

Sports

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Panthers overpower Rabun County; improve to 6-1 in 8-AA

Bulldogs' rally comes up short as Union edges Murphy, NC 3-2

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Union's lone Region 8-AA contest of the week ended in a 5-1 Panthers victory over Rabun County to remain even with Social Circle atop of the Region standings.

Union County (10-4 overall, 6-1 in region play) is two games better in the win-column, but the Redskins (8-5, 4-1) and Panthers remain even in the loss-column with one a piece. However, Union's lone game of the week is a non-region affair with Andrews, NC on Thursday. The Wildcats lost to Murphy, NC earlier this season by an 11-0 score.

Meanwhile, Social Circle has three region games slated this week, providing them with an opportunity to surpass Union in the win column, or fall behind - leaving the Panthers all alone in first place.

On Tuesday the Redskins will host Oglethorpe County (3-4 in Region 8-AA) before traveling to Rabun County (3-3 in region-play) for a doubleheader on Friday.

Next week, the Panthers will visit White County on Wednesday, Apr. 6th before hosting a doubleheader with last place Greene County (0-8 in region play) on Friday, Apr. 8th. Greene has been outscored 142-7 in its eight Region 8-AA contests this season - an average score of 18-1 per game. That upcoming schedule should leave Union well-rested and in the driver's seat going into the Apr. 12th game at Rabun and an Apr. 15th doubleheader at Social Circle to wrap up region-play.

Panthers 5, Rabun County 1 - In a matchup of last year's Co-Region 8-AA Champions, the Union County Panthers drew first blood with a 5-1 win over the Rabun County Wildcats, who reached the Class AA Final Four one year ago after winning the coin toss over Union for the No. 1 seed.

Despite playing without the services of shortstop and leadoff hitter Patrick Baggett, the Panthers jumped out to a 2-0



Joseph Mancuso brings the heat vs Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

lead in the second inning and were never seriously threatened as senior Joseph Mancuso allowed just one unearned run and four hits over 5 2/3 innings while notching his fourth win of the season.

With Union on top 3-1 after four innings, the Wildcats got on the board during a controversial fifth inning that saw the Panthers record three outs, only to have the final out reversed minutes later, forcing the Panthers back onto the field and sending Rabun back into the dugout to continue their at bat.

The call that was reversed was a two-out grounder to sophomore third baseman RJ Banton, with runners on second and third. Following a diving snag of a sharp grounder down the third base line, Banton's throw momentarily forced senior first baseman Will King off the bag, but King quickly recovered and stepped back on the bag a split second after the Wildcat runner reached the base. The base umpire ruled the runner out, negating the Wildcats' first and only run of the game.

While the Rabun players took the field between innings, their pitcher was throwing a few warm up tosses, and the Panthers players were preparing to step to the plate with their batting helmets on, the final out call was

reversed and Union was sent back onto the field and Rabun was awarded a run.

With the tying run now on base and the Wildcats' cleanup hitter coming to the plate, the Panthers didn't allow the reversal to also reverse their momentum and Mancuso quickly drained the life from the Wildcats' rally with a three-pitch strikeout.

When Union finally came to the plate in the bottom of the fifth, Mancuso blasted a one-out solo homer over the left field fence. Banton followed Mancuso with an infield single and would later score on a base hit by Crawford Colwell to stretch the Panthers' lead to 5-1 entering the sixth.

Mancuso recorded a pair of grounders for outs before issuing a two-out walk that brought junior Josh Nachtrieb to the mound to replace Mancuso after 5 2/3 innings.

Nachtrieb got out of the sixth on two pitches with a fly out to senior left fielder Andrew Brown. In the seventh, Nachtrieb allowed a one-out base hit but induced two ground balls to end the game.

Union scored two in the second when Crawford Colwell was hit by a pitch to lead off the inning. He would steal second and advance to third on a Rabun error. Crawford Colwell scored



Crawford Colwell plays piggy-back with the Rabun second baseman following a stolen base and an overthrow by the catcher. Interference was ruled after Colwell was prevented from reaching third by the infielder. The ruling awarded him third base. Photo/Todd Forrest

on a ground ball by Candler Colwell, King reached base when the Rabun pitcher mishandled a ground ball back to the mound.

Logan Dyer brought home Candler Colwell with a sacrifice bunt and the Panthers held a 2-0 advantage until they added another run in the fourth.

Once again, Crawford Colwell reached base to open the inning when he drew a walk and quickly stole second base. He reached third on a sacrifice fly by Dawson Groves and scored when Candler Colwell took a 1-2 pitch back up the middle for a base hit - making it a 3-0 game.

The win over Rabun improves Union to 6-1 in Region 8-AA, while the loss drops the Wildcats to 3-3 in region play. The rematch at Rabun is scheduled for Apr. 12 at 5 p.m.

Panthers 3, Murphy NC 2 - Despite getting out-hit 7-to-5, Union held on to a 3-2 victory after scoring a run in the first, second, and fifth inning. Entering the seventh inning up 3-1, the Panthers' Candler Colwell stymied Murphy's comeback-bid following back-to-back two-out doubles by the Bulldogs.

Rich got the start on the mound and worked a perfect first. Then in Union's half of the in-

ning, Rich doubled and courtesy runner Will King later scored on a two-out single from Brown.

Murphy loaded the bases with one down in the second but Rich fanned the next two hitters to escape unscathed.

Crawford Colwell walked to open the bottom of the second and advanced on a Cole Davis sacrifice to set the table for Baggett, who delivered another two-out single to put Union on top at 2-0.

