

Sports

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Soccer: Solorio's four goals leads Union on Senior Night

McCarter and Hill net hat tricks in Lady Panthers' rout of Rockmart

By Todd Forrest
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The Panthers and Lady Panthers did a number on the visiting Rockmart Yellow Jackets on Friday, putting on a Senior-Night offensive masterclass in two Region 7-AA wins.

Panthers 10, Rockmart 0 - Senior Antonio Solorio's four-goal haul and junior Kainen Shirley's first career hat trick set the pace during Union County's mercy-rule-shortened win over the Jackets.

The Panthers buried five goals in the first half before tacking on five more after the intermission, the final goal coming by way of freshman Chris Robinson -- ending the contest during the 73rd minute.

Shortly after stepping off the bus, Rockmart found itself in a 2-0 hole when Shirley opened the scoring, beating the Jacket keeper during the second minute, and moments later, senior Julian Jimenez found the net for a 2-0 advantage in the third minute.

Starting in the 12th minute, Shirley ignited a three-goal scoring barrage that included a pair of Solorio goals in the 18th and 20th.

Up 5-0 less than 15 minutes into the second half, Union County rocked the Jackets with a four-goal flurry over a seven-minute stretch, beginning with two Solorio goals in 36 seconds.

Four minutes removed from Solorio's brace, Shirley secured his hat trick in the 59th, and Ty Hogsden grew the lead to 9-0 with a goal less than three minutes later.

Content to ride out a 9-0 lead and gain experience for his reserves, head coach Tim Hunter rested his starters down the stretch, but Robinson showed that the younger guys know how to find the net as well, ending the contest with over seven minutes to play.

Rockmart concluded the night with only two shots on goal, both following a corner kick in the 67th, but both attempts were denied by backup keeper Wyatt Chandler.

Union County finished with four corner kicks; Rockmart had three.

Lady Panthers 9, Rockmart 0 - Senior Ariel McCarter and freshman Destiny Hill each recorded a hat trick in Union's



Union County Lady Panther seniors Lily Brookshire, Katelyn Brown, Ariel McCarter and Kiella Strand were recognized ahead of their 9-0 win over Rockmart on Friday, March 21. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Union County men were honored before last Friday's 10-0 win over Rockmart. L-R: Coach Matthew Patrick, Eli Chapman, Julian Jimenez, Ayden Lee, Jensen Rivera, Kevin Ramirez, Antonio Solorio, Noah Sommers and head coach Tim Hunter.

County blowout of Rockmart on Friday.

Senior Kiella Strand kicked things off with a goal in the 10th minute and Hill made it 2-0 in the 15th. McCarter got in on the action during the 23rd and Hill sent Union County into the break up 4-0, burying a shot with under a minute left in the half.

The Lady Panthers went on the attack to begin the second

half, firing four shots during the 42nd and 43rd minutes until freshman Stella Collins connected during the 44th. Strand found the net in the 49th, opening up a 6-0 advantage, but the flood gates didn't open until Union's three-goal outburst between the 50th and 55th minutes.

McCarter scored in the 50th and 53rd, followed by Hill's third goal of the night

during the 55th.

Coach Hunter handed the keys to his reserves moments later and Union County put it in cruise control over the final 20+ minutes.

Rockmart's night ended with only two shots attempts as the Lady Panthers out-shot the Jackets 18-1 in the first half and 16-1 during the second. Union County finished with four corners while Rockmart



Senior Antonio Solorio scored four goals during Union County's blow-out win over Rockmart. Photo/Todd Forrest

didn't attempt one.

Remarkably, McCarter's hat trick is the first of her career despite being one of the program's most prolific goal scorers this decade over her four years as a starter.

Panthers 1, Pickens 1 (3-1) - For the second consecutive game, Union County's contest was decided by penalty kicks, but unlike the loss to Murrey County, the Panthers survived courtesy of two PK stops by senior keeper Eli Chapman on Tuesday, March 18.

Solorio put Union on top in the first half, flicking in a Brayden Torres corner kick during the 24th minute.

Pickens converted less than 70 seconds into the second half, tying the game and capping the scoring for the evening.

The Dragons went first in the penalty shootout and Chapman's diving stop set the tone right off the bat. Solorio connected on Union's first kick and Jimenez's shot had the Panthers ahead 2-1 after two rounds.

