-20 following an LFO 3-pointer to start the third. But the Lady Panthers fired back with a 10-0 run, and then held a 36-27 lead after three quarters of play.

LFO climbed within 36-32 early in the fourth but Hood sparked an 8-0 spurt that put things away at 44-32 with under 2:30 remaining.

Taylor finished with 9 points and seven boards; Brown had 8 points, five rebounds and three assists; Aubrie Akins went for 5 points and 10 boards; Adams had 4 points, five boards and an assist; Ella Akins added 2 points and a rebound.

Dyer had 6 boards, four assists and two steals; Livia Haney had one assist and a steal.

More importantly, Union County held 7-AA Co-Player of the Year Christen Collins to 16 points after she went for 40 in last month's win over Union County.

No. 6 Sonorville 52, No. 9 Union County 30 - The Union County offense struggled from the opening tip in Friday's semifinal loss to the Phoenix.

"When you play a team like that, with a couple differ-

ent girls that can put the ball in the basket, you have to keep scoring points," Coach Nelson said. "And when your offense starts to lag a little bit, it just becomes hard to keep up with a team like that."

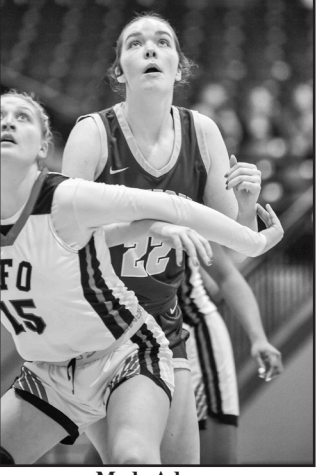
However, the Lady Panthers' defense managed to keep it close into the third quarter, trailing 7-3 after one and 19-13 at the break. The second half was a different story as Sonorville opened up a 28-17 edge inside three minutes and maintained its 11-point lead into the fourth at 33-22.

Early in the final frame, Union's comeback hopes were dashed when Taylor collected her fourth and fifth fouls in a matter of seconds and Sonorville stretched its margin to 39-24.

Union County's three bigs, Adams, Aubrie Akins and Taylor scored 6 points apiece. Taylor ended with seven boards, two blocks and one assist; Aubrie Akins pulled down three rebounds; Adams had seven boards and an assist.



McKenna Hood



Mady Adams

Nomi Nelson had 5 points; Ariel McCarter had 3 points, six boards, three assists, two steals and a block; Brown added 2 points, four rebounds, an assist and a block; Hood had 2 points, three rebounds and an assist.

Dyer contributed seven boards and three assists; Ragan McCarter had a rebound and a block.

Up next: Union County enters the State tournament as the No. 16 seed and will host 17th-seeded Coahulla Creek at 5 p.m. on Tuesday in the fourth meeting this season between the two region opponents.

"It's going to be an uphill battle," Coach Nelson said. "It's hard enough beating a good team three times, now we have to do it four. We just have to stay focused on the task at hand. But playing them at home is a big deal for us. Hopefully we can move forward and take that next step."

The winner will likely visit top-seed and Region 7-AA champion Murray County this weekend.

Baseball: Panthers split first two games



Gunnar Akins struck out 10 batters and drove in two during Union's win at Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest

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Union County baseball opened the 2025 season with an 11-0 win over Towns County on Feb. 10 before letting a two-run lead slip away during a 4-2 loss at Gilmer on Feb. 14.

Panthers 11, Towns County 0 (5 inn) - Junior left-hander Gunnar Akins fanned 10 Indians over four innings of two-hit ball while driving in two at the plate.

Union County put up three runs in the first before tacking on six in the fourth and two in the fifth. Up 11-0 entering the Indians' half of the fifth, senior Tyler Richards worked around two walks and an error, escaping a bases-loaded jam with a pair of strikeouts.

Junior Eli Gwynn finished 2 for 3 with three runs; junior Lane Haney doubled, drove in two and scored twice during a 1 for 4 evening; sophomore Cayden Miller finished 1 for 3 with two runs and a pair of RBIs. Akins doubled during his 1-for-3, two-RBI performance.

Maddox Patton scored the first run of the season when he walked, stole a bag and came around on Haney's groundout. Miller made it 2-0, scoring

Gwynn with a base hit to left. He later scored via an error off the bat of Akins.

Towns County put two aboard in the first but Akins slammed the door with his third punch out of the frame. Both offenses remained quiet until the Panthers broke things open with six in the fourth.

A one-out walk by Patton followed by a Gwynn single and a RBI double by Haney sparked the Union fourth. Wild pitches allowed Union County to add two more followed by an Akins double that made it 8-0. Akins capped off the inning by scoring on a wild pitch.

Gwynn singled to start the fifth and Haney reached on an error, allowing Miller to drive in a run via a groundout. Sophomore Bentley Rich drove in the final run of the game on a sacrifice fly.

Rich finished with a run and an RBI; Patton walked three times and scored twice; Bo Brown went 1 for 3 with a walk; senior Travis Tracy walked twice.

Panthers 2, Gilmer 4 - Union County got two in the fourth but Gilmer answered with four in the bottom of the fifth courtesy of two errors and a hit by pitch.

took a two-hit shutout into the fifth before running into trouble. Gilmer used three singles to score four runs (one earned) before Richards entered and stopped the bleeding.

Miller worked a one-out walk in the sixth but a 6-4-3 double play ended the Union threat. Richards escaped a bases-loaded jam in the Gilmer sixth and Tracy was stranded in the seventh after drawing a free pass.

Earlier, the Panthers got two in the fourth when Gwynn was hit by a pitch and scored courtesy of Rich's two-out double. Rich came around on Brown's base hit to left.

Gwynn finished 1 for 2; Rich went 1 for 3 with a RBI and a run; Brown drove in one during his 1-for-3 game. Miller and Patton each drew a walk. Tracy and Gwynn were hit by pitches.

Akins struck out nine over 4 2/3 innings, allowing five hits and one earned run. Richards went 1 1/3 with a strikeout, giving up one hit and a walk.

Up next: Union County visits Fannin County at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday. The Panthers host Fannin at 5:30 p.m. on Friday. Union travels to Madison County on Saturday for an 11:30 a.m. doubleheader.

Soccer: UCHS sweeps Fannin in opener



The Lady Panthers following their win at Fannin County on Feb. 14. Photo/UCHS

Blue Ridge - Union County soccer opened the 2025 season with a pair of narrow wins at Fannin County on Friday, Feb. 14.

The Lady Panthers, playing shorthanded due to basketball, escaped with a 4-3 win courtesy of Sophia Miller's

hat trick. Lilly Brookshire added a goal for Union County courtesy of a corner-kick by Stella Collins - her second assist of the night.

Destiny Hill added an assist in the win. Later, the Union men

managed to knock off Fannin County 3-2.

Senior Antonio Solorio accounted for two goals, including the go-ahead score, and added one assist.

Kainen Shirley scored the equalizer from Solorio, tying the contest at 2-2.

UCHS swimmers log three Top-20 performances at State Championships



Congratulations to the UCHS swimmers who participated in the GHSA State Swim Meet at Georgia Tech on February 5-6. Cole Orlando, John Tippens, Andrew Nushtayev and Nicholas Nushtayev swam in the 200 freestyle relay and Nicholas swam in the 50 and 100 freestyle individually. All swimmers qualified for finals events, and overall, Nicholas placed 18th in the 50 free and 14th in the 100 free. The relay team placed 19th. We are so proud of all of their accomplishments.