

# Sports

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## Golf: Price crowned Area champion; boys finish second

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**Ringgold** - Before sophomore Hayden Price's 75 last Monday, April 28 at Ringgold's Windstone Golf Club, it had been 18 years (Jake Levens) since a Union County men's golfer took home low-medalist honors at the region or area championships.

Price led the Panthers to a runner-up team finish, qualifying Union County for the Class AA State Championships at Columbus' Bull Creek Golf Course on May 19-20.

Senior teammate Huston West finished third at Area with a 78, but the Price-West duo wasn't enough to overcome Rockmart's 322 team score -- 18 strokes better than Union County (340).

West and Price were the only Panthers to break 90 on the day with sophomore Will Henson shooting a 93, junior Jonah Licavoli shooting 94, senior Brayden Hogsd ending this round at 96 and sophomore Grant Smith with a 98.

Behind Ringgold and Union County in the team standings, Sonoraville qualified for state with a third-place score of 346.

Ringgold's 349 just missed the cut, while Coahulla Creek (358), North Murray (364), Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (374) and Murray County (383) rounded out the team scores.

Individually, Price's 75 edged Rockmart senior Parker Smith (77). West's 78 was third, Rockmart freshman Remi Atkins and Ringgold junior Elijah Stidham tied for fourth with a 79.

North Murray senior Brody Allen and Sonoraville senior Jake Cochran (80) tied for sixth. Junior Clay Worley



Sophomore Hayden Price became the Union County men's first Area/Region low medalist since 2007 with a 75 at last week's Area golf tournament in Ringgold. Photo/Todd Forrest

(81) of Sonoraville was eighth, Rockmart junior Levi Crumley (82) came in ninth, Coahulla Creek freshman Coker Gadsen (83) placed 10th and Rockmart senior Kapp Fennell (84) finished 11th.

The Union County ladies failed to qualify for State, placing sixth at Area. According to Union County head coach Brandon Bradburn, the girls were unable to field a full squad due to club events at the school.

Junior Peyton Grisham shot a 113 and senior Aubrie Akins ended at 116.

"Overall, it was a very successful season for the girls," Bradburn said. "We're looking forward to next year and the added experience many of our new golfers will have under their belt."



Senior Huston West placed third at last week's Area 3 golf match in Ringgold. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Union County boys golf team will compete for a State Championship in Columbus on May 19-20. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Track: Hunter and Totherow lead UCHS at Sectional meet

### Union County qualifies 12 for this weekend's State Championships

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**Decatur** - Union County collected 12 top-eight finishes at Saturday's Class AA State Sectionals, each qualifying for this weekend's State Championships at East Jackson.

Competing against regions 1, 5, 6 and 7, junior Lola Hunter and sophomore Jaxon Totherow each picked up first-place performances in their respective events. Senior Jack Wilson logged a second-place finish in the discus.

Hunter came in first in the 3200M race, crossing the finish line at 12 minutes, 56.35 seconds, defeating Columbus freshman Olivia DiQuattro, the reigning Class AA Cross Country State champ, by eight seconds (13:04.38). Coahulla Creek's Dafne Monroy was third at 13:11.35.

In the shot put, Totherow's first-place throw measured at 50 feet, 11 inches (school record), defeating Sumter County's Joshua Coleman (47-3) and Miller Grove's Maurice Seals (45-0).

Wilson placed second in the discus at 143-10 behind Shaw's Andre Thrasher (173-9). Columbus' Zach Clay came in third at 134-3 and Totherow placed fourth to qualify for state with a 134-2 toss.

Sophomore Oliver Hillman was third in the 3200M with a time of 11:03.76, falling



Junior Lola Hunter qualified for the State Championship in three individual events and one relay event. Photo/Todd Forrest

in line behind a pair of runners from KIPP Academy. Nasir January was first at 10:52.84 and Josiah Owens placed second with a time of 10:52.99.

Hunter also qualified for state in the 1600M and 800M races, coming in third in the 1600M with a time of 5:43.39. Rockmart's Paxton Kirby was first at 5:38.28. Drew Charter's Zora Jackson came in second with a time of 5:39.07.

