

Sports

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Volleyball: 'Great group of kids' take home NGML crown

By Todd Forrest
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It took Union County Middle School volleyball only three years to find its way atop the North Georgia Mountain League (NGML) following last month's championship victory over Clear Creek under first-year UCMS coach George Miller.

The UCMS program, founded in 2022 on the heels of the high school's run of success between 2019-22, finished its 2024 campaign with a 15-3 record (10-2 in league play), highlighted by its first NGML title.

"When you take a step back and look at it, this was really a great group of kids," Miller said. "I like to call them 'gamers.' Yes, you had kids like Kamryn Brown, Hailey Marshall, Bristol Davis, Kinsley Kendrick and Scout Henry -- those are kids that have played together, in all sports, and they just held the collective group together. But with this group, they knew how to dig down, and mentally, they were very good."

Miller, a long-time college and high school coach, applauded her squad's ability to adapt to the level of play Miller expects from her team.

"Usually, when I start teaching kids what I want them to learn, they struggle and we lose some games," she said. "I like to call it 'information overload.' But these girls, they took this information that I gave them, and we're talking high-school, college-type information and it's a lot to digest, but these kids got it within a week."

Entering the opening match vs. defending league champion Lumpkin County, Miller remained uncertain if the progress in practice would transition over. But once the first ball went into the air on Aug. 5, the rubber met the road, putting



Union County Middle School's volleyball team finished with a 15-3 record (10-2 in league play), highlighted by a NGML championship victory. Photo/UC Volleyball



L-R: Lyla Price, Scout Henry and Kamryn Brown. Photo/Jenni Dixon

any doubts to rest when the Panthers sent Lumpkin home with a loss.

"After we won the first match, and then the second match, and then won against White County, I knew this was a really special group," she said. "Anytime we would lose, these kids would come back with a vengeance."

Miller, a national championship-winning college coach,

recently moved to Young Harris from the Atlanta area, where she headed up a club volleyball program featuring more than 50 teams.

"I was [contemplating] retirement after my youngest daughter went off to college," said Miller, who also serves as Georgia's AAU Coordinator. "So we moved up here and I realized that I can't just sit around and talk about my garden - I have too much energy."

Miller's journey to UCMS began when she reached out to her friend, who coaches volleyball at Young Harris to suggest operating a few clinics, which, in turn, put Miller in touch with local parents and ultimately led her to Murphy, North Carolina to work with the Bulldogs' high school program.

"I told them, 'if you really want to get better, you need to play club [volleyball],'" she said. "One thing led to another, and then the coach from Hayesville reached out about working with some of their girls, and like I said, one thing just led to another."

Fast forward to Fall 2023 when Susan Stalcup of the Union County Recreation Department contacted Miller about heading up the new rec volleyball program, and within a few months of getting that program off the ground, Union County High School athletic director Mandy Hunter got in touch to gauge Miller's interest in taking over UCMS.

"She made me an offer

I couldn't refuse," Miller said jokingly. "So here I am, back in the game again."

Looking ahead to 2025, Miller expects to keep Union County volleyball trending upward while fostering a solid feeder program for UCHS.

"I look forward to next year and the next wave of kids and how everything ends up going," she said. "I want to thank Megan Brown, the Union County high school coach, for supporting what we're doing [at UCMS]. I also want to thank the athletic department at the middle school for all their support and understanding of what we're trying to build."

"A lot of the girls come up to me and say 'I play basketball, I play this, I play that,' and I always say, 'That's okay, I'll bring you to the light,'" Miller joked. "We just want to do anything we can to get volleyball out there and let these girls know there is something else for them to try."

The UCMS volleyball team included Davis, Henry, Kendrick, Marshall, Kamryn Brown, Lennon Ellis, Emilie Ekeberg, Makaylin Bingham, Haden Abercrombie, Eden Barber, Lyla Price, Laycee Cook, Camden Gunter, Mallory Gwynn, Hannah Maier, Molly Giddens, Shyann Owenby, Valynn Lanham, Cambrie Cox, Aubrie Cox, Ava Wynn, Bree Galloway, Ella Fisk, and Brianna Mallette.

The UCMS Panthers are coached by Miller and Shaunmarie Dotson.



