

# Sports

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## Union County basketball undergoes major changes at the top

### Garrett replaces Jones as men's coach; Buford's Crystal Beach takes the helm of Lady Panthers

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Both Union County basketball teams are going to look very different when they take the court in November.

Union County High School Principal C.T. Hussion made the official announcement last Thursday, May 30 that boys' head basketball coach Casey Jones was stepping down after six seasons.

Earlier in the day, Jones broke the news to the team, who is preparing for the summer camp season, beginning at Tennessee Wesleyan this week.

They also learned that a familiar face would be taking the reins as former boys assistant and current Lady Panthers head coach Corey Garrett would immediately replace Jones.

Garrett was an assistant under Jones in 2016-17 before taking over the Lady Panthers a year later. This year's senior class were freshmen during Garrett's one season on the boys' bench and played under him during middle school.

Garrett also had to break the news to his Lady Panther squad that he's led for the last two seasons while introducing his replacement, Dr. Crystal Beach, who becomes the basketball program's first female head coach since parting ways with Robbie Stancil in 2004 -- three seasons removed from a State title game appearance.

Beach comes to Union County by way of Buford where she was an assistant under legendary coach Gene Durden.

The Lady Wolves are fresh off their third-straight State Championship while winning seven state titles under Durden since 2009.

Overall, Durden has compiled an 808-214 record in 31 years of coaching -- the last 14 coming at Buford.

Beach was a part of four basketball state titles in both the



Coaches Corey Garrett and Crystal Beach following their introduction by Union County High School last Thursday, May 30. Photo/Todd Forrest

4A and 5A classifications. She was also an assistant on two State Runner-Up squads.

Her volleyball teams won four consecutive Region Championships while finishing 41-0, en route to the program's first state title in 2015.

Buford volleyball has won two state titles, finished as runner-up twice and reached four final fours since 2014. As the head coach in 2018, Beach received Region 8-5A Coach of the Year honors after leading her team to the final four despite graduating a half-dozen All Region/Area players.

Beach, a Virginia native, and a graduate of Virginia Tech, spent time coaching in the Commonwealth before heading south to Gainesville's Lakeview Academy.

From there, she made the move to Buford, where she spent the previous eight years helping shape the basketball and volleyball programs.

When asked what she's looking forward to about moving to mountains, she didn't hesitate.

"The people," Beach replied. "Everyone has been so warm and welcoming. Part of what drew me here was the notion of 'family' and 'Union United.'"

As for her Lady Panther players, they made a wonderful first impression on their new coach, as well.

"Walking into the gym today as they were practicing, I saw a lot of hustle and effort," she said. "As a coach, that's something you're always excited to see."

"I'm also really excited about the talent. I've heard nothing but good things about this core group of young women that we have coming back. I'm excited to have the opportunity to continue developing them as players but they also seem like amazing young women."

Due to remaining obligations at Buford, Beach won't be available to coach during this week's University of North Georgia and UGA basketball camps but she plans to hit the ground running as soon as possible.

Until that time, assistant

coach Mandy Hunter will handle the coaching duties. Hunter is also expected to assist Beach during the upcoming season.

"I'm just excited and honored to be here and I'm ready to jump in and get going," Beach added.

Garrett, meanwhile, is able to dive right in and get reacquainted with the guys' squad at this week's Tennessee Wesleyan camp and the Union County camp on June 17-18.

Garrett replaces Jones, who stepped down to focus on his administrative duties. Prior to the 2018-19 school year, Jones accepted an administrative position at Union County Schools. However, with the responsibilities of his new job, combined with two children at home, he felt he was no longer able to dedicate 100% to his coaching duties.

Jones won 91 games during his six seasons, reaching four state tournaments while leading Union to its first state playoff victory in 15 years during the 2015-16 season. Jones was also in Garrett's current position when he was an assistant under former

head coach David Tucker before replacing him prior to the 2013-14 season.

In year one, Jones led the Panthers to their first postseason appearance in five years. And Jones believes that the transition to Garrett will also be a smooth one and both teams are in excellent hands.

"I'm excited about the future of our basketball programs; Corey and Crystal are going to do a great job," Jones said.

He also took a moment to reflect on the time spent coaching his alma mater.

"I appreciate the opportunity that I've been given over the past six years," Jones said. "When I got into education, my dream was to coach boys high school basketball at Union County and I was able to do that for six years."

"I definitely appreciate all the people who made that happen but the relationships with the guys will be the best part. The cool thing is, many of the guys I coached have remained local so I get to see them and those are lifetime relationships that

I've built.

"I want to thank everyone that's helped me from assistants to administrations but especially Coach Anthony Payne and Coach Kevin Hughes.

"Kevin has been there with me the whole time and I'm convinced that what success we had wouldn't have been possible without Kevin. He's a good guy and a really good friend of mine."

"I definitely have to thank Emily (wife) and our two kids (Reese and Cash). They have been my biggest supporters."

Jones leaves a stocked cupboard with four returning starters from last season's 17-win squad; Hughes is also expected to return as an assistant coach.

However, Garrett could face a slight rebuild entering 2020-21 following the Class of 2020's departure.

"We have a pretty good (upcoming) senior class but we kind of skipped the junior class (2021)," Garrett said. "I'm actually pretty excited about the sophomore class (2022) because it's a little deeper than I thought it was. So I'm looking forward to it, we have a nice senior class, a deep sophomore class, and the freshmen are stepping up and they all play hard, so right now, we're looking good."

According to Hussion, the groundwork for long-term athletic success is being laid at all levels. As UCHS continually raises the bar with top-notch coaching staffs, along with the improvements underway at the recreation department, Panther athletics are on the verge of setting a new standard like never before in Union County.

