

Sports

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Men's Golf: Panthers seventh at State; Price finishes 11th

By Todd Forrest
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Midland - The Union County men turned in a seventh-place finish at last week's two-day Class AA State Championship, hosted by Bull Creek East Golf Course located outside Columbus.

Junior Hayden Price fired back-to-back 78s to finish at 156 -- 11th on the individual leaderboard.

Following a 325 team score on day one, Union County sat one shot out of third until a 340 on day two dropped the Panthers to seventh.

Columbus, playing on its home course, took home both the team and individual State titles, led by Brooks Urquhart's 8-under par 64 in round one.

Columbus distanced itself from the field courtesy of 587 team score, followed by Pierce County (603), Thomson (652), Burke County (654) and Hart County (661).

Region 7-AA's Rockmart's 664 was one shot better than Union County (665). Drew Charter was eighth (671), Franklin County (671) came in ninth, while another Region 7-AA squad, Sonoraville (675), rounded out the top-10.

As for the Panthers, senior Huston West's 163 (81-82) came in behind Price and was good enough for T-23rd in the state.



The Union County men's golf team were one shot out of third place after round one of last week's State Championships at Bull Creek East Golf Course in Midland. Photo/Todd Forrest

Junior Jonah Licavoli shot 170 (83-87) to finish as Union's No. 3 scorer and tie for 39th overall.

Sophomore Will Henson posted Union's fourth best score with a 178 (83-95) to tie for 50th.

Sophomore Grant Smith's 184 (91-93) earned him 55th in Class AA. Senior Leo Nam came in 66th at 207 (104-103).

Individually, Urquhart took home the State title at 137 (64-73). Pierce County's Ethan Arnold was second at 143 (74-69), Jay Patel of Columbus finished third at 147 (72-75), Pierce County's Bennett Puryear came in fourth at 150 (79-71) and Columbus' Monty Thakur placed fifth at 151 (77-74).

Preston Johnston of Jackson came in sixth with a

score of 153 (79-74). Crisp County's Will Gordon (78-76) and Pierce County's Samuel Ricketson (78-76) tied for seventh at 154. Coming in ninth were Thomson's Sam Amerson (79-76) and Columbus' Boon Bickerstaff (73-82) at 155.

Price's 156 was 11th, edging out four players at 158 - Charlie Ducey (Thomson), Ethan Pham (Columbus), Elijah Stidham (Ringgold) and Hardt

Strickland (Pierce County).

Price's tournament began with two pars before taking bogeys at 3 and 5. He followed with a birdie on the Par-4 6th, but bogeys at 8 and 9 resulted in a +3 opening nine.

Price played the back-9 at even par until three consecutive bogeys at 16, 17, 18 closed out the opening round with a 78 (+6).

Price's second round

opened with a bogey-6 at the 1st hole, but following consecutive pars at 2 and 3, he went back to even with a birdie on the Par-5 4th.

Still even through seven, he suffered a bogey-5 at No. 8 but answered with a birdie on the Par-4 9th for an even-par front-9.

Price shot 6-over on the back-9, which included a double-bogey at the Par-5 16th.

Track: Wilson's determination pays off with D1 scholarship

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Union County's Jack Wilson, Class AA's 2025 State runner-up discus thrower, inked a scholarship with Division-1 East Tennessee State University during a signing-day ceremony at UCHS last month.

After visiting the Johnson City, TN university, Wilson quickly fell in love with the facilities and location. However, he identified the coach and his future teammates as the key deciding factors.

"It's a nice Division-1 school and they have a huge indoor dome where the track and field team gets to practice, plus its only three hours away," he said. "But after I took a visit, I loved the team, I loved the coach, it was just an awesome atmosphere. It seemed like the perfect fit."

Wilson briefly considered other schools, but none matched ETSU's appeal, and he knew if ETSU extended an offer, his search would be complete.

"Honestly, I didn't look at a lot of other schools," he said. "There were a few others that were interesting, but I knew if I got an offer from ETSU, that would be my home."

