

# Sports

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## Union County wrestling sends four to State Sectionals

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
[sports@nganews.com](mailto:sports@nganews.com)

The Union County Wrestling program is sending four of its grapplers to the State Sectionals this weekend at Greater Atlanta Christian High School in Norcross.

Four more wrestlers will serve as alternates for Sectionals following a stellar performance at Area that saw Union place 10 of its 12 competitors.

Representing the Panthers at Sectionals will be Alex Barrett, Logan McClure, Bryan Nelson, and Zach Payton.

Barrett, a freshman, placed third at 106 pounds. Sophomores McClure and Nelson each finished third at 132 and 160 pounds, respectively. Payton, a junior, came in fourth at 220 pounds.

Union's four alternates each placed fifth and could



Union County wrestlers at Social Circle following the Area Tournament.

get a call this week if someone drops out of the Sectional Tournament.

Freshman Tyree

Mackey was fifth at 126 pounds and fellow freshman Isaac Tritt was fifth at 138 pounds.

Sophomore Brendan Mason was fifth at 113 pounds and sophomore Josh Silvers was fifth at 285

pounds, despite weighing in at 211.

"I am very proud of these young men and what

## Playoffs near for Union basketball following late-January struggles

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
[sports@nganews.com](mailto:sports@nganews.com)

Points were at a premium for the Union County men when they hosted Riverside Military Academy on Tuesday.

On Friday, the Panthers traveled to Rabun County where the Wildcats scored 73 points in a 13-point victory.

The Lady Panthers didn't fare any better as they fell 76-41 at Rabun.

Washington Wilkes traveled to Blairsville for a Saturday afternoon contest where both Union County teams could turn things around entering the final week of the regular season.

Unfortunately, the contest was postponed a week because no referees were sent to officiate the game, and Wilkes was forced turnaround and make the long journey home.

However, they get to do it all over again next Saturday when the makeup game is scheduled.

Senior Night was scheduled during the Washington Wilkes game and the ceremony went on as planned.

Union County basketball now has a back-loaded week ahead of them with three consecutive games, beginning on Thursday.

On Monday, Union hosted Greene County in a makeup game due to winter weather. No results were available as the game was played following the *North Georgia News'* Monday morning deadline.

On Thursday, Oglethorpe County pays Blairsville a visit in another makeup game. The Lady Panthers are scheduled to tip at 4 p.m.

Union will travel to Social Circle on Friday in what will be the final road game of the regular season. The varsity games get underway at 6 p.m.

The season concludes with Washington Wilkes on Saturday at 2 and 3:30 p.m.

The Lady Panthers (11-8, 4-2) can secure the No. 2 seed in the Region 8-AA Tournament by defeating Greene County on Monday, then winning just one of their final three games.

