

Sports

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Panthers enter final week of region-play with one-game lead

Union maintains slim advantage over second place Social Circle following sweep of Greene County

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As Union County (12-5, 8-1) hosted Greene County on Friday the only drama was whether the seniors would be called out in numerical or alphabetical order during the Senior Night ceremony held between the two games of a Region 8-AA doubleheader.

The Panthers posted 10 runs in the first inning of each game and went on to win 15-0 in game one and 17-2 in the second game.

Senior Will King picked up his second win of the year during the three inning victory in the first contest.

Game two saw senior Andrew Brown make his first mound appearance of the season and fire two innings in the win.

Junior Josh Nachtrieb allowed an unearned run in the third inning and sophomore Patrick Baggett also made his season debut, tossing a scoreless fourth.

At the plate, Brown drove in three runs during a 2-for-2 day, including a double, a triple, and two runs.

Senior Joseph Mancuso went 1-for-2 with a 2-run homer. Sophomore Crawford Colwell was 1-for-1 with a 3-run double.

Senior Lance Rich finished 2-for-2 with a double, two RBIs, and two runs. Sophomore Slade Rowan went 1-for-3 with a double and a pair of RBIs.

Junior Dawson Groves and freshman Coleson Daniel each recorded an RBI-double during the second game.

Sophomore Cole Davis was 1-for-2 with two runs and an RBI. Fellow sophomore Logan Dyer scored three times and drove in one.

Freshmen Ean Harkins and Jackson Colwell each scored twice, while King was hit-by-a-pitch and scored. Freshman Chayton Schafer also added a run and sophomore Candler Colwell drew a walk.

In the first game, Mancuso finished 3-for-3, doubling twice, homering, driving in three, and scoring three times in the Panthers' 15-0 victory.

Baggett also drove in three runs and scored twice during a 3-for-3 game. Rich finished 1-for-4 with a pair of RBIs and a run. Brown was 1-for-1 with 2 runs, an RBI, 2 walks, and a stolen base.

Rowan went 1-for-2 with an RBI and freshman Hunter Kelley also drove in a run. Sophomore RJ Banton singled and stole a base, freshman Michael Raper



Senior Andrew Brown with parents.



Senior Lance Rich with family.



Senior Public Address announcer Chris Mathis with parents.

singled and scored, and Schafer scored twice.

Dyer, Daniel, Davis, and Candler Colwell each scored a run and King drew a walk.

King fanned three and walked one without allowing a hit during three innings on the mound in game one.

The sweep over Greene puts Union just two wins away from securing the outright Region 8-AA Championship.

Although, after sharing the Region Championship with Rabun last year, Union is looking to win

all three of its remaining region games and erase any chances of Region 8-AA crowning co-champions once again.

The Panthers travel to Rabun on Tuesday while second place Social Circle (7-2) will likely defeat Greene County to set up a Friday night showdown between Union and Social Circle to determine the 8-AA crown.

Having a one-game lead clearly puts Union in the driver's seat. For example: a win at Rabun on Tuesday means the Panthers only need to split at Social Circle



Senior Will King with parents.



Senior Joseph Mancuso with parents.

Union County Baseball Senior Night photos by Todd Forrest

to take the top spot.

The Panthers will be looking for a remarkable second straight Region Championship, something that hasn't been accomplished in the past 25-plus years, if at all.

Rabun County currently resides in third with a 5-4 region record while Riverside (5-5), Washington-Wilkes (4-5), and Oglethorpe County (3-5) are all within a game of the fourth and final playoff spot.

However, Rabun is the only team outside the top two that has a shot at finishing in second. Meanwhile, Union and Social Circle are the only two teams that can win the region.

The Panthers have also guaranteed themselves a fourth consecutive State Tournament berth, something else that could be a first for Union baseball.

Regardless of how the 2016 season concludes, it should be noted that new Head Coach Robby Roxbury came into this season needing to replace seven starters from 2015, so Roxbury and his staff are to be commended for the job they've done while continuing to move the program forward on the heels of former coaches CT

Hussion and Brandon Bradburn, who are a tough act to follow.