Hunter was fourth in the 800M at 2:33.90. Kirby picked up another first-place finish at 2:27.94; Columbus' Kelby Mills was second at 2:31.34; Carver-Columbus' Anita Burnett came in third with a time of 2:33.88.

Junior Leslie Rash placed fourth in the discus with a school-record throw of 100-6. Miller Grove's Saniya Francis placed first with a distance of 127 feet, Shaw's Taliyah Schreane placed second at 113-9 and Sonoraville's Ashley Fountain was third at 108-8.

Sophomore Sofia Foster turned in a top-five in the shot put with a toss of 33 feet. Schreane was first at 41-4; Sonoraville's Izzy Goss placed second at 35-11; Francis came in third at 35-3; Carver-Atlanta's Precious Upshaw finished fourth at 33-7.

Three Union County relay teams placed seventh -- the



Sophomore Jaxon Totherow placed first in the shot put and fourth in the discus events at last weekend's Sectional meet.

4x100 girls, 4x800 girls and 4x800 boys.

The 4x100 girls team of Ava Lloyd, Ava Klein, Izzy An-thros and Nomi Nelson crossed the line in 51.24 seconds. Booker T. Washington placed first at 47.39, Shaw was second (47.85) and Carver-Columbus came in third (50.03).

Carver Atlanta (50.21), Miller Grove (50.24) and Spencer (50.41) rounded out the top six.

The 4x800 girls team of Hunter, Avery Hussion, Averie Tanner and Kate Barrett were seventh at 11:25.22. Columbus placed first (10:42.77), Redan came in second (10:47.05),

Shaw was third (11:01.11), Therrell came in fourth at 11:08.22, fifth place went to Miller Grove (11:12.18) and KIPP Atlanta took home sixth (11:17.80).

Last but not least, the 4x800 boys' team of Hillman, Andrew Nushtayev, Noah Payne and Arthur Bowman came in seventh after crossing the line in seventh at 8:59.20.

KIPP Atlanta (8:39.45), Therrell (8:40.04), Columbus (8:42.03), Redan (8:43.07), Salem (8:46.46), Jordan (8:57.44) and eighth-place Shaw (9:02.55) also qualified for the State Championships.

Union County men who

failed to advance were Bowman (3200M and 1600M), Cole Brown (400M), Andrew Nushtayev (800M), Jacob Turner (110 hurdles), Micah Wallace (110 hurdles), the 4x100 and 4x400 relay teams.

Girls falling short of a State berth were Lloyd (100M), Tanner (800M), Regan McCarter (100 hurdles), 4x200 relay team, 4x800 relay, Abby Barrett (triple jump), Foster (discus) and Rash (shot put).

The Class AA State Championships begin Friday at 9:30 a.m. with the girls' discus throw (Rash). Totherow competes in the shot put at 11:30 a.m. The boys' discus event (Totherow and Wilson) is at 1:30 p.m.

Union County's first running event (4x800) is at 5:40 p.m. The 4x100 races are at 6:40 p.m. The 1600M races are scheduled for 8:40 p.m.

On Saturday, Hunter competes in the 800M race at 1:50 p.m. then hits the track again, along with Hillman, at 4:50 for the 3200M events. The trophy presentations are at 6:30 p.m.

Union's frontrunners, Hunter and Totherow, will have their hands full at State. In the 3200M, Hunter will see four girls that logged faster sectional times, led by Savannah Arts' Frances Tedder's 12:09.99.

As for Totherow, Franklin County and Tattnall County turned in shot put distances of 55-6 and 52-4, respectively.



# Football: Panthers face Christian-Heritage in Spring scrimmage

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Panther fans will get their first glimpse of the Rob Stowe-era when Union County hosts Christian-Heritage (Dalton) in a spring scrimmage under the lights of Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Thursday at 7 p.m.

Stowe and the Panthers have gotten acquainted during spring practice over the last week-plus, culminating with Thursday's contest.