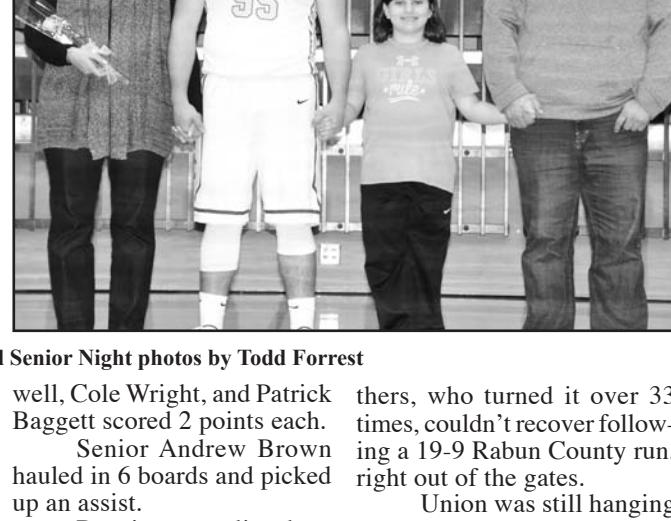
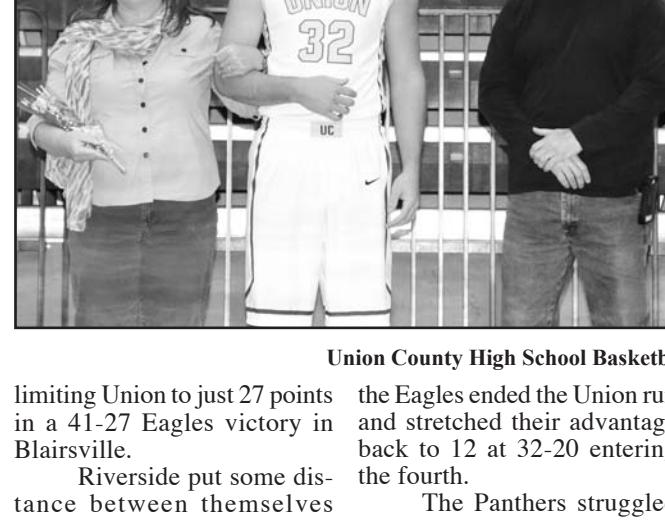
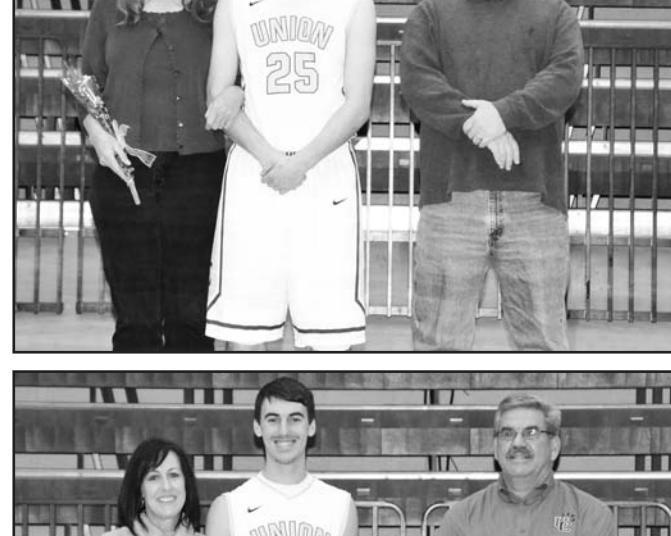
Meanwhile, the Panthers (9-12, 4-4) have an outside shot at second place, but third is more than likely the best-case scenario. If they were to lose all four games this week, they could fall to last place.

Oglethorpe (4-5) and Greene (4-5) are one game behind Union in the loss column. Washington Wilkes (3-6) is two games back in the loss column and Social Circle (3-7) is three back in the loss column.

While it's not yet official, there is very little doubt that the Region 8-AA Tournament will be held at Rabun County.

### Panthers 27 Riverside 41

In early January, the Riverside Military Academy Eagles held the Panthers to a then-season-low 30 points. Last week, Riverside topped that defensive performance by



Union County High School Basketball Senior Night photos by Todd Forrest

limiting Union to just 27 points in a 41-27 Eagles victory in Blairsville.

Riverside put some distance between themselves and the Panthers with a 13-7 second quarter.

During the second frame, Union connected only twice from the floor on baskets by sophomore Crawford Colwell and senior Chase Shook, who scored six of his team's 11 first half points.

Trailing 21-11 at the break, Shook knocked down a 10-footer to get the Panthers within eight but Riverside answered with a 9-0 run that put Union in a 30-13 hole with 2:57 left in the third frame.

Senior Joseph Mancuso sparked a 7-0 run by the Panthers to trim the deficit back to 10 but a tip-in at the buzzer by

Mancuso, Crawford Col-

well, Cole Wright, and Patrick Baggett scored 2 points each.

Senior Andrew Brown hauled in 6 boards and picked up an assist.

Despite struggling late, Union outperformed the Eagles at the foul line - hitting 10-of-20 to Riverside's 6-of-14 performance.

