

# Sports

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## Panthers third at Habersham Central 7-on-7 tournament

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**Mount Airy** - For the second straight week, Union County football's 7-on-7 squad proved they could hang with the big boys.

On Friday morning, the Panthers won 3-of-5 games during the championship game at Flowery Branch's Battle at the Branch 7-on-7 tournament that pitted Union against teams from Class AAAAAA.

Union's competition featured two Class AAAAAA schools (Dacula - twice and Habersham Central), one Class AAAAA (Flowery Branch), three from Class AAAA (Madison County, Oconee County, Jefferson) and one fellow member of Class AAA (Hart County).

A week earlier the Panthers narrowly missed a trip to the championship game at Flowery Branch's Battle at the Branch 7-on-7 tournament that pitted Union against teams from Class AAAAAA.

While the Panthers didn't face anyone from AAAAAA at Habersham, they were clearly the smallest school in the field.

However, someone forgot to tell Union County they were supposed to be intimidated. And if by chance, anyone believed the Panthers' Battle at the Branch performance was due to the opposition underestimating a mountain team; the Habersham tournament should have brought the Purple and Gold back down to earth.

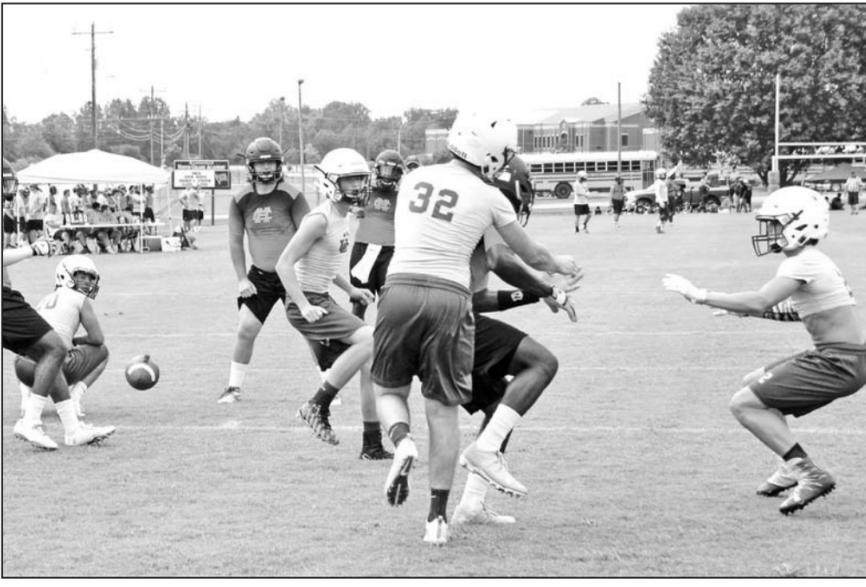
Despite finishing third at Flowery Branch, it was the "giant killers" from Union stealing the headlines. Not the champions. If anything, that put a target on the Panthers as they stepped off the bus at Habersham Central High School last Friday.

And if there was a target on their backs, they wore them proudly.

Union would finish 3-2 in pool play with wins over Flowery Branch, Hart County and Dacula before opening the tournament with wins over Madison County and Dacula.

The Panthers were finally eliminated by the eventual tournament champions, Oconee County in the semifinals.

Not only was Union County the smallest school in the tournament, they also alternated between first and second string during each one of its games. While the Panthers took a JV squad to compete against the other junior varsity teams, that team consisted of mostly freshmen. Instead of allowing the varsity reserves to compete in the JV tournament, Coach Brian Allison allowed the backups to split time with the starters - bringing in the entire second unit for a series - or more - against



Safety Jackson Colwell (32) breaks up a Hart County pass attempt in the end zone. Photo/Todd Forrest



Alec Scott breaks up a Habersham pass with his fingertip. He intercepted it on the next play. Photo/Todd Forrest

the opposition's A-team. "Right now we're working on getting our receivers to gel with the quarterbacks," Allison said. "We're also trying to (implement) our passing game and become more comfortable with it. Then we want to improve our pass coverage and understand our zone drops on the defensive side"

Action got underway at 9 a.m with a narrow 20-19 victory over Flowery Branch that saw quarterbacks Cole Wright and Pierson Allison each lead the offense to a score.

