

Sports

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Summer League Softball: Union blasts Towns

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nganews.com

For the past three years, Coach Jessica Stewart and Union County softball have been faced with the task of trying to replace the irreplaceable.

Kaitlyn Seabolt, Tori Dyer, and Kristen Hamby graduated in 2011, all taking their talents to the college level.

Angie Hughes and Callie Dyer left some big shoes to fill in 2012 and Hannah Hughes, who signed with the University of North Georgia is on her way out after graduating last month.

However, Coach Stewart and company can breathe a sigh of relief now that the players who have dominated the youth softball leagues and the middle school for the past three years have now begun to crack the high school ranks.

"Losing five seniors and gaining several freshman this summer, we're focused on playing together as a team and improving on our fundamentals in the field and at the plate," Stewart said.

Last week's Summer League wins over Towns County showed that Union County will be young and inexperienced during the upcoming season, but has no shortage of talent. If teams across Region 8-AA want to knock Union County from the top of the mountain, they better get their shots in early, because Lady Panther softball has nowhere to go but up once the season opens on Aug. 9th.

During Union's sweep of Towns, the Lady Panthers jumped out to a 10-0 lead in the first inning as Union sent 15 hitters to the plate in the bottom of the first.

Crystal Busbee pitched a shutout in a mercy-rule shortened game. The junior also drove in four runs and scored twice in the first inning after being hit by a pitch and then smacking a 2-RBI single to left the second time around.

Freshman Laken Chambers who threw a one-hit shutout in Union's 11-0 Game Two victory, crushed an opposite



Left: Junior Crystal Busbee delivers a pitch during her Game One shutout of Towns County. Right: Freshman Lydia Arrowood singled and scored during Union's 10-run first inning. Photos/Todd Forrest



Left: Freshman Laken Chambers takes a high fastball the opposite way and out of the ball park during just her second at bat at the UCHS field. Right: Junior Kelsie Nix drove in two runs in the first inning against Towns County. Photos/Todd Forrest



field homer in just her second plate appearance at the UCHS softball field.

"You've only been here one day and you're already hitting home runs on our field," junior catcher Courtney Busbee joked after Chambers' solo blast.

"I was very pleased with the way Chambers pitched and hit," Stewart said. "We did practice for two hours on Monday inside because of rain so this was the second time together."

As for Crystal Busbee, the junior worked around some control issues to keep Towns off the board. She has been working on developing an off speed pitch during the summer, and according to Coach Stewart there were about four different off speed pitches that she has been trying out in attempt to find one that she can rely on when the season opens.

"Crystal has been working extremely hard in the off season to find a change up that best fits her pitching style," Stewart said. "I'm not so concerned with passed balls or wild pitches at this point, we just started our summer league and we are learning from what we do wrong to improve on in practice."

Union was without its only two seniors, Allie Stroman and Madison Rich, who were at basketball camp. However, that allowed a lot of youngsters to play, and gave them a chance to put their skills on display.

Another freshman, Lydia Arrowood started at second base and laid down a sacrifice bunt in her first at bat, then singled and scored the second time up.

Sophomore outfielder Maddie Garrett walked, scored, and drove in two with a single from the No. 3 spot in the

lineup. Clean-up hitter Courtney Busbee was hit by a pitch, scored and singled in a run.

Freshman Maddie Horinek singled and scored. Also getting hits were Karlie Nix and Kelsie Nix. Meanwhile Johnna Langston added a walk.

"I was very impressed with the way the freshman came out and performed," Stewart said. "The returning players were as expected and I'm looking forward to a good season with the mix."

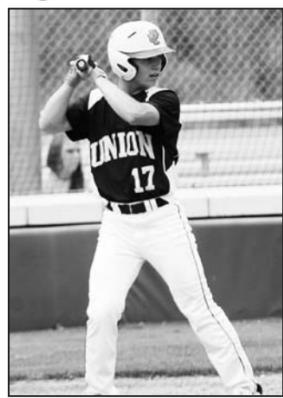
Coach Stewart also looks for Chambers and Crystal Busbee to split the innings during the season and provide Union with one of its most talented 1-2 punch in years.

"We only have two pitchers this year so Chambers and Busbee will get all the innings. Chambers will also pitch all 8 JV games as well," Stewart said

Summer Baseball: Panthers score early and often against Towns



Jake Sisum



Garrett Nix



Rising senior Lane Everett deals against Towns County.



Rising sophomore catcher/DH Lance Rich leads off first base.



