

Sports

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Softball: Northwest Whitefield takes two from Lady Panthers

Lady Bruins escape with a 3-2 victory in game one; explode for 14 unanswered runs in game two

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The Union County Lady Panthers didn't open the season last Thursday with North Hall. Instead, rain postponed the 2017 season by two days and Union welcomed Class AAAA's Northwest Whitefield to town for a Saturday afternoon twin bill.

Opening the season with one of your toughest region opponents is never ideal, and most coaches like to get the kinks out before jumping into region play. However, NW Whitefield could go down as Union's toughest test of the year.

Coming off a 21-win campaign and a runner up finish in Region 6-AAAA last year, the Lady Bruins entered Saturday's doubleheader with record of 2-0 thanks to a 9-6 win over Kennesaw Mountain and an 8-0 shutout of North Cobb.

In the early going of both games Saturday, the Lady Panthers would strike first. During game one, it was junior Aubree Pack who put her team on the board in the third inning, after Union had a runner thrown out at the plate to end the first.

Leading off the bottom half of the third, Pack was hit by a pitch. Braden Poteete bunted her to second and Katelynn Hodges moved her to third with a ground out.

Junior Maddie Sutton scored Pack when she reached on a Lady Bruin error. On top 1-0, Union's senior ace Jillian Lawn retired the side in the fourth, but the Lady Panthers also went down 1-2-3 in their half of the inning.

Trouble finally found Lawn in the fifth when a lead-off double had NW Whitefield in business. Lawn nearly escaped unscathed until an error and a bad bounce led to a pair of runs.

Union responded with back-to-back, two-out doubles by Hodges and Sutton to tie things up at 2-2. Sutton would finish the doubleheader 3-for-5 at the plate, while driving in half of their team's four combined runs.

The Lady Bruins went down quietly in the sixth and junior Bailey Rayfield opened the bottom half of the inning by lacing a leadoff double to left-center. Fellow junior Aladriel Arnold bunted pinch runner Kristen Poteete to third, but a pop up and ground out terminated the Union scoring threat.

NW Whitefield regained the lead in the seventh when Lawn was the victim of bad luck once again. Following a leadoff single and a sacrifice bunt, Lawn found herself in the path of a frozen rope lined back up the middle. The ensuing deflection off Lawn sent the ball bouncing into foul territory, in the direction of the Union dugout.

As a result, the lead runner was able to score from second to make it a 3-2 game. Lawn went on to prove she's as mentally tough as she is physically when she shook off any ill effects and escaped the inning without further damage.

Unfortunately, two ground outs and a strikeout were the result of Union's final at bat and game one belonged to the Lady Bruins, 3-2.

As for the positives to take away from the loss: The top of the Lady Panthers lineup was an extremely tough out.

Hodges finished the game 2-for-4 with a run and a double from the leadoff spot. Sutton went 1-for-2 with an RBI double while batting second.

Lawn was 1-of-3 in the 3-hole and Rayfield ended up 2-for-3 with a double as the cleanup hitter.

Meanwhile, the bottom-five struggled at the dish - going hitless in 16 plate appearances with a run.

From the circle, Lawn allowed just one earned run during a complete game 3-hit-ter.

Pack got the nod in game two and worked a scoreless first inning but found herself



Junior Maddie Sutton totaled 3 hits, 2 RBIs, and a run during Saturday's doubleheader. Photo/Todd Forrest



Kristen Poteete (7) charges from third as senior pitcher Jillian Lawn fields her position. Photo/Todd Forrest

in a jam during the third. In the bottom half of the first, Hodges and Sutton continued to rake - spotting the Lady Panthers another early advantage.

Hodges led off with a base hit and stole second. Sutton followed suit with an RBI single to center for a 1-0 lead. Later in the inning with two down and Sutton in scoring position, Arnold stretched the lead to 2-0 by delivering a base hit to left.

NW Whitefield got one back in the second with an unearned run off of Pack. They would open the third inning with a game-tying solo shot to left-center.

Two walks and an error followed the homer and coach Jessica Stewart turned to sophomore Megan Bright in an attempt to stem the bleeding.

Bright fanned the first batter but a sacrifice fly and another costly error put Union in a 4-2 hole.

Defensive miscues continued to plague the Lady Panthers and when the dust settled, Union had surrendered 14 runs while committing 6

errors. Bright, like Pack earlier in the game, allowed four runs but only one was earned.

