

Mayor Jim Conley throws out first pitch as shorthanded Panthers fall to White County



Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley throws out the first pitch at last Friday's game. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
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With the basketball team in the Sweet 16 and several key players missing from the diamond, the Panthers took one on the chin to Class AAAA's White County last Friday, 13-0 in five innings.

"We are missing eight players to basketball so we are young at most positions," new Union County Baseball Coach Robby Roxbury said. "I started four freshman three sophomores, one senior, and one junior. We had some first game jitters, as to be expected, and this led to a rocky first inning. The guys settled in and did a nice job in the second, third, and fourth innings."

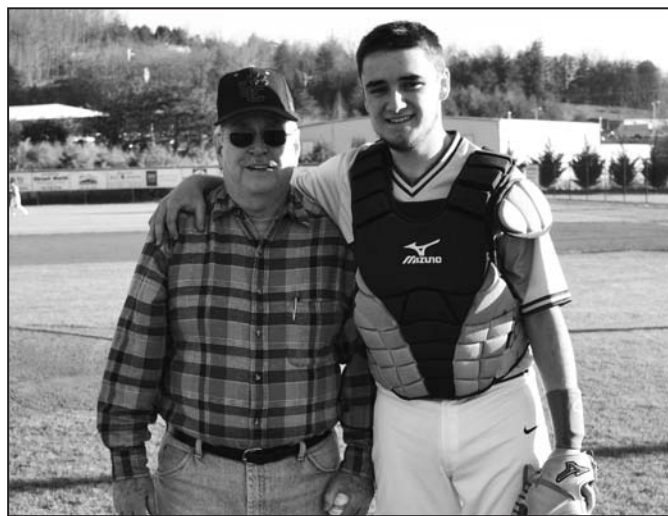
Senior Will King started on the mound and worked three innings, striking out three, and allowing four hits.

Freshman Jackson Colwell worked the final two innings with a pair of strikeouts, while surrendering four hits.

At the plate, the Panthers managed three hits - all by freshmen.

Freshman Hunter Kelley went 1-for-1, and freshmen Ean Harkins and Chayton Schafer were each 1-for-2.

Monday's game at Towns County was washed out so the Panthers' next game will be



Thursday at Pickens. Towns County will come to Blairsville on Friday. First pitch is scheduled for 5 p.m. both days.

This season, Panther Baseball will feature a ceremonial "First Pitch" before each home game, and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley threw out the first pitch before last Friday's game with White County.

Known as Jimmy Conley in school, he played baseball, basketball and football and ran track. He played baseball from his sophomore to senior year, playing the positions of short stop and second base. Conley also played American Legion baseball for the Dahlonega Nuggets during his junior and senior years.

He throw right-handed but batted from the left side.

One of his accomplishments in baseball was having the ability to do the drag bunt. He also played basketball as a sophomore, junior and senior years at guard, and was a starting right guard on the first Union County football team in 1957.

Upon graduation from UCHS, he went to North Georgia College. After that, he spent many years in management with Kroger Company until returning home to Blairsville in 1982 when he went to work for Ingles Markets for several years. Then in 1995 during the City of Blairsville election, Conley qualified and was elected for a Council seat and served until 2001. He ran and was elected for Mayor of Blairsville in 2005 and is still serving in that position today.

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ing, she hit the first free throw but missed the second.

All tied up at 36-36, Union County put the clamps on the Red Devils' final possession and forced a difficult shot at the buzzer.

"We always talk about free throws and this time it came down to free throws again," Coach Tucker said. "We could've folded but we hung in there."

Coyne scored 8 of Union's 10 points in the overtime, including the first 6 points. She would finish with a game-high 18 points.

The Lady Panthers got 7 points from Daniel, 6 points from Busse, and 5 points each from Layne Colwell, Fair, and Lawn.

Fair put Union on the board with an early trey for a 3-2 lead. The first quarter scoring concluded with a perfect trip to the line by Coyne.

A Lawn trey tied things up at 10-10 early in the second. Then Coyne scored an easy deuce under the basket off a nice feed from Busse, who later scored on a put-back layup for a 14-13 lead.

Busse then stepped outside and knocked down a 15-footer to put the Lady Panthers on top 16-14 with 1:31 left in the half.

Daniel capped off Union's first half scoring with a 1-for-2 visit to the line with 58 seconds on the clock.

Coyne opened the third with a basket in the paint and Colwell followed with a trey to open up a 22-18 lead. Busse nailed another mid-range jumper to extend Union's lead to six at 24-18.