Wilson, who holds the school record for the event at a distance of 155 feet, 10 inches, didn't join the track and field team until his junior year. In just two years, he leaves UCHS after achieving a second-place finish at last month's Class AA State Championships with a throw of 154 feet, 3 inches.

Initially, Union County track and field coach Beau Kelley had reservations about Wilson's desire to join the team, especially since the then-junior made this request in February 2024, nearly two months after practices had begun.

"I finally said, 'Sure, why not? Let him come out and



Outgoing senior Jack Wilson, second from left, alongside family and UCHS track and field coach Beau Kelley during last month's signing day ceremony. Photo/Todd Forrest

let's see what he can do,' Kelley said. "The first few weeks, I thought, 'Maybe he can do this.' But once the competitions started, you could tell he really wanted to get better. And that's the thing I love to see from any athlete because everyone has to start somewhere. It's just a matter of how hard are you willing to work to get better."

This past April, Wilson won the Region 7-AA championship, and the following week, he placed second at sectionals to the eventual State champion.

"This year, it's been the opposite, he's been the guy on top at every meet," Kelley said. "That meant he had to approach it with a different mentality because if you put too much pressure on yourself, you're going to cave. You have

to keep going out there and having fun, and Jack has done a phenomenal job."

In 2024, his first year competing, Wilson secured fourth place at the region meet and eighth place at sectionals, which qualified him for the State Championships. He went on to finish eighth in Class AA with a throw of 130 feet 9 inches, improving his distance in each of the three postseason events.

"He was the underdog all season," Kelley recalled, reflecting on Wilson's foray into track and field in 2024. "Going into the region, he wasn't supposed to make it to sectionals, and he made it to sectionals. At sectionals, he wasn't supposed to make it to state, and he made it to state. At state, he wasn't supposed to get a medal, and

he got a medal."

When Wilson was asked about his decision to give track and field a shot in early 2024, he admitted that he never dreamed he would sign a D1 scholarship 14 months later.

"At the time I thought (track and field) would be something to do for fun," he said. "And I'll admit, I was very average at first, the distance just was not there. But I'm glad I stuck with it. Everything happens for a reason."

Wilson is the son of Greg and Jane Wilson. He intends to major in business at East Tennessee State University.

"I want to thank God for this opportunity and I want to thank my parents for the countless hours they've spent helping me with my college stuff, diet stuff, everything."



Jack Wilson competes at the Class AA State Championships earlier this month. Photo/Todd Forrest

Hope Taylor weighs future options, chooses Georgia Gwinnett

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Hope Taylor, Union County's 6-foot-1 all-region center, signed a scholarship earlier this spring with a first-year program at Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) in Lawrenceville.

However, when GGC head coach Tory Wooley first contacted Taylor during her 2024-25 season, the Union County senior was still undecided about continuing her basketball career at the next level.

"I wasn't sure if I wanted to play, but Coach Tory is really what sold me," Taylor said. "He was so personable and asked me more questions about myself than he did about basketball. I felt like he was someone I could grow a lot under and learn a lot of lessons from, not just in the game, but in life in general.

"I originally called him and said I didn't want to play, but I kept thinking about it, and eventually I changed my mind and told him if I'm going to play, I want to play for you. So I went down there for a workout and ended up committing that same day. I was pretty set on not playing at all, but overnight, I changed my mind."

Taylor's story is one of persistence after spending most of her first two seasons as a Lady Panther on the junior varsity squad, under two different coaches, before working her way into the starting lineup as a junior under then-first-year coach Thomas Nelson.



Union County outgoing-senior Hope Taylor, with parents, during her signing day ceremony last month at UCHS. Photo/Todd Forrest

This past year, Taylor helped lead Union County to 19 victories, securing the program's first Battle of the States title and achieving a second consecutive Class AA Sweet 16 appearance while averaging 9.3 points, 8.2 rebounds, and 1.4 blocks per game.