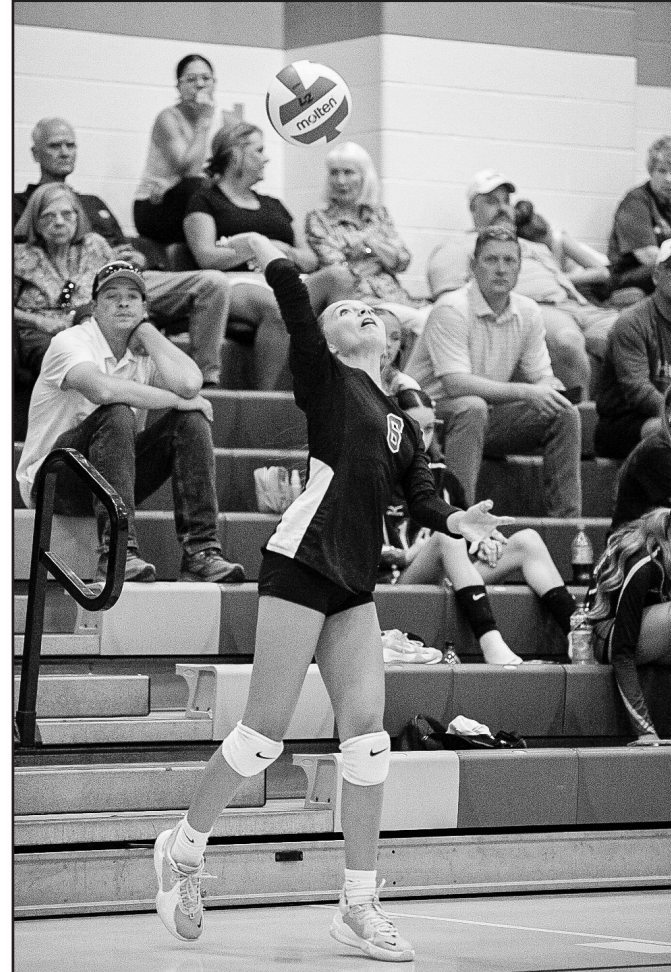
UCMS coach Shaunmarie Dotson and the UC bench. Photo/Jenni Dixon



UCMS Volleyball coach George Miller. Photo/Jenni Dixon



UCMS 8th grader Hailey Marshall. Photo/Jenni Dixon



UCMS 8th-grader Bristol Davis serves during Union County's match vs. Pickens on Sept. 12. Photo/Jenni Dixon

Softball: Six-run fourth sinks Union County in 10-1 loss at Sonoraville

Lady Panthers host Senior Night on Wednesday vs. Gilmer

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Sonoraville - Union County fell to 3-8 in Region 7-AA with a 10-1 loss at Sonoraville on Tuesday, Sept. 24. Last Thursday's home meeting with Ringgold was canceled due to weather.

Union County travels to Murray County on Tuesday, Oct. 1 at 5:30 p.m. The Lady Panthers host Gilmer on Wednesday, Oct. 2 at 5 p.m. for Senior Night.

Lady Panthers 1, Sonoraville 10 (5 inn) - The Phoenix broke open a 4-1 game with six runs in the fourth inning, dropping Union into a three-way tie for last place in 7-AA with Ringgold and North Murray.

Sonoraville got two in the first via a bases-loaded hit batter, followed by a walk, each with two away in the frame.

An RBI triple and a run-scoring groundout spotted the

Phoenix a 4-0 advantage in the third before Union got on the board in the top of the fourth.

Sophomore Izzy Anthros led off with a single and Sloane Dyer's one-out base hit moved a runner into scoring position for sophomore Jules Dyer's two-out opposite-field single -- scoring Anthros.

Sonoraville loaded the bases to start the bottom half, then scored two courtesy of a Union error. Consecutive base hits made it 9-1 with the 10th run coming around on a groundout to the pitcher.

Anthros started in the circle and went 3 1/3, allowing 5 hits and 10 runs (8 earned), while striking out six and walking four.

Lexi Davenport went 2/3 of an inning, surrendering one hit.

Anthros finished 1 for 2 at the plate with her team's only run. Senior Sloane Dyer went 1 for 2; Jules Dyer drove in a run during her 1-for-2 day.



Union County softball will honor its Class of 2025 seniors on Wednesday. L-R: Lily Collins, Mikala Souther, Reese Kelley, Jordane Mullanack, Lily Helton and Sloane Dyer. Photo/UCHS

Volleyball: UCHS improves to 14-14 with wins over Murray, North Murray

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Chatsworth - Union County (14-14, 2-4) is nearing full strength with sophomore Sofia Foster and junior Reese Jones back in the rotation, and as a result, picked up its first region victories with wins over Murray County and North Murray on Tuesday, Sept. 24.

The Panthers wrap up region play with a Tuesday, Oct. 1 trip to Coahulla Creek to face the Colts and North Cobb Christian. Union hosts Rabun County on Oct. 7 for Senior Night.

Panthers 2, Murray County 0 (25-21, 25-14) - Foster poured in 7 kills and senior Lily Brookshire had five to lead the way in Union's straight-set victory over the host Indians last week.

Seniors Charlei Robinson and Katelyn Brown had 4 kills apiece, Jones had two and senior Mallory Rouse added one.