The Panthers also lost four of their top five pitchers, who tossed a total of 85 of the team's 135 innings and accounted for 87 of the staff's 141 strikeouts.

Offensively, Roxbury replaced 122 of the team's 177 hits from last year. He also lost 92 of the team's 143 runs scored, 67 of

112 RBIs, 5 of the 8 homers, and 32 of 41 stolen bases.

However, this season's team on base percentage of .407 as almost identical to last year's OBP of .408.

Defensively, Union lost two outfielders, the entire infield and its catcher following the 2015 season.

On Thursday, White County scored in four of the game's five innings during a 10-0 rout of visiting Union that was stopped via the mercy rule after the Warriors put up four runs on three hits with one out in the bottom half of the fifth.

An RJ Banton single was the Panthers only hit of the contest as White County's John Mullis struck out nine in five innings.

The Panthers only scoring opportunity came in the third when sophomores Candler Colwell, Patrick Baggett, and senior Andrew Brown each walked to load the bases but Union was unable to capitalize.

Rich worked a perfect third and Banton delivered the only hit of the game to open the fourth but two strikeouts and a ground out followed.

Senior Will King took the mound in the bottom half of the fourth and the Warriors tacked on two more runs - one earned - to extend their advantage to 6-0.

Senior Joseph Mancuso took over for King in the fifth and three Union errors led to four unearned runs and a 10-0 deficit, bringing the mercy rule into play. Baggett walked twice for the Panthers, while Brown, Crawford Colwell, and Candler Colwell drew one free pass each. On the hill, King recorded two strikeouts with Mancuso and Rich fanning one each.

Region 8-AA Baseball standings

TEAM	REGION REC	OVERALL REC
1. UNION COUNTY	8-1	12-5
2. SOCIAL CIRCLE	7-2	12-6
3. RABUN COUNTY	5-4	7-13
4. RIVERSIDE MILITARY	5-5	10-7
5. WASH WILKES	4-5	4-15
6. OGLETHORPE CO	3-5	6-10
7. GREENE COUNTY	0-10	1-11

Blairsville's Caleb Kelley takes the reigns of the YHC Golf program

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Young Harris - Caleb Kelley, a 2007 Union County High School graduate has the YHC men's golf team sitting at No. 5 in the current NCAA Division II regional rankings.

After serving two years as an assistant coach at YHC, Kelley was named the interim coach in October of 2014. The following June, the search for a new coach for both the mens and women's golf programs led the school to Kelley.

The choice was an easy one after Kelley, a former YHC golfer, led both Mountain Lion teams to their best-ever finishes in the Peach Belt Conference Championships as the interim head coach. Kelley led the men's team to a third-place finish while the ladies came in seventh. The men also set a new PBC Championship record as they recorded a 279 in the second round.

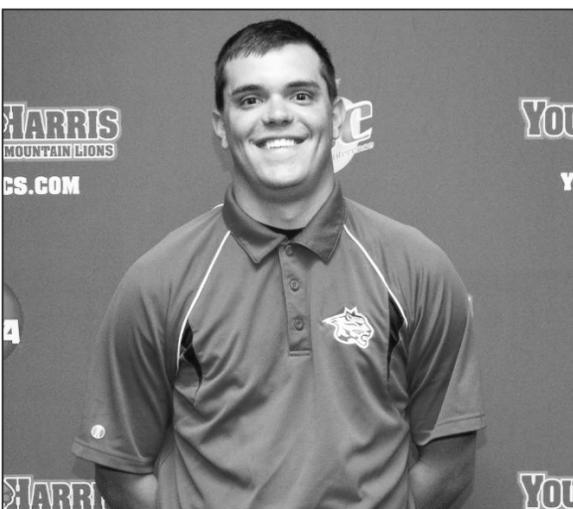
The women's team, shaved 37 strokes off its scoring average from 2013-14 to 2014-15 and became the first-ever YHC program to be honored by the Peach Belt Conference with its Sportsmanship Award.

Earlier this month, the Young Harris men found themselves at fifth when the NCAA Division II regional rankings were released.

A week later, the Mountain Lions remained at No. 5 in the second regional rankings to be released. This is the first time in the program's history that they have been featured in the regional rankings.