However, the Panthers shot just 17 percent from the field and turned the ball over 19 times.

The meeting could be the final time that Union and Riverside square off with the Panthers moving up to Class AAA and Riverside going to AAAA.

### Lady Panthers 41 Rabun County 76

### Tiger - The Lady Pan-

thers, who turned it over 33 times, couldn't recover following a 19-9 Rabun County run, right out of the gates.

Union was still hanging

around at the half at 35-22 but the Lady Cats used a 17-10 third quarter to put the game away. They continued the onslaught into the fourth quarter - turning 20-point game after three into a 35-point margin at the final buzzer.

Senior Kim Coyne led the Lady Panthers with 12 points. Sophomore Bailey Daniel scored 8 points, sophomore Jillian Lawn added 7 points, seniors Layne Colwell and Stephanie Busse scored six each, while junior Ashley Fair finished with 2 points.

Fair and Layne Colwell

led the team with 6 boards each. Daniel, Busse, and Lawn

they have accomplished this year," Union County Wrestling Coach Michael Smith Foot said. "It is very rare to get these kinds of numbers from a team of mostly freshmen and sophomores."

Coming in first place at Area was the host Social Circle with 10 seniors. GAC finished in second, and Wesleyan third.

Behind the Panthers were fifth place Monticello and sixth place Rabun County.

Weigh-in for Sectionals is at 7 a.m. on Saturday with the action getting underway at 9 a.m.

In order to advance to the State Championship Tournament at the Infinite Energy Center (aka Gwinnett Center), wrestlers must place no lower than fourth in their respective weight class.

In other results from Area, freshman Logan Tritton came in sixth at 145 pounds and freshman Chad Buzzard was sixth at 152 pounds.

each grabbed 5 boards, while Coyne had 3 boards.

Coyne, Layne Colwell, and Daniel each finished with 3 assists to lead the team. Coyne also led the way with 5 steals. Daniel and Layne Colwell both finished with 3 steals, while Law had one steal.

Busse blocked 4 shots, Coyne blocked 3, and Fair blocked one.

### Panthers 60 Rabun County 73

**Tiger - A 29-point second quarter by Rabun blew open a 14-11 game and put Union 21 points behind at the half.**

The Panthers cut into the lead during the third and continued to hang around into the fourth quarter but 9-of-12 shooting at the line by the home team kept Union at bay over the final 8 minutes.

Baenninger led the Panthers with 18 points, including a pair of treys in the second quarter in an attempt to stop the bleeding.

Baggett hit three treys and scored 11 points - all in the second half, helping prevent the Wildcats from building on their 43-21 halftime advantage.

Crawford Colwell and Shook each scored 9 points, while senior Matthew Rich connected on a pair of treys during an 8-point performance. Candler Colwell added 3 points on a first quarter trey.

### The future of Union County vs Rabun County:

As for the Union-Rabun rivalry, with the Panthers moving to Class AAA next season, this could be the final time the Panthers and Wildcats meet for a very long while.

Union and Rabun have shared a region since 1994 and have become each other's longest-running Region rival.

When Union moved up to Class AA prior to the 2000-01 school year, Rabun, Banks, Dawson, Towns, and GAC all made the jump as well.

Over the years, those schools have changed Regions (GAC), moved down to Class A (Towns), or went up to AAA (Dawson and Banks). However, the only constant in 8-AA was Union and Rabun.

As the region was reshaped over the years, and a multitude of schools from the Tennessee state-line to south of I-20 have called 8-AA home, the Panthers and the Wildcats have taken them all on, and for the most part, were extremely successful.

But over the 16 years that the two have shared the region, both programs have witnessed first hand, across all sports, the ebb and flow of a rivalry. Each one would rise, and then fall, then rise again. Or vice versa.

There is a good chance that Union and Rabun will see each other again on the hardwood during next week's Region Tournament, but after that, it's a waiting game to see if Rabun County will be added as a non-region game. Not just in basketball, but hopefully, in many sports as possible.