"The biggest thing is just seeing how they respond under the lights in a game situation," Stowe said. "We're going to see what we need to work on and what kind of changes need to be made to improve our football team. The main thing is, I just want to see them compete and reward them by finishing off the spring with a game."

"It's hard to base where [your team] is going to be in the fall based on nine days of practice and a spring game. But you can get a good idea and a headstart on your summer work -- maybe a position change or finding something new that could help the team."

Through the first seven practices of the spring, Stowe is confident his players are buying into his new system and staff.

"I'm really pleased with how they are trying to do what we ask of them, and we're asking a lot of them," he said. "The biggest thing is watching them battle through adversity. They've been sore. They haven't put on pads in a few months and [practice] has been physical, but we've been trying to make them understand it'll all be worth it."

"What we've been preaching is, 'you need to sacrifice something to be great.' Whether it be your time, your energy, or maybe some days you just don't feel good, you still have to do it. Anything worth having in life is going to require a sacrifice. But that's what makes it all worth it: Seeing the results after sacrificing for something bigger than you."

Union County's enters the 2025 season with a couple question marks on both sides of the ball. Offensively, the Panthers graduated their leading rusher (Connor Schuknecht) and the team's top receiver (Maddox Young).

On the other side, Union bids farewell to team captains Kaden Combs and Ethan Lester at the linebacker position, along with a three-year starter in Braden Plott.



Head coach Rob Stowe and the Panthers brave the elements during spring practice. Stowe hopes to bring his E.A.T. mantra to Union County, emphasizing effort, attitude and toughness. Photo/Todd Forrest



Rising senior Cade Dockrey is back in the mix at the quarterback position following last fall's knee surgery that cost him an entire football and basketball season. Photo/Todd Forrest

Combs was a three-year starter on an O-line that must also replace another experienced starter in Beau Webster.

Despite the losses up front, Stowe should be able to lean on a solid O-line to protect either sophomore Kamden Kendrick or senior Cade Dockrey.

Kendrick has the early advantage by way of being the returning starter from Union's 2024 playoff squad, where he was thrust into a tough situation but showed progress over 11 starts as a freshman.

However, the dual-threat Dockrey is looking sharp as he

attempts to regain his spot at QB1 following a serious knee injury that derailed his junior campaign.

The intriguing quarterback battle will be on full display Thursday night, but all QBs involved will sport red no-contact jerseys, as agreed upon by Stowe and Christian Heritage.

According to Stowe, the starters will play the entire first half, with the younger players mixing in during the third quarter. The fourth quarter will be strictly JV players and freshmen.

"We're excited to get out there Thursday night," Stowe

said. "Christian Heritage is bringing a good team that went pretty far in the playoffs last year. We better be ready to strap it up and get after it."

"We're definitely hoping that people will turn out for this game to encourage these kids. We're hoping for one big united group between our team and community, and what better way to start that than this Thursday night in Blairsville."

"Sometimes it's hard to think about football in May, but if I know people in Union County, they're like most people in the south, if there's a football game going on, they're going to get excited."



Rising sophomore quarterback Kamden Kendrick last Friday during spring drills. Photo/Todd Forrest

