

Sports

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Baseball: Panthers get back on track vs. North Murray

North Cobb Christian sweeps Union to open region play

By Todd Forrest
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Union County (5-7, 1-2) opened region play, bouncing back with a much-needed 11-1 win over North Murray on Friday following a pair of losses to No. 2 North Cobb Christian earlier in the week.

The Panthers visit North Murray on Tuesday, March 18 before traveling to Sonorville on Thursday, March 20. The week concludes with a home date vs. Sonorville on Friday, March 21. All three games begin at 5:30 p.m.

Panthers 11, North Murray 1 (six innings) - Junior lefty Gunnar Akins allowed three hits over 5 1/3 innings and Hayden Hughes drove in four runs as Union County put up five in the fifth and three in the sixth.

Leading 3-1 in the fifth, Chetley Cox, Maddox Patton and Akins opened the frame with three consecutive singles -- two coming around to score on Akins' base hit.

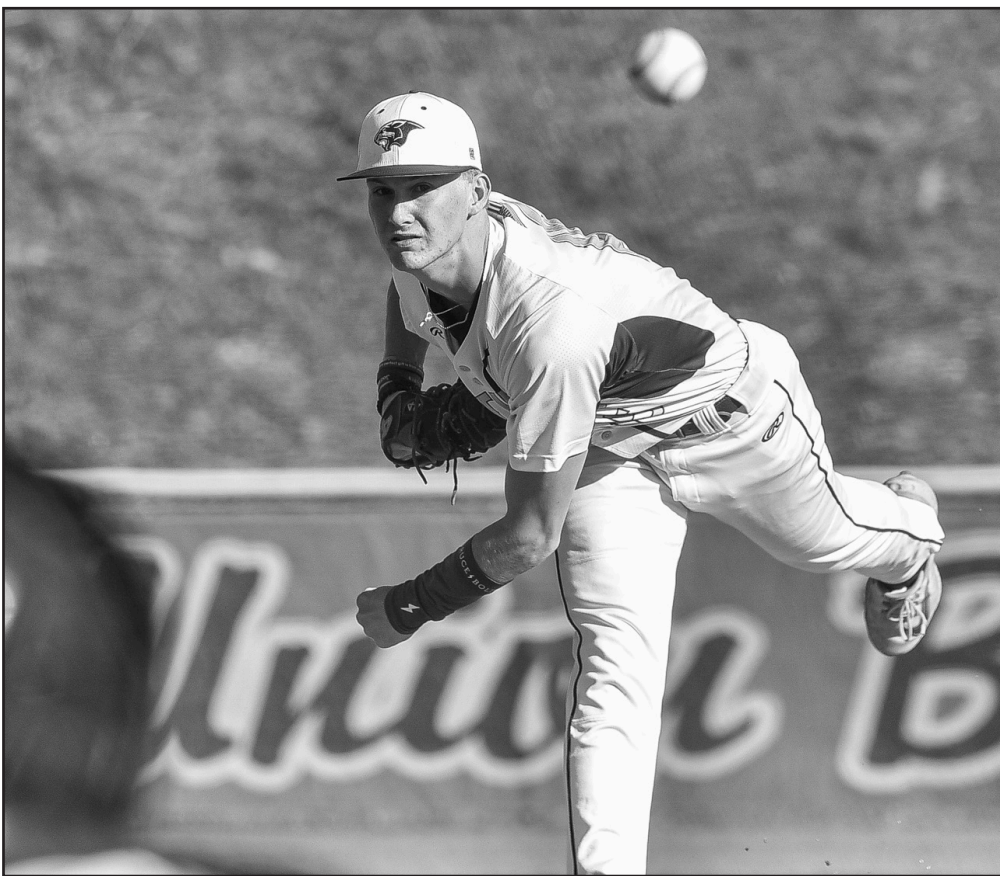
Lane Haney followed with a walk and Hayden Hughes reached on an error that scored Akins. Up 7-1 later in the inning, Brown's single put runners at the corners, and Hayden Hughes came around to score via Eli Gwynn's ground out.