Taylor logged a career-high 27 points in a Dec. 10 region victory over Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe. Later that month, she pulled down a career-best 14 rebounds in a 22-point outing during a Battle of the States semifinal win vs. Rabun County -- the Lady Panthers' first victory over the Lady Cats in a decade.

Two days later, she was

selected to the All-Tournament team when Union County defeated Polk County, Tennessee in the championship game.

She achieved double-digit rebound totals in 10 games during the 2024-25 season, resulting in six double-doubles. Additionally, Taylor blocked five shots in a loss at Ringgold on January 31.

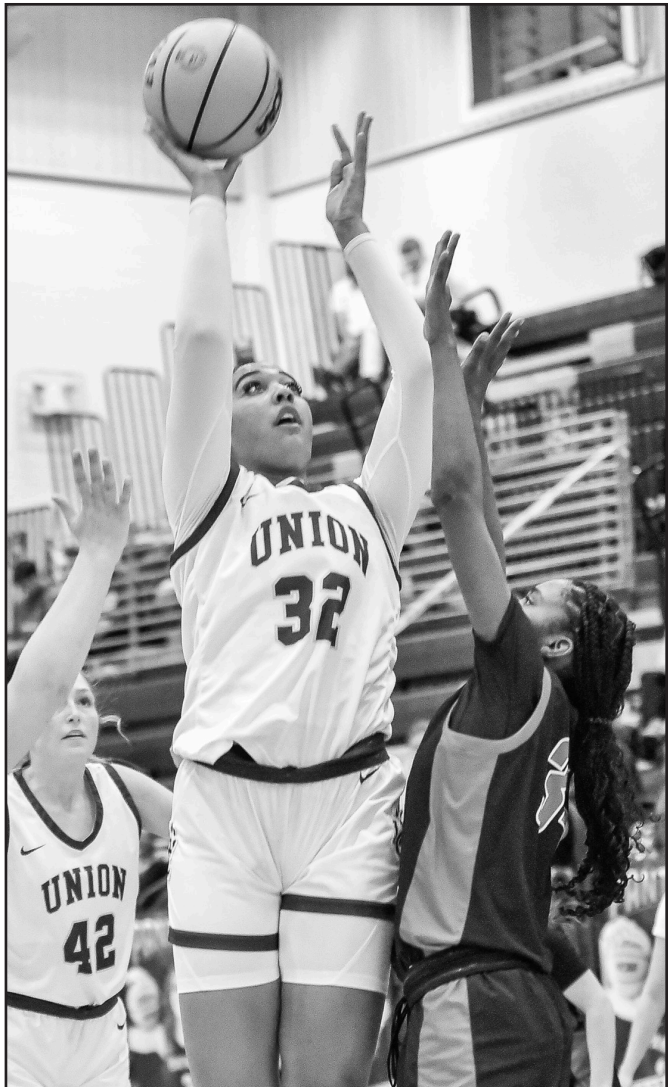
As a junior, Taylor started the season as a steady presence in the post but evolved into a dominant force down low by season's end.

She scored in double digits for the first time, recording 11 points during a victory over Providence Christian Academy on January 2,

2024, where she also blocked two shots. Taylor achieved the same scoring total of 11 points once again on January 13, 2024 -- a one-point loss to Fannin County.

However, her breakout performance came in a 46-41 season-ending loss at Murray County in the Sweet 16. Before fouling out, Taylor had 15 points on 5 for 8 from the floor and 5 of 6 at the line, while pulling down seven rebounds.

Taylor is majoring in history education and plans to be a high school teacher and possibly coach basketball. She was also crowned UCHS Basketball Homecoming Queen for the 2024-25 school year.



Hope Taylor shoots in the paint during a Lady Panthers' contest in December. Photo/Todd Forrest

In closing, Taylor thanked the town of Blairsville for all their support.

"It's a small town and I had a bit of a rough start here, but over time, I found a lot of people who cared about me and supported me," she said. "To everyone, from the guy

who made my sandwiches at Ingles every day before our games, to the people who would come up to me and wish me good luck on our game, everyone in this community has been amazing to me. I really appreciate all of it."