Pickens opened round three by missing wide right and Jonah Munoz found the net for a 3-1 advantage, allowing Chapman to seal the win by swatting away the ensuing Dragons' attempt.

Lady Panthers 1, Pickens 5 - Union County got on the

board early but surrendered two goals before the break and three more in the second half.

The Lady Panthers' lone score came in the first 10 minutes when a Gaby Jimenez goal kick took a friendly bounce near midfield and was gathered by Hill, who found McCarter in front of the net for a 1-0 lead.

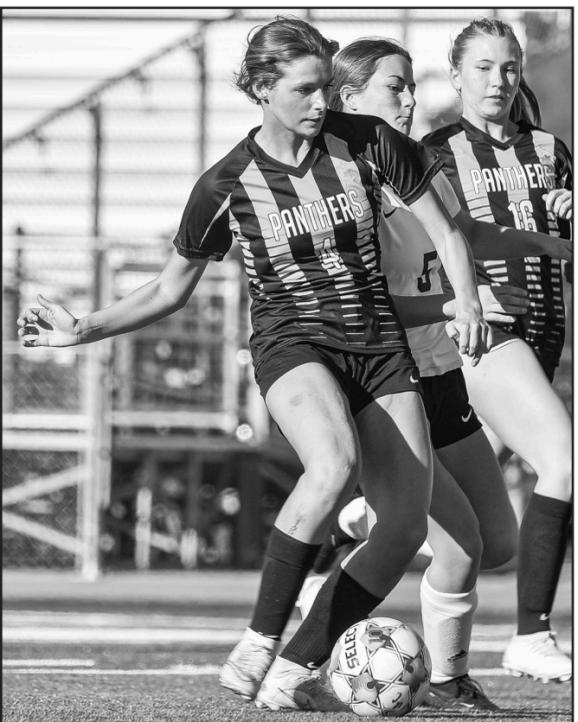
Up next: Union County travels to Coahulla Creek on Tuesday. The girls get underway at 5 p.m. with the guys to follow.

The Panthers finish up region play on Thursday with a trip to Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO).

The Lady Panthers can secure second in Region 7-AA with two wins this week. Union County is currently tied for third with LFO in Region 7-AA and Coahulla Creek sits second, one game up on third place.

The men are tied for third with Ringgold, who they own the tiebreaker over, but Union sits just one game up on fifth-place LFO.

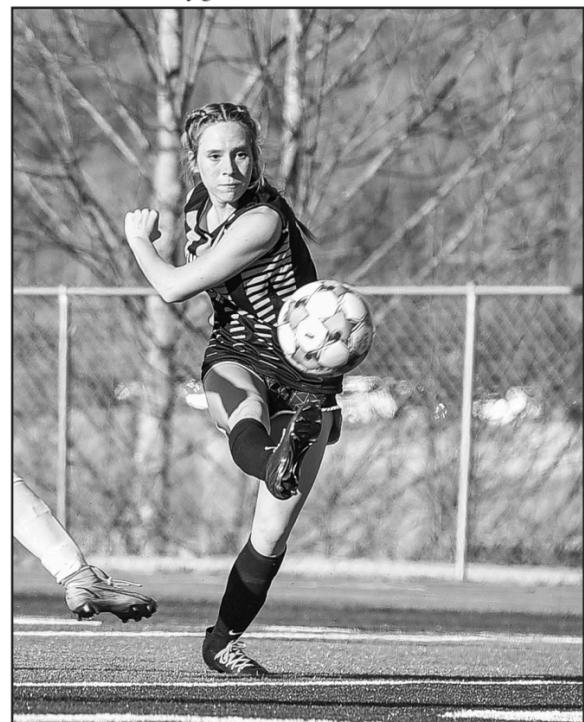
Two victories for the Panthers this week, along with a North Murrey loss to Coahulla Creek, would potentially create some chaos atop the region standings, forcing a three-way tie for first alongside North Murrey and Coahulla Creek.