The Bulldogs loaded the

bases once more in the fourth, this time off King, who replaced Rich to open the inning.

An error allowed one runner to cross before King mowed down the ensuing hitter on three pitches and induced a grounder to third to end the inning.

Baggett was plunked with one out in the fifth, Rich singled up-the-middle, and Mancuso delivered an RBI single to stretch the Panthers lead to 3-1.

Rabun Co. stats:
HITTING - Rich 1-for-3. Mancuso 1-for-3 with 1 RBI, 1 run, 1 HR. Banton 1-for-3 with 1 run. Crawford Colwell 1-for-1 with 2 runs, 1 BB. Candler Colwell 1-for-3 with 2 RBIs, 1 run. King 1-for-3. Dyer 0-for-2 with 1 RBI.

PITCHING - Mancuso 5 2/3 innings, 1 run, 0 earned runs, 4 hits, 3 K, 3 BB. Nachtrieb 1 1/3 innings, 0 runs, 1 hit. WINNING PITCHER - Mancuso

Murphy, NC stats:
HITTING - Baggett 1-for-2 with 1 RBI, 1 run. Rich 2-for-3 with 1 2B. Mancuso 1-for-2 with 1 RBI, 1 BB. Brown 1-for-3 with 1 RBI. Crawford Colwell 0-for-2 with 1 run, 1 BB.

PITCHING - Rich 3 innings, 0 runs, 5 K, 1 hit, 2 BB. King 1 inning, 1 run, 0 earned runs, 1 K, 3 hits. Candler Colwell 3 innings, 1 run, 1 earned run, 1 K, 3 hits, 1 BB. WINNING PITCHER - Rich, SAVE - Candler Colwell

Upcoming games: Thursday vs Andrews, NC at 5 p.m.

Region 8-AA Baseball standings

TEAM	REGION REC	OVERALL REC
1. UNION COUNTY	6-1	10-4
2. SOCIAL CIRCLE	4-1	8-5
3. RIVERSIDE MILITARY	5-4	8-5
T4. RABUN COUNTY	3-3	5-10
T4. WASH WILKES	4-4	4-13
6. OGLETHORPE CO	3-4	6-9
7. GREENE COUNTY	0-8	1-9

THIS WEEK'S REGION GAMES:
Tuesday: Oglethorpe Co. @ Social Circle
Friday: Social Circle @ Rabun Co. (DH)

McCombs' goal lifts Panthers over Towns; Lady Panthers shutout

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Severe storms postponed Union County's Region 8-AA contest with Rabun County on Thursday of last week, leaving a Friday trip to Towns County as the only game on the schedule.

The Lady Panthers were unable to recover from a Lady Indians' four-goal outburst during the first half and fell 4-0 at Towns.

The guys held on for a 2-1 victory after scoring in the game's opening minute.

This week the 8-AA playoff picture should come into focus after Union visits Rabun County on Wednesday and Oglethorpe County on Friday.

Panthers 2 Towns County 1

Hiwassee - The Panthers struck early in their 2-1 victory at Towns County with freshman Brian Smith putting Union on the board 28 seconds into the contest at Hiwassee's Frank McClure Stadium.

Union (4-1-1, 2-1) just missed out on a second early goal when Sean Dobbins' header was deflected by Towns' keeper in the third minute. Five minutes later, Smith's header attempt sailed high.

Senior keeper Justin Eigel denied the Indians in the 16th minute before junior Sam Seiler and Lance Underwood's shot attempts were thwarted on the other end of the field by Eigel's counterpart.

In the 26th minute, Eigel turned away a Towns County scoring opportunity when the Indians were awarded a free kick. Three minutes later, Smith was turned away once again on a diving save by the Towns County keeper. Eigel stopped another shot in the 32nd minute and junior Lawson Baeninger's shot was blocked in the 38th minute. The Indians responded by getting off a shot less than a minute later but Eigel came through once again.



Union County soccer at Towns County last Friday. Top left: Parker McCombs. Top right: Madison Yost. Bottom left: Ansley Garrison Bottom right: Justin Eigel. Photos by Todd Forrest

time-span. Towns finally got on the board in the 52nd minute, then just missed taking the lead when Eigel stopped the go-ahead goal almost two minutes later. In the 59th and



60th minute, junior Parker McCombs got off a pair of shots but neither found paydirt. He finally broke through in the 61st minute off an assist from Colby Ives to put the Panthers back on top for good at 2-1.

Both teams exchanged shots until the 77th minute when Seiler's kick missed wide left. In the game's final 40 seconds, the Indians were unable to take advantage of three throw-ins from deep in Union



Brian Smith
territory and the Panthers held on to the 2-1 victory.

Lady Panthers 0 Towns County 4

Hiwassee - The Lady Panthers suffered their first loss of the season at Towns County by a 4-0 score. Union fell behind 2-0 in the game's opening minutes and never recovered. Towns added another goal in the 19th minute before taking on another off a corner kick in the 38th minute to take a 4-0 advantage into the break.

The Lady Panthers managed to get off a few shots in the first 15 minutes of the second half but were unable to make a dent in the four-goal deficit.

In the contest's final 15 minutes, Union (4-1, 2-0) was unsuccessful on three free kicks and the Lady Indians preserved the shutout victory over Union. The Lady Panthers have now dropped three-straight to Towns County, who were lead by sophomore Brook Barrett's two goals.

On Tuesday, Union County will host Pickens County in a boys only contest at 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday's games at Rabun County and Thursday's games at Oglethorpe County will all be at 5 and 7 p.m.