Young Harris College hosts 21st Annual Clay Dotson Open

A rainy start couldn't dampen the spirits at the 21st annual Clay Dotson Open golf tournament on May 19 at Brasstown Valley Resort, as 224 golfers helped raise more than \$115,000 to benefit student scholarships at Young Harris College.

"I want to thank everyone for being here today for this special event," said Dr. John Wells, Young Harris College president, as he kicked off the tournament. "The Clay Dotson Open is an incredible event, and thanks to you, it helps us raise money for our students."

Proceeds from the tournament go directly toward scholarships at YHC.

Clay Dotson, the tournament's namesake, passed away in September 2024. A professor for 42 years, Academic Dean and interim president on more than one occasion, Dotson loved YHC. His son, Mark, vice president for Advancement, spoke about his father.

"I really appreciate everyone who participates in this event, from the players and sponsors to Brasstown Valley Resort and volunteers," Dotson said. "Dad loved golf, and he loved Young Harris College. He bled purple. Everything we do at Young Harris College is for the students, and he loved that this event helps them. Thank you for supporting this tournament and the College."

Players enjoyed morning and afternoon flights, followed by awards ceremonies. Prizes for the tournament were awarded as follows:

Morning Flight: Flight 1 First Place - Eliyah Ryals, Isiah McPherson, Curtis Phillips, and Brandon Arrowwood; Second Place - Wade Douglas, Cade Douglas, Rick Miller, and Buck Belue; Third Place - Sonny Sprayberry, Richard Lester, Blake Kinnett, and Brice Sprayberry.

Flight 2 First Place - Tim Brackett, Mark Vaughn, Brian Mundy, and Lawrence McNabb; Second Place - Patrick Lovelace, Kevin Floyd, Drew Dotson, and Clint Hobbs; Third place - Stan Gunter, Kevin Bierschenk, Lamar Paris, and Steve Rowe.

Afternoon Flight: Flight 1 First Place - Hank Komodowski, Don Green, Tim Waite, and Greg Gibson; Second Place - Dave Bartschy, Steve Conrad, Nick Stephenson, and Casey Conrad; Third Place - Cody Walden, Joe Fortwengler, Parker Hulme, and Chandler York.

Flight 2 First Place - Jason Seabolt, James Cook, Kevin Hughes and Tony Long; Second Place - Dustin Burch, Brad Smith, Danny Reagan, and Cooper Patton; Third e - Billy Roland, Matt Cox, Michael Clements and Randy Crowder.

Longest Drive: Curtis Phillips (morning flight), John Lichtenwalner (afternoon flight).



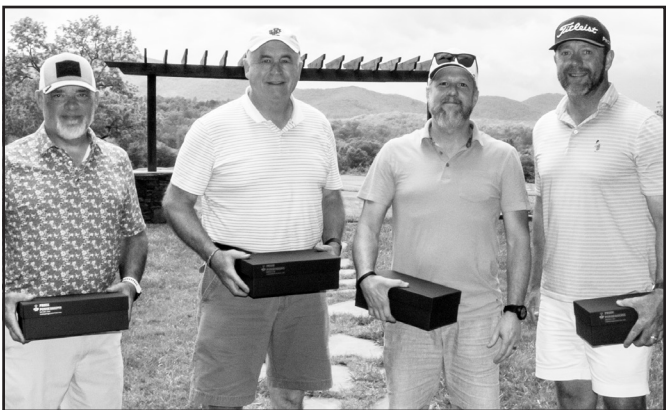
Hank Komodowski, Don Green, Tim Waite. Not pictured - Greg Gibson



Jason Seabolt, James Cook, Kevin Hughes, and Tony Long



Eliyah Ryals, Isiah McPherson, Curtis Phillips, and Brandon Arrowwood



Tim Brackett, Mark Vaughn, Brian Mundy, and Lawrence McNabb

Closest to the Pin: Dallas Snyder (morning flight), Casey Conrad (afternoon flight).