Senior Ariel McCarter scores the first of her three goals vs. Rockmart on Senior Night. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior Kainen Shirley logged a hat trick during Union County's 10-0 victory over Rockmart. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman Destiny Hill has recorded hat tricks in consecutive Region 7-AA contests. Photo/Todd Forrest

Baseball: Union sweeps North Murray, splits with Sonoraville

Panthers face Ringgold, LFO this week in region action

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Union County (7-8, 3-3) won two of three last week, capping off a two-game sweep of North Murray on Tuesday, March 18, followed by an 11-3 home victory on Friday to force a split with Sonoraville after the Panthers dropped a 6-4 road contest to the Phoenix 24 hours earlier.

This week, the Panthers open a two-game tilt vs. Ringgold (10-6, 4-2) on the road on Tuesday, March 25, before hosting the Tigers on Thursday. Union County travels to Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (1-15, 0-4) on Friday to close out the week.

"We need to win one of these two against Ringgold," Union County head coach Chris Robbins said. "That would be huge, so we'll see what happens."

Panthers 7, North Murray 2 - Junior lefty Maddox Patton picked up the win, tossing 4 innings of one-hit baseball on March 18 in Eton.

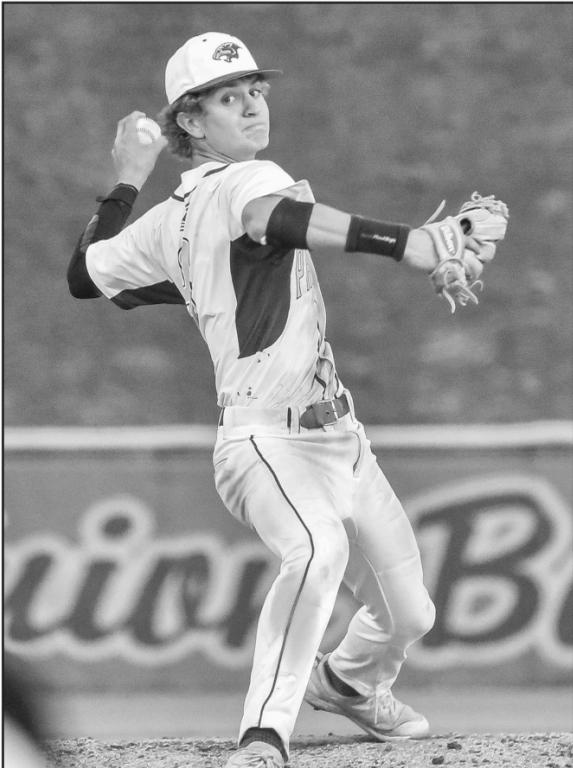
Senior Tyler Richards nailed down a three-inning save, allowing two earned and striking out four Mountaineers.

Both lineups finished with five hits each, but Union County benefited from seven North Murray errors, resulting in seven unearned runs off freshman starter Jordan Coker.

A North Murray error off the bat of Travis Tracy produced the first run of the game when he came around to score on Patton's two-out single in the second inning. Bentley Rich reached on an error to lead off the fourth, resulting in a three-run frame. Tracy followed with a walk, and then another North Murray error -- this one off the bat of Colten Gibson -- allowed both runners to score. Later in the inning, Gibson came around to score on a wild pitch.

Patton worked around two walks in the bottom half, bringing his final stat line to 3 Ks, 4 BBs, one hit and no runs over four.

The Mountaineers shot themselves in the foot during the fifth, spotting Union a 5-0



Junior Maddox Patton recorded the win vs. North Murray, and then scored four runs in the win over Sonoraville. Photo/Todd Forrest

edge courtesy of a walk, a two-out error and a hit batter. Richards replaced Patton and worked a scoreless fifth and Union used a two-run sixth to put the game away. Richards wore a pitch from Coker with one down in the inning and Gunnar Akins' double put two runners in scoring position for Hayden Hughes, who brought both runners home courtesy of another costly two-out error.

The Mountaineers cracked the scoring column in the sixth inning of a 7-0 game, pushing across two runs via a single, double, a walk and a sacrifice fly. During the seventh, Richards gave up a one-out single before slamming the door on the 7-2 win.

Patton went 1 for 3 with an RBI at the plate; Akins doubled and scored once during a 1-for-4 day; Eli Gwynn finished 1 for 4; Hughes went 1 for 3 with a walk, a stolen base and a run; Gibson ended his day 1 for 2 with a walk and a run.