Brookshire recorded a



Union County volleyball got back on track with two wins last week. Photo/Todd Forrest

team-high 7 aces, while Jones, Robinson and freshman Emry Sosensky had one each. Foster chipped in 2 blocks; Rouse had one.

Brown picked up 16 digs; Robinson had 11, Sosensky had seven, Jones finished with six, Brookshire and sophomore

Payton Murphy added five apiece. Rouse and freshman Samantha Combs had one dig.

Jones ended with 7 assists and Brown dished out five. **Panthers 2, North Murray 0 (25-5, 25-13)** - Union County completed the Murray County sweep with an easy

victory over the Mountaineers during Tuesday's visit to Chatsworth.

Jones' ace spotted Union an early lead in set one, then Rouse and Sosensky grew the margin to 7-2.

Foster came through with a kill and a block to open up a



Freshman Samantha Combs. Photo/Todd Forrest

15-5 advantage. Later, Foster's block built a 21-5 lead as Union cruised in the first stanza.

Combs finished off the first set with an ace.

Tied at 2-2 in the second set, Robinson's ace pushed the Panthers ahead and Rouse's

kill broke things open at 11-4.

Foster grew the margin to 16-6 via a kill before her block made it 21-7.

A kill by Jones ended the day and sent Union home with two region wins.

No stat totals were available for Union County vs. North Murray.

XC: Union men fourth, ladies sixth at Dalton race

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Dalton - Sophomore Lola Hunter placed third with a time of 21 minutes, 41 seconds at the Monday, Sept. 23 NGXCL 3 Wildwood Run, pacing Union County to a sixth-place finish.

In the guys' race, Union County finished fourth behind Oliver Hillman's 20th-place finish at 20:08.

Bryson Brooks was 30th at 20:48, Ander Faulkner came in 41st at 21:29, Cole Brown was 43rd with a time of 21:30 and Andrew Nushtayev rounded out Union's top five at 21:32.

Other Panther runners included Cody Dupuis in 54th (21:48) and Noah James Payne in 58th (22:11).

On the girls' side, Kate Barrett was 34th at 26:41, Lydia Wagner placed 35th with a time of 26:43, Macy Payne came in 42nd at 27:23 and Avery Hussion was 45th at 27:45.

Katie Payne crossed the line 46th (27:53) and Averie Tanner placed 51st (28:07).

Cleveland, Tennessee's Walker Valley placed first in the team standings with 53 points; Dalton was second with 84; Chattanooga's East Hamilton came in third with 88; Heritage was fourth (96); Northwest Whitfield was fifth (141) and Union placed sixth with 159 points.

Southeast Whitfield (223), Coahulla Creek (226), Lafayette (234) and Gordon Lee (278) rounded out the top 10.

Behind Union and Coahulla Creek, Region 7-AA teams included Sonoraville in 11th (329), North Murray in 14th (369) and Murray County



The Union County men bunch together at last month's Stephens County race. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



The Union County ladies leave the starting line during an early-season race. Photo/Todd Forrest

in seventh (225), Lafayette was eighth (244), Gordon Lee ended up ninth (256) and Coahulla Creek placed 10th (267).

Murray County came in 16th with 460 points.

On Oct. 3, Union County will race at Helen's Unicoi State Park in White County's

Mountain Invitational.

Local teams participating include Banks County, Chestatee, Dawson County, Fannin County, Lumpkin County, North Hall, Rabun County, Towns County and White County, among others.



Lola Hunter at Stephens County. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

UCRD Youth Football



Union County 3rd-grader Ransen Swanson breaks a long run during the win over Fannin County on Sept. 21. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Union County 4th grade prepares to take the field vs. Fannin County on Saturday, Sept. 21. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sixth-grader Coltyn Sandler celebrates a touchdown during Union County's blowout win at Fannin County on Sept. 14. Photo/Todd Forrest

Union County Recreation Department's football season is in full swing with the 6th grade team sitting at 3-0 on the year.

This weekend, Union County travels to Pickens to face the only other 3-0 squad in the league.

Meanwhile, the 2nd grade Panthers sport a 2-1 record heading into Saturday's showdown at 3-0 Pickens.

The 3rd and 4th grade teams currently sit at 1-2 on the year. The 1st and 5th grade teams are 0-3.

UCHS football update

Union's Friday, Sept. 27 trip to Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) was rescheduled for Monday, Sept. 30 due to the remnants of Hurricane Helene passing through North Georgia late last week.

After the Panthers traveled to LFO for some Monday night football, they will resume their normal schedule, resulting in short turnaround when they travel to Ringgold on Oct. 4.

Union County will benefit from a bye week before visiting Dalton's Coahulla Creek on Oct. 18.



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