Putting Green Contest: Jonathan White.

Winners of tournament raffles: The Ridges Marina Half-Day Rentals Winners: John Goff of Augusta, and Daniel Davenport of Blairsville. Harrah's Package: Daniel Davenport of Blairsville.

Events like the Clay Dotson Open are not possible without the support of sponsors.

Diamond Sponsors: Brasstown Valley Resort, Alora Pharmaceuticals, United Community Bank.

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Bronze Sponsors: Carter Williams/McGriff Insurance Services, Lake Chatuge Monthly Magazine, Mary Broadrick & John Moffit.

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 info visit www.mountainhighhikers.org.

Young Harris College: From the Mound to the Major Leagues, and the Classroom to the Record Books

Young Harris College Athletics continues to shine as we head into the summer. From a standout former YH Baseball ace signing with a Major League organization, to exciting youth development opportunities on the lacrosse field, and record-setting academic achievements across all sports programs – it's been a banner week for the Mountain Lions.

The biggest Young Harris Athletics newsbreak of the week comes from a YH Baseball alum, Zach Murray. Murray signed a professional contract with the Cincinnati Reds organization after a strong start to his professional career with the Lincoln Saltdogs of the American Association of Professional Baseball. The right-handed pitcher from Cumming, struck out 11 batters across seven innings for Lincoln before having his contract transferred to the Reds.

During his career as a Mountain Lion, Murray compiled a 14-7 record with a 3.77 ERA over 181.1 innings pitched. He made 31 appearances (29 starts), struck out 186 hitters, and walked just 67. As a senior in 2024, Murray led YHC on the mound with a 9-2 record and a 3.21 ERA across 101.0 innings while punching out 99 batters. His .239 opponent batting average against and four complete games anchored one of the most successful pitching staffs in program history. Murray's dominant senior campaign earned him Conference Carolinas Pitcher of the Year honors, as well as First Team All-Southeast Region recognition from both D2CCA and NCBWA.

Even though our teams are away from campus, they find themselves back in the Enchanted Valley to connect with the community and grow the game they love. In a few weeks, Young Harris Women's Lacrosse is hosting an exciting overnight camp, led by Head Coach Christine Hatton and Assistant Coach Rachel Robb. The camp runs from June 9-12, offering players aged 8-16 the opportunity to develop their skills, sharpen their lacrosse IQ, and compete at a high level. Both overnight (\$649) and extended day (\$499) options are

Learn to play Pickleball

The Blairsville Pickleball Club, in conjunction with the Union County Recreation 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(May28/23)CA

YOUNG HARRIS WOMEN'S LACROSSE

WOMEN'S LACROSSE CAMP

JUNE 9-12

GameBreaker Lacrosse Camps returns to Georgia for an exciting girls' summer lacrosse camp at Young Harris College.

Campers will focus on improving individual stick skills and positional techniques, learning team concepts, and participating in daily scrimmages to apply what they've learned.

Both overnight and extended day camper options are available, making it flexible for participants.

Visit: <https://laxcamps.com/girls-lacrosse-camps/young-harris-college-georgia/>

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available to suit different schedules. Visit laxcamps.com, click "Find a Camp," head to "Georgia Lacrosse Camps," and select "Girls Lacrosse Camp at Young Harris College" to register!

When off the court, field, or track, our student-athletes are still succeeding. Young Harris College Athletics has set new department records for academic performance following the conclusion of the 2024-25 academic year. For the first time in

school history, every program at YH recorded a team GPA of 3.0 or higher in both the spring semester and full academic year. The Mountain Lions also posted a department-record cumulative GPA of 3.525 for the Spring 2025 semester, marking a historic academic milestone. Out of 337 total student-athletes this spring, 84.86% earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher, 61.12% achieved a 3.5 GPA or better, and 19.88% finished with a perfect 4.0.

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