Coch Steward was forced to bring Lawn back to the circle, but even the team's ace fell on hard times - yielding six unearned runs.

At the plate, Sutton posted Union's only multi-hit performance - going 2-for-3 with an RBI and one run. In fact, Sutton's third inning single was her team's only hit after the first inning.

Hodges and Arnold were responsible for the other Lady Panther hits - both coming in the first. As for Arnold, she reached base in both plate appearances after getting plunked to lead off the fourth.

Leading 8-2 after four, the Lady Bruins added six more runs in the fifth - resulting in a stoppage of play after five innings, due to the "mercy rule."

Region play opens Tuesday at Lumpkin - Now that Union was able to get a pair of games under its belt, Region 7-AAA action begins at Lumpkin County - a playoff team from a year ago that gave

the Lady Panthers all they could handle, and then some, in 2016.

The Lady Indians are currently 1-2 on the year with a pair of one-run losses to Banks County and Pickens County. Their one W was an 8-4 victory over Chestatee.

First pitch at Lumpkin is scheduled for 6 p.m. on Tuesday.

White County visits UCHS on Wednesday at 6 p.m. for a non-region game sandwiched between two 7-AAA foes.

The Lady Warriors are also sporting a 1-2 record following a season opening win over Dawson County in extra innings.

On Saturday, White dropped a pair to Gilmer County by scores of 18-2 and 6-4.

A trip to Dawson County rounds out the Lady Panthers' week on Thursday at 6 p.m. The Lady Tigers are 2-1 with a 6-1 win over Rabun County and a come-from-behind, 5-4 win over Towns County.

The Lady Panthers JV squad will also be in action at 4:30 p.m. on all three days.

AUG. 15	AWAY	LUMPKIN	4:30	5:55
AUG. 16	HOME	WHITE	4:30	5:55
AUG. 17	AWAY	DAWSON	4:30	5:55
AUG. 22	HOME	EAST HALL	4:00	5:55
AUG. 23	AWAY	WHITE	4:30	5:55
AUG. 24	AWAY	RABUN	N/A	5:00
AUG. 26	HOME	CHESTATEE	N/A	12:00
AUG. 29	HOME	FANNIN	4:30	5:55
AUG. 31	HOME	GAC	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 6	HOME	RABUN	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 7	HOME	LUMPKIN	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 12	AWAY	NORTH HALL	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 14	HOME	DAWSON	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 15/16	AWAY	MORGAN COUNTY TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
SEPT. 19	AWAY	EAST HALL	4:00	5:55
SEPT. 21	AWAY	CHESTATEE	N/A	5:00
SEPT. 26	AWAY	FANNIN	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 28	AWAY	GAC	4:30	5:55
SEPT. 30	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 2	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 4	TBA	REGION TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 11/12	TBA	1ST ROUND STATE TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 18/19	TBA	2ND ROUND STATE TOURNAMENT	N/A	TBA
OCT. 26-28	COLUMBUS	ELITE 8	N/A	TBA



Katelynn Hodges and Braden Poteete (13) warming up. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior left fielder Aladriel Arnold fires to the infield. Photo/Todd Forrest

#	Roster	GP	PA	AB	H	1B	2B	3B	HR	RBI	R	HBP	ROE	FC	CI	BB	K	AVG	OBP	SLG	OPS
26	Maddie Sutton	2	6	5	3	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	.600	.600	.800	1.400
8	Katelynn Hodges	2	7	6	3	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	.500	.571	.667	1.238
00	Bailey Rayfield	2	5	5	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.400	.400	.600	1.000
11	Aladriel Arnold	2	5	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	.333	.500	.333	.833
21	Jillian Lawn	2	5	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	.200	.200	.200	.400
18	Aubree Pack	2	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	.000	.250	.000	.250
13	Braden Poteete	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.000	.000	.000	.000
15	Ellie Garrison	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	.000	.000	.000	.000
7	Kristen Poteete	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.000	.000	.000	.000
24	Maddie Tanner	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.000	.000	.000	.000
14	Mary Wischmeyer	2	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	.000	.000	.000	.000
6	Megan Lockaby	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.000	.000	.000	.000
12	Skyler Ludlum	2	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	.000	.000	.000	.000
Totals		2	49	43	10	7	3	0	0	3	4	2	1	1	0	1	7	.233	.283	.302	.585

Union County softball's combined batting statistics from Saturday's doubleheader. Stats/GameChanger



Bailey Rayfield went 2-for-3 with a double in game one. Photo/Todd Forrest