

Sports

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One year removed from UCHS; Hughes still mowing down opponents

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When Angie Hughes graduated from Union County High School in 2012, she took almost every school and Region 8-AA pitching record with her to Lee University in Cleveland, Tenn.

As they say, one's loss is another's gain, and that was very true in the case with Hughes.

After leading the Lady Panthers to consecutive Region 8-AA titles and a State Runner Up finish, Hughes signed with Lee, where she quickly made an impact and became the ace of the Lady Flames' pitching staff, starting 7-0 on the season, including a one-hit shutout against Tennessee-Wesleyan in her first college appearance, striking out nine and walking two.

"I was very nervous the first inning and came out a little shaky but settled in after that and pitched my game," Hughes said.

"I knew she would be good for us," said Lee Head Softball Coach Emily Russell. "She played at a high level of travel ball and did awesome last year. She has great movement and got even stronger this year. She threw very well."

On March 5th, Hughes was named Southern States Athletic Conference Pitcher of the Week. She went 3-0 on the week, fanning 39 hitters in 21 innings, while yielding only two runs.

Three days later, Hughes tossed a 14-strikeout, no-hitter against Blue Mountain College.

"I was not expecting to throw a no-hitter," Hughes said.

"It was really exciting and I was thankful for the great defense I had behind me during the game. It was an honor to get Pitcher of the Week. There are many great pitchers in our conference so it was an honor to be chosen as Pitcher of the Week."

When asked what makes Hughes such a tough pitcher, Coach Russell chalks it up to her obvious athletic ability and work ethic, plus a little bit of unpredictability.

"She spins the ball well and even she isn't 100 percent sure exactly where it's going, but she knows its going to be moving sharply," Russell said.



Angie Hughes

"She is a very hard worker and did everything that was asked of her."

Hughes went on to make the All-Freshman Team, All Division and Lee eventually reached the NAIA National Championship – the equivalent of the College World Series, where the third-ranked Lady Flames fell to Auburn-Montgomery University. Yet, Hughes discovered earlier in the season that her team was capable of winning it all.

"I realized that we could win a national championship when we went to a tournament in Alabama and were co-champions," Hughes said. "We played really good softball during that tournament and it felt like no one could beat us. I felt like we could win it all during that point. I realized I could be an effective pitcher during that tournament."

As the season ended, and the dust settled, Hughes had recorded team highs with 17 wins, four shutouts, and 176 strikeouts in 121 innings of work.

Opposing hitters only managed a .179 batting average against Hughes, who compiled a 2.65 ERA.

"I was very happy with my freshman year," Hughes said. "Going in I didn't know what to expect, but our team really came together and our main goal was to win the national championship."

After a successful freshman campaign, Hughes is now focused on avoiding the dreaded sophomore slump. However, she realizes she has her work cut out for her.

"I have been working on my off speed pitches and developing my pitches better," Hughes said. "We are moving up to Division II next year, so our schedule will be tougher.



Hughes (right) collected some hardware at the conclusion of her freshman season.

So there are many things I need to work on and be prepared for next year."

Hughes has already faced some adversity when she went through a bit of a mini-slump late in the season, which could be chalked up to the extended 40-plus game college schedule. But the Blairsville native, turned things around in the conference tournament, showing her keen ability to adjust after the college hitters began to figure her out.

"A turning point for me this season came in the conference tournament," Hughes said.

"I had been in a slump with my pitching during one of the games and the other team had the bases loaded, no outs in the top of the seventh inning, and we were winning by one run. My coach put me in to pitch and get out of the jam. I was able to get out of it with only one run scored and we ended up scoring to win in the bottom of the seventh. Getting out of that jam really boosted my confidence and I felt like my old self pitching."

She also led the team in batting average. Sort of.

Hughes hit 1.000 on the year with one hit in one at bat. Unfortunately, she didn't have enough at bats to qualify for the batting crown. Hughes joked when talking about her one and only plate appearance, where surprisingly, reaching base wasn't what her coach intended.

"My one and only at bat this season was against a team that we had a rather large lead against and there were two

outs," Hughes said. "I don't normally hit so my coach really just put me in to try to get an out. I actually went up to the plate laughing and telling myself not to strike out. I do not remember much about the at bat, just making contact and running then I was surprised that it was actually a base hit. I ended up scoring in that inning which was exciting."

There were many highlights of the season according to Hughes. Some came on the field, others took place off the field, or out of the country.

"Back in January our team took a mission trip to the Dominican Republic, which was an amazing trip and we were able to play against people from the Dominican which was extremely fun," Hughes said. "Also, during our spring break we took a 10-day road trip to South Georgia, Florida, and Alabama to play. This trip brought our team together and we were co-champions of our tournament in Alabama. We also won our conference tournament this year which was the first time in four years and were able to host the first round of the national tournament."

As for her decision to choose Lee, Hughes couldn't be any happier than she is up in Cleveland, Tenn.

"I love the campus of Lee," Hughes said. "Everyone is so nice and very supportive. It is a relatively small campus so we get a lot of support from the students and faculty. I could not ask for better teammates this year. We had great senior leadership



Coach Russell and Hughes. Photo courtesy of Judy Watts.

which was great if something ever went wrong. The freshman class really came together this season and we spent most of our time off the field together. Our coaches were great in preparing us for every game. When I came in I was not expecting to become so close to my teammates, they are truly like sisters to me."

Yet when it comes to her successes as a Lady Flame, Hughes admits that it wouldn't be possible without the solid foundation that was laid during her four years as a Lady Panther.