Tracy scored twice, drew a walk and was hit by a pitch;

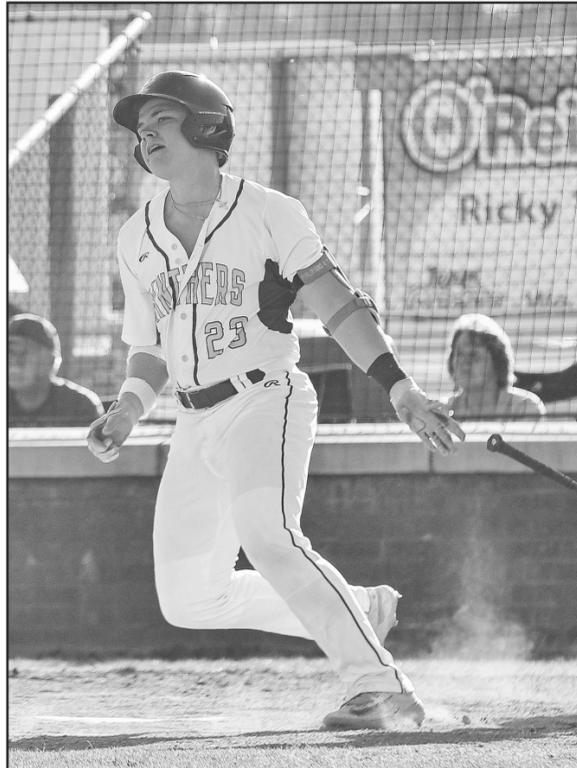
Rich stole a base and scored once; Richards added one run on his hit-by-pitch.

Panthers 11, Sonoraville 3 - Union County bounced back from Thursday's road loss to the Phoenix by scoring the first eight runs of a one-sided Friday-night victory in Blairsville.

Patton had himself a day, going 3 for 4 with four runs, two stolen bases and an RBI. He also tossed 1.2 innings on the mound, allowing one hit and recording one strikeout. Not to be outdone, Bo Brown turned in a 3-for-3 performance with three RBIs, a double, a walk and a run.

Akins got the starting nod and silenced the Phoenix for four innings, allowing his offense to put up three in the first, four in the second and one in the third. Up 8-0, Akins cruised into the fifth where he ran into trouble after blowing an 83 MPH fastball past the leadoff man for the first out.

Sonoraville followed with three straight hits to get on the board. The Union County



Junior Bo Brown went 3 for 3 with RBIs during Union County's 11-3 win vs. Sonoraville on Friday, March 21. Photo/Todd Forrest

ace was allowed a chance to clean up the mess, but unfortunately, a four-pitch walk ended Akins' day and brought Patton to the bump.

Patton induced a tap-per back to the mound for the second out, but a bases-loaded walk allowed Sonoraville to tack on one more, cutting Union's lead to 8-2.

During the Panthers' fifth, Gwynn tripled and Patton drove him in with a base hit to right. Patton stole second and eventually came around on Hughes' sacrifice fly. Lane Haney also walked and scored during the inning.

Patton held the Phoenix in check during the sixth and Richards yielded a run in the seventh, bringing the final tally to 11-3.

Akins went 1 for 4 with a run at the dish while going 4 1/3 innings on the mound, allowing four hits, two earned, and two walks with seven strikeouts.

Gwynn scored twice and tripled during his 2-for-4 game; Haney doubled and walked

three times, scoring one run and driving in another.

"[Haney's] arm is ruined so I haven't been able to do anything except DH him," Robbins said. "But he's hitting .379 so he's doing his job. He told me, 'coach I want to play,' so I told him better be a stud at the plate and he's done that. He takes walks and does whatever it takes to find his way onto the field."

Hughes knocked in three runs and scored twice; Gibson went 1 for 4 with a double and a pair of RBIs.

Richards walked one and fanned one while surrendering two hits and one earned run during an inning on the bump.

Panthers 4, Sonoraville 6 - The Panthers couldn't overcome a 6-1 hole and three errors during Thursday's road trip to Sonoraville.

"We gave that game to Sonoraville," Robbins said. "We out-hit them, but the difference was, they didn't have three errors. They only had two earned runs that game. But that's what happens when you

make mistakes at the wrong time."