A Daniel free throw a the 4:41 mark of the third made it a 25-22 game. Colwell stretched the margin back to five by hitting two free throws with 1:51 remaining in the third.

The win was Union's 17th of the season and the program's first State Tournament win since 2009.

Eatonton - After Union



Coach Tucker and the Lady Panthers during a timeout at Putnam County. Photo/Todd Forrest

hung around for the majority of the game, it looked as if Putnam County would begin to pull away when they opened up a 33-26 lead entering the fourth quarter.

Instead, the Lady Panthers (17-10) refused roll over and went down swinging before eventually falling to the 23-4 Lady War Eagles, 46-36.

Led by the 1-2 punch of senior Ebony Hargrove (committed to the University of Massachusetts and hit 7-of-8 free throws in the fourth quarter) and sophomore Rykia Pennamon, who finished with 20 points and 11 rebounds, Putnam crashed the boards and were deadly from the charity stripe during the game's final 5 minutes.

Down seven after three quarters, the Lady Panthers rallied for six unanswered points to make it a 33-32 game with 5:52 to play.

"We played hard and had a shot," Coach Tucker said. "But that one girl proved why she's going to UMass. I told the girls afterwards that it was hard to find anything negative (about the way we played), because (Putnam) is a pretty good basketball team and we stayed right there."

The 6-0 spurt began with a corner jumper from Busse, then a pair of free throws and a 14-foot jumper from Daniel followed.

The Lady War Eagles quickly went into for two then hit two from the line to extend the margin to five at 37-32 with 5:06 remaining.

Colwell was perfect at the line to make it a one-possession game at 37-34. Putnam returned to the line after getting fouled on a putback attempt and once again, they were a perfect 2-for-2.

The War Eagles were once again fouled after grabbing an offensive rebound but luckily, they finally missed a free throw and Fair connected on 1-of-2 at the other end.

Still hanging around at 39-35 with 2:14 to play, Daniel went to the line and hit 1-of-2 to get Union back within three at 39-36, but Putnam would score the final seven points - coming on 7-of-8 shooting at the stripe, while Union was 0-for-2 on freebies during that stretch.

"I don't know what we could have done differently," Coach Tucker said. "Our girls gave it their all and that's all you can ask."

Daniel led the team with 16 points to go along with 3 assists and 3 rebounds on 6-of-8 shooting at the line. Layne Colwell finished with 9 points, 7 steals, and 4 rebounds on 6-for-9 shooting from the line. Busse hauled in 10 rebounds and blocked 6 shots, while scoring 2 points.

Fair added 4 points and 5 boards, Lawn had 3 points, and Coyne scored 2 points with 3 assists and 2 steals.

"What this team has accomplished, and with all the fans that follow us, this season has been a lot of fun," Coach Tucker said.

Thank You

The Union County Middle School Athletic Department would like to thank everyone for coming out to support the February Finale Basketball Tournament.

We would also like to especially thank O'Reilly Auto Parts for donating the trophies and all of the volunteers for helping make this a success.

Bowling scores

Monday Night Men: Joe Teague 228, 220, Derick Rice 215, 209, Mel White 246, 221, Doug Tanner 211, 215, Chris Ellinwood 200, Mike Newsom 217, 222, Keith Rhodes 211, Tom Griffiths 203, Greg Whittenburg 214, 214, Michael Whitehead 211, 209, Taz Matetzschk 251, BJ Gilbert 213, Bonnell Thomas 243, 208, Curtis Corn 202, Stanley Tyler 203, Ranny Jones 214, Kenneth Clark 200, Jay Burrell 235, 223, 215.

Monday Night Ladies: Janet Bush 199, Nicki Austin 182, Nell Rice 244.

Blairsville Youth Bowlers: DJ Robbins 172, Jacob Fox 132, Jared Edwards 179, Michael Fox 221, Derek Harwood 121, Michael Caldwell 112.

Thursday Night Fun Mixed: David Carroll 185, Sam McVay 186, Dan Wilson 184, Tim McVay 183, Tee Turner 220, 216, Roy Johnson 229, Joe Chubberly 233, 185, Tom Coy 198, Stanley Tyler 216, Tony Lynch 225, 205, Bob Bischoff 215, Bill Cox 209, Dewey Allen 245, Bonnell Thomas 208, 232, 247, Series 687

Annual STRA Trials Bike Competition at Trackrock

The 8th Annual Trackrock Trials will be held on March 12 & 13 from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. This free family friendly event is a must see with no other like it in this area. Participants from 6 to 75 years of age must possess extraordinary balance and agility skills to weave their way over 8-10 difficult courses in rough terrain that are different each day of the event. The course is easy walking for spectators and a great day outdoors.