"What I learned at Union County High School that helped me on both the field and the classroom is hard work," Hughes said. "It takes a lot of work to play a sport and also do well in the classroom. I had to practice hard on the field in order to be able to play in games, and I had to spend many hours studying to be prepared for classes."

Hughes also offered some advice for the current Lady Panthers softball team, and anyone else who aspires to thrive as a student-athlete in high school, as well as college.

"Some advice I would give to for younger players thinking about playing in college is to be ready to work really hard and have an extreme love for the game, because sometimes things do not go the way you think they should," Hughes said. "To win high school and college championships it is important to be mentally prepared as well as physically prepared."

Even Hughes admits that she needed guidance and went to one of her teammates for advice. One would expect

an upperclassman to be the player who took Hughes under her wing, but actually, it was a sophomore.

"The person that had the most effect on me my freshman year was our right fielder, Laurel Allen," Hughes said. "She was one of the hardest workers on the team and a great role model. She was a great player and also a great person who gave me good advice during the season. I went through a slump during the middle of the season and I am so thankful for the advice from my teammates who kept telling me to battle through it."

"There are many people I would like to thank for my success so far. First off God for giving me the ability to play softball. My parents for traveling to all my games this season and even sitting through games in the snow. Also my dad for catching me all these years, and all the great advice they give me. I would like to thank Coach Stewart for being a great coach during my time in high school and also still supporting me while in college. Also I would like to thank David Seabolt for the hours he has spent working with me. If it were not for him I would not be playing softball in college. Finally I would like to thank all of the teammates I have had who have always had my back and have been so supportive over the years.

"I was very happy with my freshman year and I am excited going into next season as we are moving into the NCAA Division II and we will be in a very good conference. I am thankful for all the support I was given during my freshman season."

Lee University and Coach Russell share those same feelings when it comes to Hughes.

"The sky is the limit for Angie," Russell said. "We gave her some goals for the summer and I know she will come back with those things done. She is working on adding more pitches and that will help her. She is a very talented pitcher."

"She is a great teammate. She is a team player and worked so hard conditioning. She is a great example on the field and in the classroom. She came in and acclimated to college life very well. I look forward to seeing her progress the next three years."

UCHS hosts Tucker basketball camp



Union County Lady Panther Basketball Coach David Tucker held his individual skills and shooting camp during the week of June 24th. Photos by Lowell Nicholson



MUSA registration now underway

Mountain United Soccer Association is ready for Fall Soccer.

Registrations are currently being accepted. Forms have been mailed to players who have participated in previous seasons. Forms are also available by visiting the league's website: www.mountainsoccer.org.

In Blairsville, CottBeverage is our community host for the soccer fields. In Hiawas-

see, the fields at the Towns County Fairgrounds are utilized through the cooperation of the local recreation department. The league is grateful for their commitment and support.

The fall season will begin in early September. Anyone who is interested in playing needs to register promptly. In some cases space is limited.

MUSA is a volunteer run organization and is also a 501C3 nonprofit. Any and all

donations are directed to the youth player. Field Sponsors, Sign Sponsors and Team Sponsors are always needed. If you are interested in supporting the youth soccer players in our community through sponsorship and/or donation, please contact the association.

For additional information contact the league at 706-994-4351, musa.soccer@gmail.com or visit us on the web at www.mountainsoccer.org .

AHT Atlanta Hawks Basketball Camp

July 18-20, 9 a.m. -1 p.m. at the Union County Recreation Center

Advanced Hoops Training in Gainesville, Georgia, a proud partner and supporter of the Atlanta Hawks of the NBA, will be conducting an advanced skills basketball camp for boys and girls basketball players, ages 10-14. This camp will be 3 days in length, and be 4 hours each day of instruction and drills on advanced basketball skill development in the following areas: ball handling, shooting, speed, agility, passing,

defensive skills, rebounding. The Atlanta Hawks Skill Development Team will be making a 2-hour appearance at the camp on Friday, July 19 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.. All campers will have the opportunity to win exclusive Hawks' promotional items, prizes, and autographed items. Each camper will receive a camp t-shirt and one ticket to a future Hawks' game, with special discounted ticket opportunities for other fam-

ily members. The cost for this camp is \$125 per camper, and the registration deadline for this camp is on July 12. Don't miss out on this opportunity to attend this skills camp and be a part of the Atlanta Hawks' Skills Combine. You can check AHT out on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ahthoops. To register for camp, contact AJ Gwyn at 678-300-0453 or email ahthoops@aol.com.

Blairsville PTO, INC.

1st Annual S.O.S. Glow Golf Tournament
(Support Our Schools) 4 Person Scramble

Friday, July 26

Butternut Creek Golf Course
Blairsville, GA

Awards for:

Top Gross Foursome • Top Net Foursome
2nd Place Net Foursome • 3rd Place Foursome

Incredible Raffle Prizes & Putting Contest

Registration: \$75 per player • \$300 per foursome

Registration starts at 4 p.m.

Tee Off @ 5:30 p.m. • Dinner/Raffle @ 8 p.m.

Glow Golf Begins @ 8:45 p.m.

Awards at Conclusion of Play!

Player 1: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Player 2: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Player 3: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Player 4: _____ Handicap: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail: _____



Mail form & payment
(check/money order) to

Blairsville PTO

P.O. Box 1059

Blairsville, GA 30514

or email registration info to
blairsville_pto@ucschoools.org

For more information on the tournament
call 706.835.5322 or email blairsville_pto@ucschoools.org.