Brown was tagged with the loss, giving up four hits and two earned runs over four innings. Hughes took the ball in the fifth and surrendered two unearned runs and two hits during two innings of relief work.

Haney went 2 for 3 with a walk at the plate, driving in a run, scoring once and stealing a bag. Akins finished 2 for 4 with a run; Hughes scored and drove in a run during his 1-for-2 day.

Union County grabbed an early 1-0 lead when Patton walked to open the game and scored on Haney's RBI single. But Sonoraville fired back with three in the bottom half courtesy of a walk, a single, a double and a two-out error.

A Panthers' error in the third inning allowed another run, putting them at a 4-1 deficit. Then, with Hughes on the mound, a single, an error, and a wild pitch gave the Phoenix a 6-1 lead in the fifth inning.

Union County's three-run sixth opened with a base hit by Akins, a walk by Haney and an RBI single from Hughes. With nobody out in the inning, Brown kept things going with a run-scoring single, but the rally eventually fizzled, adding one more run via Rich's RBI groundout.

Hughes silenced the Phoenix bats in the sixth but a two-out Akins single was all Union County muster during the seventh.

Brown went 1 for 3 with an RBI; Gwynn finished 1 for 3; Rich drove in a run; Patton walked and scored.

Up next: Union County travels to Ringgold on Tuesday for a 5:30 p.m. first pitch. The Panthers host Ringgold on Thursday at 5:30 p.m., then head back on the road for a 5:30 p.m. date with Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe on Friday.

"We're about to face some better pitching, so these boys need to learn to shorten their swings," Robbins said. "But we're hitting the ball. I'm excited that we have five kids batting over .300. Our team batting average is over .260 while last year it was .223 and the year before it was .187."

Track: Union girls place first, guys second at Habersham Central meet



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Mt. Airy - Union County returned in an impressive showing at Habersham Central's Surcheros Battle of the Blue Ridge on Friday, March 21, where the girls took first overall and the guys finished second.

In ladies' action, Ava Lloyd placed first in the 100M and 200M races with respective times of 12.95 and 27.28. Lola Hunter finished first at 3200M at 12:17. The 4x200 relay team logged a first-place time of 1:52.29, and Sofia Foster earned gold in the shot put with a distance of 35 feet, 3 inches.

In the men's competition, Andrew Nushtayev placed first in the 800M race, clocking in at 2:20.02. Oliver Hillman won the 3200M event with a time of 11:10; the 4x400 relay team came in first at 3:50.93; Jack Wilson won the discus event with a throw of 147-11.

Girls' silver medals went to Ava Klein (100M - 13.14; 200M - 27.66; 400M - 1:05.14); the 4x800 relay team (11:27.76); Abby Barrett (triple jump 30-9.5).

Taking home runner-up finishes in the guys' competition were Cole Brown (400M - 53.85); Noah James Payne (800M - 2:20.03); Micah Wallace (300 hurdles - 46.25); the 4x100 relay team (52.23); Daniel McPhee (triple jump -



Daniel McPhee was second in the triple jump and fourth in the long jump at Habersham Central. Photo/UCHS

41-6); Jaxon Totherow (shot put - 45-2).

Bronze medals went to Gracie Miller (100 hurdles - 18.96; high jump - 4-8); Ragan McCarter (300 hurdles - 54.84); the girls' 4x400 relay team (4:47.76); Loyd (long jump - 16-1); Payne (3200M - 11:40.80); the boys' 4x800 relay team (9:26.50); the boys 4x200 relay team (1:39.67).

Fourth-place finishes went to Hunter (1600M); Miller (300 hurdles); the girls' 4x100

relay team; Kyler Juracka (300 hurdles and high jump); and McPhee (long jump).

Union County competed against Hart County, Lumpkin County, Stephens County and Habersham.

This week, Union County hosts the Mountain Top Invitational at 3:15 p.m. on Thursday, March 27. Teams expected to attend are Dawson County, Gilmer, Pisgah (NC), and Robbinsville (NC).

UCHS Panthers basketball team recognized at Blairsville City Hall



On Thursday, March 20, Blairsville Mayor Robert 'Buddy' Moore and city councilman Tony Dyer welcomed the Union County mens' basketball team to City Hall to present them with a proclamation to honor and recognize their State runner-up season in 2024-25. Photos by Todd Forrest