Patton replaced Akins with one away in the sixth and proceeded to retire the next two batters, and then Patton opened the bottom half by drawing a walk.

Akins' single put two aboard and Haney's two-run double plated Patton. The Panthers ended the game via the mercy rule when Hughes' base hit to left brought home Akins and Haney.

Hughes finished 3 for 4 with a double, four RBIs, two runs and a stolen base. Akins went 3 for 4 with three runs and a pair of RBIs; Haney's night ended a homer short of the cycle, going 3 for 3 with three runs, an RBI and a walk; Patton scored twice and walked during a 1-for-3 evening. In all, the top four spots in the Union lineup ended 10 for 14 with 10 runs and seven RBIs.

The Panthers grabbed a 1-0 lead in the second courtesy



Union County junior Gunnar Akins picked up the win vs. North Murray on Friday, and earlier in the week, departed in the sixth with a 5-1 lead during an 11-5 loss to North Cobb Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest

of Hughes' leadoff single and Cayden Miller's two-out RBI double. They extended the margin to 3-0 in the third when Akins and Haney both reached via two-out singles and Hughes lined a two-run double to left field.

During the top half of the fourth, a two-out error and a base hit to center put the Mountaineers on the board, but that proved to be their final hit of the game.

Akins struck out six and allowed one unearned run and a walk over 5 1/3 innings. Patton had one strikeout during his perfect 2/3 inning.

Miller went 2 for 3 with an RBI double; Brown finished 1 for 3; Bentley Rich went 2 for 3; Cox scored once during his 1-for-3 evening.

Union County out-hit North Murray 16-3 while the Mountaineers committed three errors to the Panthers' one.

With a 5-7 record, Union is one win away from matching last season's win total.

Panthers 5, No. 2 North Cobb Christian 11 - Union County scored five in the first inning and took a 5-1 lead in the sixth inning when Akins

departed. Unfortunately, the bullpen couldn't protect the lead, allowing two in the sixth and eight in the seventh on Tuesday, March 11 in Blairsville.

Despite Union's early offensive explosion and a gem from Akins, six errors proved too much to overcome against the two-time defending State champs.

Akins recorded eight punchouts while allowing five hits and one earned run over 5 1/3 innings. Hughes and Rich drove in two runs apiece during Union's five-run first.

Patton and Akins singled to start the inning, and following Haney's sacrifice bunt, Hughes brought home both runners on a base hit to center. Brown followed with a single and Miller's two-out double brought home both runners. Rich singled up the middle to plate Miller and spot the Panthers a 5-0 edge.

Akins cruised into the fourth, where North Cobb opened with a base hit to center, but after a strikeout, the junior southpaw induced a 5-4-3 double play to end the threat.