"With the new athletic facilities on the way thanks to the investments made by this community, we're just starting to see (what we're capable of)," Hussion said. "And when you combine that with program building under (new athletic director) Dr. (Banks) Bitterman and the plan we have going forward, we're set up really well for the future."

## Summer Sports: Union County has plenty to offer

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Just because school's out for the summer doesn't mean local sports are also taking a vacation.

The Union County Recreation Department District Tournaments open this weekend with three softball and one baseball tourney.

The 14U baseball team gets underway in Jefferson with a pool play double-header on Friday. The first game will be at 5 p.m. against the host team, Jefferson. The second half of the Friday night-cap is slated for 7 p.m. vs White County.

The single elimination tournament opens Saturday based on the seedings from pool play.

Meanwhile, Lumpkin County will play host to the 10U and 12U softball tournaments while Dawson County hosts the 14U - all getting underway Friday.

All softball state tournaments will be in Carrollton, starting June 21. Baseball locations will vary and begin June 21 or June 28.

At the high school lev-

el, summer basketball camp season is upon us and the Union County men are at Tennessee Wesleyan through Wednesday, June 5.

The Lady Panthers, meanwhile, are at the University of North Georgia through Wednesday, June 5, followed by a UGA game on June 6.

The Wednesday schedule for the UNG camp includes a 10 a.m. game at the Convocation Center and a noon game at Memorial Hall.

Union County High School will host one basketball camp this summer and it is scheduled for June 17th and 18th.

Union County football began its summer workouts this week and will participate in its first 7-on-7 tournament on Tuesday, June 11 at Kennesaw State.

On Friday, June 14, the Panthers return to Habersham Central for its annual 7-on-7 tournament. Union County will host the FCA 7-on-7 camp on June 20 before the offensive linemen attend the Western Carolina camp on June 21-22.

The annual GHSA Dead Week has been extended this year, lasting from June 26-July 7.

SUMMER SCHEDULE	
May 29 <sup>th</sup> & 30 <sup>th</sup>	Workout 8:30-11:30am
June 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> , & 6 <sup>th</sup>	summer workout 8:30-11:30am
June 10 <sup>th</sup> , 11 <sup>th</sup> , & 13 <sup>th</sup>	summer workout 8:30-11:30am
June 11 <sup>th</sup>	passing tournament at KSU, (varsity only)
June 14 <sup>th</sup>	passing tournament at Habersham, (varsity only) leave at 7:00am
June 17 <sup>th</sup> , 18 <sup>th</sup> , & 20 <sup>th</sup>	summer workout 8:30-11:30am
June 20 <sup>th</sup>	FCA passing camp at UCHS
June 21 <sup>st</sup> & 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Western Carolina Offensive Lineman Camp (do not know cost as of now)
June 24 <sup>th</sup> & 25 <sup>th</sup>	summer workout 8:30-10:00am. Meet at weight room.
June 26 <sup>th</sup> - July 7 <sup>th</sup>	Dead Period
July 8 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> & 11 <sup>th</sup>	summer workout 8:30-11:30am
July 9 <sup>th</sup>	Start at weight room. Throw against Robbinsville at 10:00am
July 10 <sup>th</sup> & 11 <sup>th</sup>	UCHS Lineman & 7 On 7 Camp 9:30am-12:30pm
July 15 <sup>th</sup> & 16 <sup>th</sup>	summer workout 8:30-11:30am
July 17 <sup>th</sup> & 18 <sup>th</sup>	padded camp at Habersham Central leave at 7:00am
July 22 <sup>nd</sup> & 23 <sup>rd</sup>	weight room at 8:30
July 22 <sup>nd</sup> & 23 <sup>rd</sup>	padded camp at UCHS 9:30-12:30pm
July 24 <sup>th</sup>	weight room at 8:30
PRACTICE OFFICIALLY BEGINS	
July 25 <sup>th</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup>	conditioning practice 8:30-10:30. Weight room 10:30-11:30
July 29 <sup>th</sup> , 30 <sup>th</sup> & 31 <sup>st</sup>	conditioning practice 3:00-5:00
August 1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup>	full pads practice 3:00-6:00.
August 5 <sup>th</sup>	practice 8:30-11:00, meet your teacher(TBA)
August 6 <sup>th</sup>	pictures 9:30am. Practice at 3:30
August 7 <sup>th</sup>	first day of school, practice at 3:30
August 9 <sup>th</sup>	Scrimmage vs Chestatee
August 16 <sup>th</sup>	Scrimmage at Habersham Central.
August 30 <sup>th</sup>	first game at East Hall 7:30.

Union County football will pick back up on July 8, then welcome Robbinsville for a passing camp on July 9, before hosting its second annual two-day lineman and 7-on-7 camp, starting July

10. Conditioning for the 2019 season gets underway on July 25; the first padded practice will be held on Aug. 1.

## Turkey Calling Contest June 8th

Coopers Creek Sportsmen for Kids will host its annual turkey calling contest on Saturday, June 8th at the Union County Civic Center. Doors will open to the public at 10 a.m. There will be great door prizes and a raffle for a 12 Gauge Youth Model Turkey shotgun. Hamburger and hot dog plates will be available.

Come by and support Coopers Creek Sportsmen for Kids and listen to some of the best callers from the south or enter one or many of our contests: Poult, Juniors, Hunter, Friction, Open Divisions, Gobbling and Owl Hoot. Any questions, call Tony Hughes at 706-897-2032.



## Come Join Meeks Park Pool Adult Water Aerobics

Beginning June 3rd!



Classes are offered Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 10:00-11:00 am  
Classes will end on Labor Day  
Season Membership: \$90.00

Monthly Aerobics Membership: \$35  
Daily Aerobics Fee: \$5

Register at Meeks Park Pool  
\*For more information call Meeks Park Pool at 706-439-6101\*