Rising junior Jackson Burks (left) and rising sophomore Joseph Mancuso (right) during Union County's 15-6 victory over Towns County. Instead of playing a doubleheader the teams decided to play one nine-inning game. Union opened up a 12-2 lead early on and held on for the nine-run victory. Towns County was able to hang around thanks to two 2-run innings. Photos/Lowell Nicholson

Coach McCombs: Panther football more prepared mentally and physically after camps

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nganews.com

Union County Offensive Coordinator Howard McCombs knows that he has some big shoes to fill on offense.

But following a series of camps last week, the coach has acquired a bit of confidence regarding the Panther passing attack and his offensive line's ability to protect the passer in 2013.

McCombs also saw no glaring weaknesses and whatever minor shortcomings that he may have noticed, it's nothing that can't be corrected.

"Our focus during these first couple of camps was to have our passing game installed and see how our kids compete against some really good competition," McCombs said. "I was very pleased with how they

responded. Their ability to run our passing offense exceeded my expectations."

The two passing camps that Union took part in were at East Hall and at Jefferson, where the Panthers faced off with Clarke-Central and other top-notch programs from across North Georgia.

"They competed extremely well in these first couple of throwing camps against some good competition," McCombs said. "At the Jefferson camp we did not go up against another (Class) AA school. Everyone we faced was Class AAA - AAAAAA."

"We still have a ways to go and we really need to work on becoming more consistent with our drops and reads at the quarterback position and our route running for the receivers, but all in all, I am very happy with where we are at in the

middle of June. The areas that need improvement can be fixed before the season begins."

The Panthers will benefit from two talented signal callers to replace three-year starter T Bentley.

Rising junior Ralston Drake and rising sophomore Joseph Mancuso split time last season on the JV squad. Drake went down with an injury late in the season, and after Bentley was shaken up at Jefferson, Mancuso entered and drove the Panthers down the field for their only score of the night.

"Drake and Mancuso are still splitting reps 50 - 50 at this point and they are both doing a good job," McCombs said. "We are very fortunate to have two very capable quarterbacks to run our offense. If they will stay focused and keep working, they will both be more than adequate to do what we need to do at that position."

The offensive lineman attended a camp at Western Carolina over the weekend. The Panthers also will have some new faces in the trenches this fall, but like the quarterbacks, there is plenty of young talent who have been waiting for their opportunity. According to McCombs, when opportunity knocked last week, he had plenty of guys who were eager to answer.

"We had 16-18 linemen heading to (WCU) for a very intense offensive linemen camp," he said. "I was thrilled with the turn out for this camp. We had several freshmen attend and all of our linemen we our counting on for varsity playing

time this year except one were present. Coach Setzer loves this camp and I can see why. They do not mess around at the (WCU) camp. These guys are pushed physically as well as taught the techniques necessary to be successful. Our kids definitely came away from this camp more prepared mentally and physically for the season ahead.

"Like the rest of our team we will be a little young and inexperienced up front, but I am absolutely confident that we can be better up front this year. We had to play a couple of freshmen and a sophomore last year and they are improving. Those are the only guys with real game experience outside of Luther Jones. We have a host of kids who are competing for spots on the line. We are just waiting to see who is capable and wants these positions. There are several guys on our team that can still win starting positions on the offensive line."

When the Panthers kick-off on Aug. 30th against rival Towns County, Union will feature a new-look offense, but McCombs believes the sky's the limit for this young crop.

"We are going to be pretty young across the board offensively. You will be hard pressed to see any seniors out there for us this season, but I am excited about the young men we have. They have continued to work extremely hard and have been consistently attending our workouts. They have showed a lot of potential. The kids are still showing up and working hard and we are getting better."



Union County's up-and-coming crop of quarterbacks and receivers are looking to make a name for themselves and improve on Union's six-win season in 2012. Photos/Todd Forrest

Union County High School's receivers and quarterbacks participated in two passing camps last week. The offensive line attended Western Carolina's camp. Photos/Todd Forrest



July 16th - 18th

Tuesday - Thursday

Ages 7 to 13

Early Registration \$50

Day of Registration \$60

CONTACT: Coach Allison (770) 639-7331 | Coach McCombs (706) 781-9893

Time: 5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Location: Union County High School Football Field

Info: Water and Gatorade will be provided. Please bring Water bottle with name. Wear shorts, t-shirts, and cleats.

Each child will receive a Football camp T-shirt

Please Return with Payment

Name: _____ Age: _____ T-Shirt Size: _____

Parent: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

Emergency Contact: _____ Phone: _____

*Please make checks payable to Future Panther Camps. 153 Panther Circle, Blairsville, GA 30512

This is an offensive position oriented camp.

Please Circle Campers Offensive Position: Quarterback | Line | Receiver/Running Back