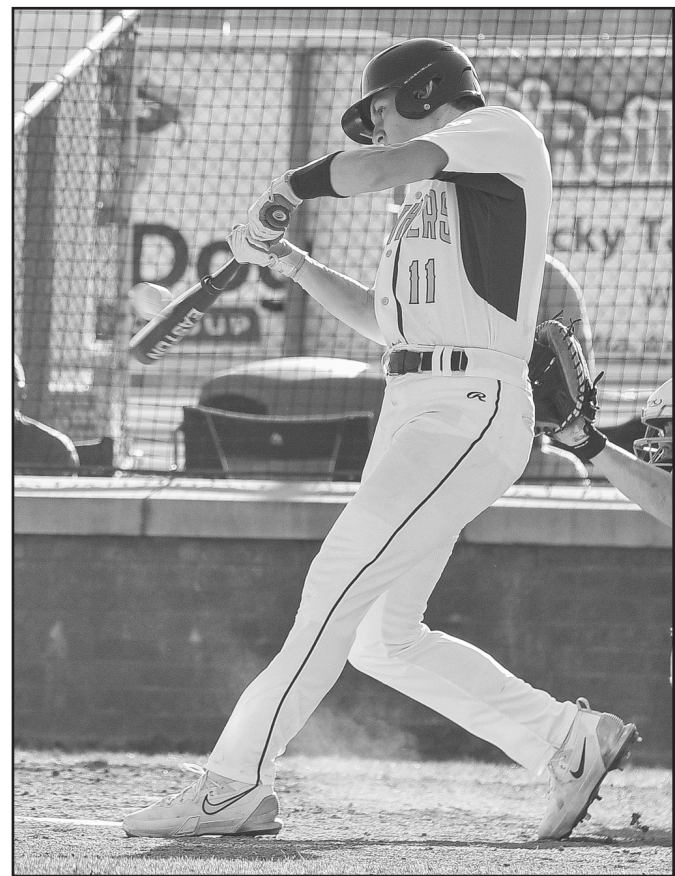
Cox led off the bottom

half with a base hit but the Eagles returned the favor with an inning-ending double play of the 4-6-3 variety. Moments later, North Cobb got on the board in the fifth when a two-out error allowed a run to score.

Akins surrendered a leadoff double in the sixth but recorded a strikeout before handing the ball to Tyler Richards. Right out of the gate, Richards was victimized by an error before allowing an RBI single. He was able to limit the damage to a lone run courtesy of a groundout and a strikeout.

Unfortunately, the wheels fell off for Union in the seventh, beginning with a double and two singles, trimming the lead to 5-4. An error loaded the bases but Richards was able to get the first out on a pop fly to center before a run-scoring walk tied things up.

Patton replaced Richards and sat down the first batter on strikes, however, a pinch-hit two-out single brought in the go-ahead run, followed by a two-run single and a three-run



Senior Hayden Hughes drives in two during Union's five-run first vs. North Cobb Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest

homer. Hughes finished 1 for 4 with a run and two RBIs; Rich went 1 for 2 with a pair of RBIs.

Patton went 1 for 3 with a walk and a run; Akins finished 1 for 4; Haney walked and stole a bag; Brown was 1 for 3; Miller scored and drove in a run during his 1-for-2 day; Gwynn scored a run; Cox reached on a walk.

Richards' walk on the mound ended with a walk, five hits and one earned run in one inning. Patton allowed three earned runs and three hits during his 2/3 of an inning.

Panthers 3, No. 2 North Cobb Christian 13 (five innings) - The Eagles belted four homers and put the Panthers away with six in the fourth, breaking open a 7-2 contest and cutting short Union's trip to Kennesaw on Thursday, March 13.

North Cobb scored three in the first via a two-run homer and an RBI double before Union answered with two in the second when Patton singled

home Gwynn and Rich.

The Eagles added three in the bottom half and one more in the third to build a 7-2 advantage. North Cobb exploded for sixth in the fourth by way of a grand slam and a two-run homer.

Union County got one back in the fifth when Tracy walked and scored on Akins' single.

Patton went 2 for 2 with a walk and two RBIs; Akins drove in one during a 1-for-3 game; Tracy walked twice, scored and swiped two bags; Gwynn walked, scored and stole a bag during a 1-for-1 performance.

Hughes' season debut on the mound didn't go as planned, allowing five hits and five earned runs over 1 1/3 innings. Colten Gibson allowed one earned and two hits over 2 1/3; Brown tossed 1/3 of an inning.

North Cobb out-hit Union 7-4 and played error-free baseball while the Panthers were charged with three fielding miscues.



Eli Gwynn (10) informs Cayden Miller to slide during a play at the plate in Union County's five-run fifth vs. North Cobb Christian on Tuesday, March 11. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore infielder Bentley Rich drives in two runs during Union County's 11-5 loss to North Cobb Christian on Tuesday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Soccer: Hill leads Lady Panthers in two region victories

Panthers drop consecutive games for first time in six years

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The Union County ladies improved 2-2 in Region 7-AA and 3-3 overall with a pair of wins last week vs. North Murray and Murray County.

The men, meanwhile, dropped both outings, culminating in a heartbreaking penalty-kick home loss vs. a 2-6 Murray County squad.

The Panthers have lost consecutive games for the first time since 2019 -- a season in which they rebounded to finish as the State runner-up.