There will be two more regional rankings released before the final selection by the NCAA for regional play takes place on April 22nd.

"We've been very consistent this year and that's what



Union County High School 2007 graduate Caleb Kelley was named the Interim Head Coach of both Young Harris College golf teams in October 2014 then in June of 2015, the "interim" label was removed and he was given the job of Head Golf Coach at the Peach Belt Conference school. Photo courtesy of YHC Athletics.

you have to do to compete," Kelley said.

It was during his playing career at YHC that Kelley began to realize that coaching could be in his future.

"I played four years here at Young Harris and had two knee surgeries because of my playing seasons so that allowed me to help coach a little bit," Kelley said. "We had two teams and only one coach so I traveled with the teams and helped coach."

After completing a healthy senior season, Kelley was asked to remain with the program as an assistant coach.

"During my senior year, I knew that (coaching) was what I wanted to do," he said. "You have to transition yourself away from the players because it's tough coaching your friends, so that was probably the toughest transition for me."

He would serve as an assistant golf coach and assistant Sports Information Director for 2 1/2 years before being named

the Interim Head Men's and Women's Golf Coach in 2014.

"It's been a challenge," Kelley said. "As a head coach, all of the responsibility falls on you. But we have a great group of kids that made my transition really easy."

Young Harris golf plays a fall season and a spring season so it's a year-round job for Kelley.

"Our season starts in August as soon as the kids get back," he said. "The fall season runs through the end of October then we slow down around Thanksgiving but start back up in January. If we make it to the National Championship, that would put us playing until the end of May, then I spend the summer recruiting."

According to Kelley, learning to recruit players from around the world was quite a learning experience. However, he has benefited from snagging plenty of local talent and keeping them in the area.

"If you want to compete at this level you have to recruit in-



The No. 5 ranked Young Harris College Men's Golf Team is under the leadership of second year Head Coach Caleb Kelley. Blairsville's James Rowe (top left) is a member of the team. Photo/YHC Athletics

ternationally," he said. "Luckily, I've made a lot of good contacts that make my job easier. But I think we have a good mix of local and international players."

Another aspect that goes into his job is keeping a positive relationship with the local golf courses for practicing. Currently, YHC uses four different golf courses in Georgia and North Carolina to prepare themselves for their tournaments.

"We practice at Brasstown Valley, Old Union, Butternut Creek, and the Ridges in Hayesville, NC.," Kelley said. "They have all been great and have went above and beyond everything I thought possible."

At 26-years old, Kelley says that he is blessed to have his "dream job" at such a young age and has plans to retire someday as the Young Harris College golf coach.

"There's not a lot of people who can say (they have their dream job)," he said. "To coach here, at the place I went to school, to remain in the local community to try and help grow the game in this area, and to give back to the

community is the ultimate goal.

"The North Georgia Mountains are not known as a golfing area but we hope to change that. We want to make it known as a place where you can bring some of the best young players in the country and they can take that next step and accomplish their goals."

Kelley credits all of his previous coaches, from high school through college for having an impact on his life.

"Every coach you learn something different from because every coach has a different style," he said. "I look back on my career and take pieces of what I like from each coach and that develops you into the coach that you eventually will be."

"I've been lucky to have a lot of great coaches who truly care about their players. In high school I played for Jim Hughes and Joe White and they both had a big impact on me. They were both very passionate about the game."

With the amount of time that he spends on the road, Kelley wanted to send a special 'thank

you' out to his family.

"It's a stressful job and they've been so supportive," he said. "You always have something on your plate, especially when you have 21 college kids you're dealing with on a daily basis."

"The staff here at Young Harris has also been super-supportive in our quest to take the golf program to the next level. But without the entire community this wouldn't be possible, it takes a full-community effort."

The South/Southeast Regional, which will be held May 2-4th at the Mission Inn Resort and Club at Howey-in-the-Hills, Fla., will be one of four regionals before the national championship on May 17-21st at the Green Valley Ranch Golf Club in Denver, Colo.

The top five teams at each regional, along with the top three individuals not on those teams, will advance to the 20-team field at the national championship.

The Mountain Lions return to action on Friday at the PBC Championship in St. Augustine, Fla.