Wright opened the game with touchdown strikes to Logan Dyer and Austin Pattee to give Union a 14-6 advantage.

Following a Falcons' score and failed point after, Allison entered at QB with his team clinging to a 2-point lead. In 7-on-7 play, the defense receives 2 points each team they keep the offense out of the end zone and 3 points for an interception.

Needing a score to preserve the lead, Allison led the offense into the end zone to open up a 20-12 advantage. Flowery Branch would score late to pull within a point at 20-19, but time ran out before the Falcons defense could force a stop.

In the second game, Union faced off with the hosts - Habersham Central - and jumped out to an early 15-12 lead thanks to an Alec Scott interception that swung a 12-12 tie into Union's favor.

On the first two Panther possessions, Wright hooked up with Kyle Morlock for six, then hit Pattee for the game-tying score. On the Raider's ensuing drive, Scott jumped in front of a pass at the goal line to keep Habersham off the board and award Union three points.

Unfortunately, the offense was unable to put the Raiders away with a touchdown and the failed drive allowed the home team to pull within one. Habersham fol-

lowed up its defensive stop with a touchdown to regain the lead at 20-15.

Needing a score to all but secure the W, Union was unable to find the end zone for the second consecutive series and the Raiders tacked on two more points for a 22-15 victory.

Up next was a former Region 8-AAA foe from back in the early years of this decade, the Hart County Bulldogs. With the team record even at 1-1, the Panthers defense provided its best effort of the day, denying the end zone from the Bulldogs in a 20-4 Union victory.

Both teams traded defensive stops on the first two possessions until the Wright-to-Pattee connection - that was working all day - spotted the Panthers an 8-2 lead. On the ensuing Hart County drive, Schafer picked off a pass at the goal line to open up an 11-2 advantage.

Union made it 18-2 when



Cole Wright looks for an open receiver vs Jefferson. Photo/Todd Forrest



Pierson Allison slings the pigskin vs Flowery Branch. Photo/Todd Forrest

Wright hit Dyer on a slant route in the end zone and Morlock converted the extra point.

The last two possessions resulted in defensive stops for both teams and a 20-4 final score.

Union's defense rose to the occasion again when they kept Dacula out of the endzone on four consecutive plays following a 1st-and-goal from inside the 10.

Scores by Dyer and Chad Buzzard gave Union a 14-8 advantage but the Dacula offense went on the move as time wound down.

A diving play by Scott broke up a would-be touchdown pass on 3rd-and-goal. Then an overthrow by the quarterback on fourth down secured the win on what turned out to be the last play of the game.

"The main thing we're looking for in these tournaments is seeing how hard these guys compete and who will compete against competition," Allison said.

In the finale of pool play, Union squared off with Jefferson,

another former region opponent, and the Dragons used an interception and a touchdown to take the 30-20 victory.

After trading touchdowns, the Panthers and Dragons were locked in a one-point game at 14-13 until a Jefferson score stretched the lead to 21-13. As Union was attempting to answer, the Dragons picked off a Panther pass, then tacked on a touchdown to open up a 30-13 advantage.

Union responded with a score of its own to get within 10, but there wasn't enough time left to force a stop and get the ball back for a potential game-tying score.

In tournament play, the Panthers knocked off Madison by double digits before narrowly edging Dacula in another nail biter.

Oconee County was too much in the semifinals as Union fell by 16 to the eventual tournament champions. Oconee would knock off powerhouse Jefferson in the finals to take home first.

## Mountain Gymnastics Center attends FlipFest

Gymnasts from Blairsville's Mountain Gymnastics Center aren't content after bringing home an entire shelf of new hardware.

Always looking for ways to improve, MGC honed their abilities, while learning new skills at gymnastics camp.