Lady Panthers 6, Murray County 3 - Freshman Destiny Hill recorded a hat trick and Union County scored the first six goals of last Friday's home win vs. the Indians.

Union County raced ahead 3-0 at the intermission courtesy of Hill and Ariel McCarter. Hill scored in the 19th minute on a Kiella Strand assist. Later, McCarter made it 2-0 in the 21st, courtesy of a free kick that followed a Murray County handball.

Hill's second goal came in the 24th minute when she knocked in a rebound from close range. Union County keeper Gabriella Jimenez kept the first-half shutout intact, turning away two Murray County shots over the final 13 minutes.

The margin expanded to 4-0 five minutes into the second when Strand found the net, and 45 seconds later, Hill completed her hat trick for a 5-0 Union advantage. Hill's third goal came off assists from sophomore Abby Gilly and freshman Charlie Llewellyn.



Freshman Destiny Hill scored five goals during Union County's two region wins last week. Photo/Todd Forrest

Freshman Stella Collins grew the lead to 6-0 less than eight minutes into the half, but Murray got on the board five minutes later.

The Indians added two more over the final 22 minutes, with the last goal coming inside three minutes.

Lady Panthers 4, North Murray 0 - Earlier in the week, Union County notched a 4-0 victory at North

Murray, scoring twice in each half of their first 7-AA victory of the year.

Llewellyn opened the scoring less than 45 seconds in off a feed from McCarter. Hill made it 2-0 in the 17th minute, courtesy of another McCarter assist.

Lily Brookshire and Hill added a pair of unassisted goals during the 51st and 55th minutes, respectively.



Freshman Stella Collins scored the Lady Panthers sixth goal vs. Murray County on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Panthers 2, Murray County 2 (3-5) - Union County couldn't protect a 2-0 halftime lead, surrendering two goals during the first 16 minutes of the second half, and then failing to take advantage of scoring opportunities down the stretch.

Following two 10-minute overtime sessions, Murray County survived the penalty kick shootout, converting on 5 of 5 penalties while the Panthers hit on 3 of 4.

Julian Jimenez put Union out front in the 8th minute thanks to a pass from Rob Thompson, and Antonio Solorio added another goal during the final seconds of the half.

Unfortunately, Murray County cracked the scoring column in the 51st minute before delivering the equalizer in the 56th.

The Panthers weathered the storm, denying two Indians

scoring opportunities in the 62nd and 65th, but couldn't convert free kicks during the 68th minute and 76th, along with a corner kick in the 72nd.

Following an uneventful first OT session, Union's go-

ahead shot was turned away in the opening minute of the second OT. Later, the Panthers missed wide with under six to play and then had another shot stopped during the final seconds.

During the penalty kick shootout, Union connected on its first three tries but was turned away in the fourth round. The Panthers failed to deliver a much-needed stop in the fifth round to continue the game.

Panthers 2, North Murray 3 - Union failed to dig out of a 2-0 halftime deficit despite scoring twice in the second half on March 11 at North Murray.

The Mountaineers grabbed an early lead during the fifth minute, clanking in a shot off the right post from 25 yards away. North Murray took advantage of a free kick during the 32nd minute, seizing a 2-0 lead at the break.

Jimenez put Union on the board during the 62nd, finding the net from 15 yards out, and Solorio evened the score in the 67th courtesy of a penalty kick.

North Murray went back on top to stay in the 68th, quickly turning a Union goal kick into a point.

Union County hosted Pickens in non-region action on Monday, March 17; region action resumes Friday at home vs. Rockmart.

Friday's action kicks off at 5:30 p.m. for the Lady Panthers.