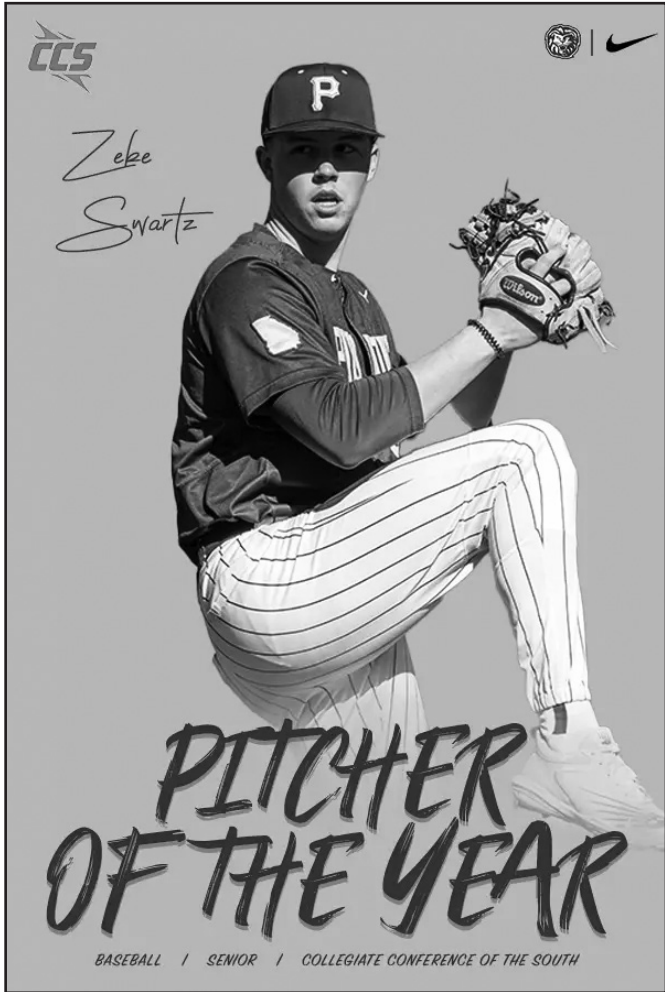


Rising junior Bentley Rich is the frontrunner to replace Connor Schuknecht in the Panthers backfield. Photo/Todd Forrest



The O-line is under the direction of Wade Hodges, who returns to UCHS after serving on Brian Allison's staff from 2017-2020. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Baseball: Blairsville's Zeke Swartz picks up CSS Pitcher of the Year, First Team All-Conference accolades



Zeke Swartz has spent the last four years at Piedmont University after anchoring the UCHS pitching staff for three years. Photo/Todd Forrest

Former Union County Panther Zeke Swartz earned Collegiate Conference of the South (CSS) Pitcher of the Year and First Team All-Conference honors last week.

**BY THE NUMBERS:**  
ERA: 1.89 (1st on the team & 2nd in the league).  
Strikeouts: 76 (1st on team & in the league).  
Record: 5-1  
In-Season CCS Recognition: 3x Pitcher of the Week

Of Note: Swartz posted a stellar 1.89 ERA, ranking second in the league and among the top 40 nationally, and his 0.87 WHIP stood 11th in the NCAA. Swartz went 5-1 over 10 starts, tossing 62.0 innings while holding opposing hitters

to a .182 batting average, ranking first in the league. He also led the league in strikeouts with 76, 16 more than anyone else.

**Honors and Awards:**  
D3baseball.com All-Region First Team (2024)  
ABCA/Rawlings All-Region Second Team (2024)  
CCS All-Conference First Team (2024)  
CCS Pitcher of the Week (2x)

CCS All-Tournament Team (2023)  
USA South All-Academic Team (2022)

**2024:**  
Started 13 contests on the mound with a 5-2 record  
Posted a 2.76 ERA, lowest among everyday starters



Union County lefty Zeke Swartz during his senior season at Union County in 2021. Photo/Todd Forrest

Pitched 75.0 innings allowing 23 earned runs

Team-high 89 strikeouts  
Threw eight innings of scoreless work against Huntingdon in a season-high IP

Totaled four outings with no earned runs

**2023:**  
Earned 13 starts on the mound posting a 6-1 record  
Led the team with 70.2 innings pitched

Earned the win in the CCS Championship on short rest after a win against Huntingdon four days earlier

Pitched a total of 13.1 innings in the CCS tournament  
Posted a 4.84 ERA with a team-high 68 strikeouts  
Tied a career-high nine

strikeouts against Susquehanna

**2022:**  
Made five appearances on the mound (four starts)  
Struck out 19 batters over 17.0 innings of work

Went 2-0 and recorded 18 strikeouts over his last three appearances

Threw 5 shutout innings in nonconference home win over Oglethorpe, striking out nine on April 19

Earned the win at Maryville on May 1, securing the Lions a place in the conference tournament with 6.0 innings and eight strikeouts while allowing just two runs.

**Personal:** Swartz is the son of Toby and Paige (Colwell) Swartz.

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