New this year, at 9 a.m. Saturday, there will be a Youth Trials Division competition for the "up and coming" riders, ages 6-10. There are over a dozen different levels of competition, including Champs, Intermediate, Novice, Women and Vintage. See www.stratrials.com for more info.

A delicious lunch will be available for purchase.

The Southeastern Trials Riders Association (STRA) is a group of members located in 7 southeastern U.S. states. They are dedicated to the exciting and family friendly sport of Observed Motorcycle Trials. They cater to both the serious competitor and the casual or fun rider. The competition schedule consists of 12 or more STRA championship events with classes for modern and vintage bikes. NT(Feb24.Z18)gg



Bikes and bikers will be competing



Participants must possess extraordinary balance and agility skills

NASCAR 2016

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Hamlin Takes Daytona 500

DAYTONA BEACH, FL- Matt Kenseth appeared to be headed to victory lane with less than half a lap to go in Sunday's Daytona 500, but his teammate Denny Hamlin wound up with the win.

The fact that he was the winner was almost beyond belief for Hamlin.

"I can't believe I won," said Hamlin. "I don't know where I came from or what I did. But it all came together and here we are."

Hamlin was running the high side of the race track in about seventh or eighth place, with less than a lap to go in the 200-lap race, when Kevin Harvick began pushing him. Suddenly, Hamlin's car picked up speed, and the momentum carried him to the front.

Kenseth who was on the low side of the track, pulled up to block. Hamlin zipped under him as the field entered turn-3. The move cost Kenseth momentum, and he fell back.

Martin Truex briefly gained the lead, but Hamlin pushed the accelerator to the floor and at the finish line, his margin of victory was 0.10 seconds.

Hamlin had won the Feb. 14 Sprint Unlimited, but the Daytona 500 victory was the first for a Toyota.

"All in all it was a good day," said Truex. "We were in a good position during the last laps, and we were maintaining our speed, but Denny just found a little something extra there at the end."

Kyle Busch, who missed last year's Daytona 500 due to an injury came in third.

"I saw Denny coming on my outside," said Busch. "If I had tried to jump up in front of him I might have lost my own position. Sometimes you have to wait and see how things play out. I just didn't feel like it was an ideal moment to try and make a move on the leader."

Kevin Harvick the fourth-place finisher had to come back from an early spin.

"I think we should be pleased with our performance today," said Harvick. "We're lucky we didn't wind up on the wrecker after what happened to us earlier."

Carl Edwards was involved in an altercation with Brian Vickers, but managed to bring his banged-up car to a fifth-place finish.

Joey Logano was sixth, while Kyle Larson, Regan Smith, Austin Dillon, and Kurt Busch were the remaining top-10 drivers.

Matt Kenseth, who led 40 laps wound up 14th.

"I was in the position I wanted to be in, but when I moved up and tried to block Denny, I lost momentum," said Kenseth. "That's the way it goes sometimes."

It appears the Joe Gibbs Toyotas are going to be strong this year. Three of their four teams (Hamlin, Kyle Busch, and Edwards) finished in the top-5. If it hadn't been for Kenseth's miscue, all five of them would have been there.

Jimmie Johnson led once for 18 laps, but he never threatened the leaders near the end and wound up 16th.

Danica Patrick had a good run going until she came down on Greg Biffle and spun across the infield grass. She finished 35th.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. led twice for 15 laps. Late in the race, he lost control and hit the wall. He was able to return to the track but finished the race 36th.

Polesitter and Saturday's Xfinity Series winner Chase Elliott lost control of his No. 24 Hendrick Chevrolet during lap 20, and spun down on to the infield grass. By the time his team had made repairs to his car he



Hamlin then Truex cross finish line

was 40 laps down, and finished 37th.

ELLIOTT HOLDS ON FOR XFINITY VICTORY

Chase Elliott held on to win Saturday's Xfinity Series race at Daytona by 0.043 seconds ahead of Joey Logano.

"That was a heck of a battle there at the end," said Elliott. "Joey pushed me hard, but I knew we had a good car, and if I hadn't won, I would have been disappointed."

The win was his first at Daytona and first restrictor plate race victory for the 20-year-old.

Logano gave it a good try during the last lap. He was running on the high side of the track, while Elliott was running a lower groove. Logano had the momentum and was about to take the lead, when Elliott went high and blocked Logano. The pair traded paint a couple times, but Logano was unable to pull off a pass.