Union County's five participants await their turn during Friday night's penalty shootout session vs. Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest



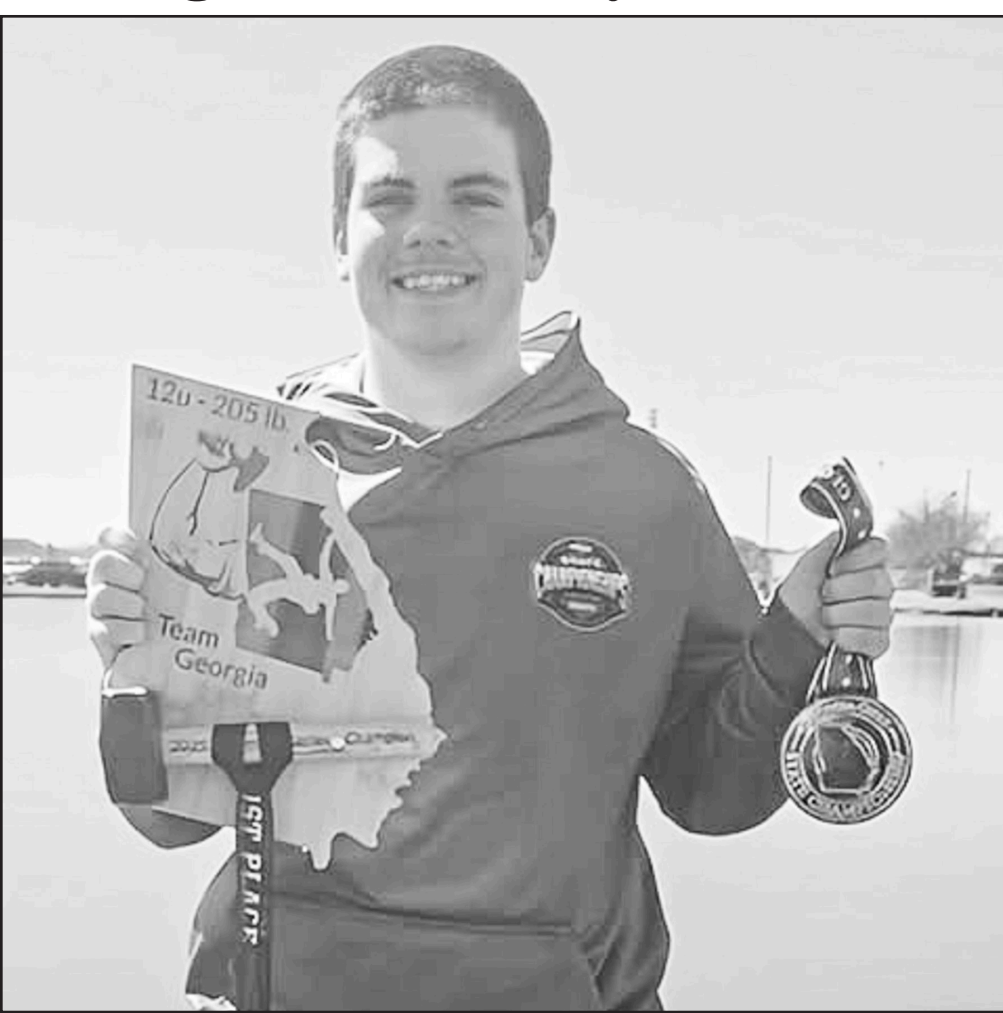
Senior Antonio Solorio (R) battles for possession during Union's loss to Murray County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Myrick is on a roll to start 2025



Blairsville's Thomas Myrick won the first race of the season on his 8th birthday (Feb. 22) Later, he won the doubleheader on March 1. Myrick races Quarter Midgets at the Cumming Fairgrounds.

12U Brantley Churchill already making noise as first-year wrestler



Blairsville's Brantley Churchill is a first-year wrestler and went 6-1 earlier this month at Team Georgia's USA Wrestling Kids State Championships at Reaves Arena in Perry. Churchill fought hard and lost in the final seconds of the third period to place second in the state for the 12U age division. Churchill is the 12U Hammer series Champion for this season of USA Wrestling.

Young Cane Lodge sends two teams to Ninth Masonic District Skeet Shoot



Two teams from Blairsville's Young Cane Lodge took part in the 9th District Skeet Shoot over the weekend with one team coming in second place out of 25 entries.