And who says football and basketball are the only ones at camp this summer?

According to MGC director Shelley Thomas, "they all had a great camp, had fun and learned many new skills."

Many of the girls had outstanding achievements at their Georgia State Championships prior to the camp.

Jacey Lee placed fourth on the beam with a score of 9.025. She also finished among the top 10 on the bars with a score of 9.15.

Other top five placers at the meet were Kiersten Queen (fifth on the bars), Sofia Swartz (second on the bars), Hanna Gregory (fifth on

the bars) and Mia McCombs (second on the bars).

In Level 3, Nevaeh Leopold was fourth on the bars and fifth on the vault and floor.

Meanwhile, Savannah Rogers placed sixth on the floor.

Kendall McClure placed third on the floor and sixth on the beam in the AAU Silver division.

Emily Henderson was fifth on the beam and the floor, to go with a sixth place performance on the bars.



Jacey Lee placed fourth on the bars at the State Championships.



Mountain Gymnastics Center participated in FlipFest 2017 - a summer gymnastics camp.

## Six Panthers selected to All Region baseball team

A pair of juniors highlighted the 7-AAA All-Region baseball team for Union County as shortstop Patrick Baggett and centerfielder Candler Colwell were selected by the region coaches.

Four other Panthers picked up honorable mention honors. And like Baggett and Colwell, each one has a year of eligibility remaining.

RJ Banton - the ace of the pitching staff and a lefthanded slugger at the plate was named honorable mention.

Second baseman Logan Dyer, third baseman Crawford Colwell, and southpaw pitcher-outfielder Cole Davis also received an honorable mention.

Baggett, Union's leadoff hitter, also led the team or shared the lead in five different offensive categories, was second in four categories, finished third in batting

average at .376 and fourth in RBIs with 14.

His 32 hits, 24 singles were best on the team while his six doubles, one triple, and one homer were tied for first.

Baggett was second (or tied) in runs with 21, slugging percentage at .506, OPS at .955, stolen bases and walks with 11. The leader in steals was the other all region selection, Candler Colwell with 12.

Candler Colwell's six doubles were tied for first to go along with his 29 hits, 11 walks and .382 batting average - both second.

Meanwhile, his 16 runs and 15 RBIs were both third but you also can't overlook his stellar defensive play in centerfield. Candler Colwell provided UCHS with highlight reel plays on a consistent basis while becoming one of the top outfielders in 7-AAA.

As for Banton, he led the team with a .415 average and 18 RBIs. On the mound, Banton led the team in wins and ERA (more than 20 IP).

Dyer led the Panthers with a .511 on base percentage, along with 23 runs and 25 walks. His 25 free passes were more than the second and third highest totals combined.

Davis led the team in strikeouts on the mound while becoming the toughest to strikeout at the plate. His 1.3 BB-to-K ratio and one K every 10 plate appearances were tops on the team.

Finally, Crawford Colwell was tied for first with one homer and second with 16 RBIs. He was top five in hits, runs, batting average, and slugging.

Plus his superb play at the hot corner anchored the UC infield while making difficult plays look routine with his glove and arm.

## Eagles qualify for SGA; MUSA registration underway



This past weekend at Kennesaw Mountain High School, our MUSA Eagles, coached by Alex Ortiz, received a bronze medal in their soccer tournament.

They played hard and left their hearts out on the field. We are so proud of them!! Since they placed they qualify for

the National State Games of America (SGA) being held this year in Grand Rapids, Michigan the first week in August. Way to go Eagles!

**MUSA FALL REGISTRATION** - Mountain United Soccer Association's fall soccer registration is open for boys and girls ages 4-16.

You may register online at [www.mountainsoccer.org](http://www.mountainsoccer.org). Registration deadline is Aug. 9. Players registered after deadline will incur a late fee and will be placed on roster waiting list.

Volunteer coaches also are needed. Questions: email: [musa.soccer@gmail.com](mailto:musa.soccer@gmail.com)