"Well, I guess I could have done a little better job, but he blocked me and I couldn't get by in time," said Logano.

Kasey Kahne was third, followed by Elliott Sadler, Austin Dillon, Darrell Wallace, Brandon Jones, Daniel Suarez, Blake Koch, and Brendan Gaughan.

SAUTER TAKES TRUCK RACE

Johnny Sauter was the winner of the Daytona Truck Series race, but most of the excitement occurred behind him as he was taking the checkered flag.

Rookie Christopher Bell crashed as he made contact with Timothy Peters as they finished the race. Bell's No. 4 Toyota spun and barrel-rolled at least 10 times before it came to a stop. Bell immediately got out of his truck and, although he walked away, was taken to a local hospital to be evaluated.

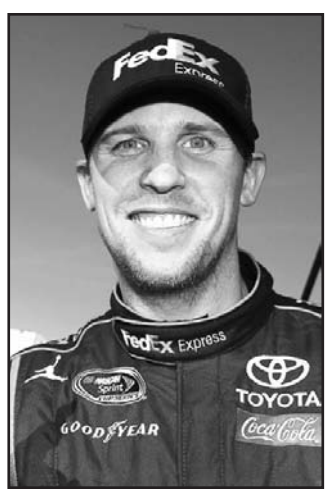
An 18-car crash caused the race to be red-flagged on Lap 93 for 27 minutes and 54 seconds. The wreck claimed pole-sitter Grant Enfinger and Austin Theriault, who had led the most laps in the race to that point.

Top-10 finishers: 1. Johnny Sauter, 2. Ryan Truex, 3. Parker Kligerman, 4. Brandon Brown, 5. Travis Kvapil, 6. Tyler Young, 7. Ben Rhodes, 8. Daniel Hemric, 9. Scott Lagasse, 10. Matt Crafton.

THE FOX IS IN THE HENHOUSE

Last week, Toronto Star editor Norris McDonald said NASCAR had allowed the foxes inside the hen house. He was referring to the recent agreement between the sanctioning body and car owners.

"Two years ago, or so, the most powerful team owners in NASCAR announced they had formed a working group (Race Team Alliance) to investigate how they could better be involved in France family decisions on racing rules, cost containment, race scheduling and so-on," he said. "That Brian France didn't announce that they were all suspended surprised me at the time and still surprises me. By agreeing to work with this group, France and NASCAR opened the door to the hen house. Now the foxes are all inside and it's only a matter of time before feathers start flying and things start falling apart."



Denny Hamlin

"It's already had a negative effect on the racing. Last Thursday, they ran the two qualifying races for this year's Daytona 500. Know how many spots were up for grabs? Two. Exactly. Two. Once upon a time, when NASCAR stock car racing was an open competition sport, everything other than pole and outside pole was on the line. Not any more. They might have to race for starting positions but there's no danger of any of them actually missing the show. Kinda takes the excitement out of it, doesn't it?"

As if all the news about teams wasn't enough, NASCAR has instituted a new personal conduct code for drivers in all three series.

"What you'll see is an effort by the sanctioning body to improve the level of transparency," said Jim Cassidy, senior vice president of racing operations.

NASCAR said it had worked over the last year to come up with a disciplinary plan and the new system was not tied to one event. There was an outcry last season when Matt Kenseth was punished for retaliating against Logano at Martinsville for a previous series of slights in the Chase. The deliberate wrecking of Logano drew a two-race suspension from NASCAR.

Kenseth said he would have handled the payback differently had he known he'd draw such an unprecedented penalty.

"We don't want perception that anything is, do as you see fit," Cassidy said. "We are so far from that today as a sport. It's a good thing for us. It's a good thing for our competitors and everyone involved and the fans to understand what's happening."

Weekend Racing:

All three of NASCAR's major touring series will be at the 1.5-mile Atlanta Motor Speedway. Sat., Feb. 27; Xfinity Series race 2 of 33; Starting time: 1:30 p.m. ET; TV: FoxSports1. Sat., Feb. 27; Truck Series race 2 of 23; Starting time: 4:30 p.m. ET; TV: FoxSports1. Sun., Feb. 28; Sprint Cup series race 2 of 36; Starting time: 1 p.m. ET; TV: Fox.

Racing Trivia Question:

Does NASCAR still give former champions a provisional starting position?

Last Week's Question: Who won last year's Daytona 500? Answer: Joey Logano.

You may contact The Racing Reporter by e-mail at: hodges@race500.com. NT(Feb24.Z19)CA