

Sports

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Baseball: Panthers 5-2 in last seven games, above .500 in region

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County Panthers are heading into April above .500 in region play for the first time in six years following two wins in three games last week.

Union County has now won five of seven, improving to 9-9 overall and 5-4 vs. Region 7-AA, headlined by last week's 3-1 victory at 5th-ranked Ringgold on Tuesday, March 25.

In the rematch with Ringgold, the Panthers led 4-2 late until a dubious delayed balk call breathed new life into the Tigers sixth inning, sparking a seven-run frame in their 9-5 win in Blairsville. On Friday, Union County held off a late rally at Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) in a 9-8 victory.

The Panthers host LFO on Tuesday, April 1 before visiting last-place Murray County on Thursday, April 3. The week concludes with Murray County at home on Friday, April 4. All three contests begin at 5:30 p.m.

Panthers 3, No. 5 Ringgold 1 - Gunnar Akins held the Tigers in check for 5 2/3 innings, allowing only two hits and one earned run. Maddox Patton logged his first 4-RBI game during a 4-for-5 day in Union County's win at LFO. Photo/Todd Forrest

- the game's final out coming via a punchout when Ringgold couldn't pull the trigger on the southpaw's full-count 81 MPH fastball.

Bentley Rich and Chetley Cox reached on walks for Union County; Patton scored a run; Brown added a stolen base.

Panthers 5, No. 5 Ringgold 9 - Up 4-2 and five outs away from sweeping the No. 5 team in Class AA, Union County were the victims of a late balk call that changed the momentum by simultaneously talking an out off the board and awarding Ringgold a free run.

After the Tigers loaded the bases with one away off Tyler Richards, Hayden Hughes entered and immediately induced a come-backer to the mound for a force out at home. Brown's throw to first wasn't in time to turn two, but the Panthers were in perfect position to get out of the inning with their two-run lead intact.

However, that's when things went south. The field umpire, after ruling the runner safe at first, paused the action for a discussion with the home plate umpire. Following a brief meeting, they determined that Hughes balked before the pitch, bringing the previous hitter off first base and back to the plate, taking an out away from Union County, and awarding a run to Ringgold.

Four pitches later, the same hitter lined a go-ahead single into left field, opening the floodgates on a seven-run inning.

Union County got a run back in the bottom half but could have had more if not for a third out on the basepaths to end the inning. Akins walked to lead off the frame and Lane Haney followed with a base hit to left. Hughes scored Akins on a single to left, and then Brown bunted both runners into scoring position for the first out. Rich grounded back to the pitcher for the second out but Hughes was cut down advancing to third before Haney crossed home plate, ending the inning with Union County down 9-5.

Gwynn's two-out single in the seventh was all the offense the Panthers could muster as Ringgold held on to escape with a split in the two-game series.

The Tigers got on the board early courtesy of a one-out walk, a stolen base and a two-out single off Patton in the top of the first. Union County left two aboard in the bottom



Junior Maddox Patton logged his first 4-RBI game during a 4-for-5 day in Union County's win at LFO. Photo/Todd Forrest

half but grabbed a 2-1 lead in the second when Travis Tracy and Gwynn scored on Akins' two-out single.

A two-out, solo homer by Ringgold evened the score during the third, but Union answered in the bottom half when Colten Gibson doubled home Brown with two away.

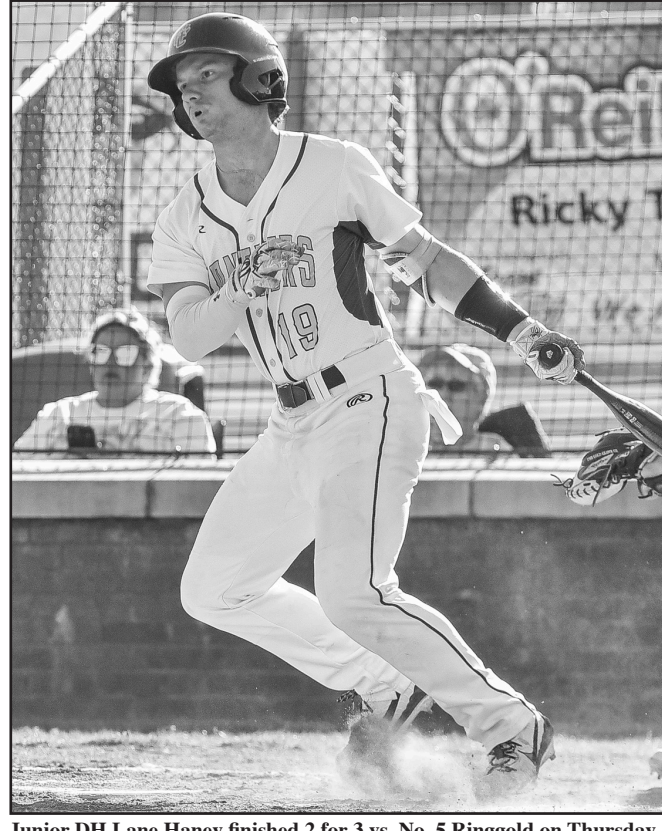
Gwynn walked to open the fourth and came around on Akins' double to right-center.

Patton departed with a 4-2 lead after four innings, giving way to Richards, who plunked the leadoff hitter and then issued a walk but managed to escape unblemished despite another walk that loaded the bags with two away.

Union County out-hit Ringgold 11-8, led by Akins' 2-for-3, 3-RBI day. Gibson finished 2 for 4 with an RBI; Patton went 2 for 5; Haney finished 2 for 3 with a walk; Hughes walked and drove in a run during his 1-for-3 day; Gwynn scored twice while going 1 for 3 with a walk.

Tracy walked, scored and finished 1 for 3; Brown added one base on balls.

Patton worked four innings on the bump, allowing three hits, two earned runs and two walks while striking out five. Richards finished with a



Junior DH Lane Haney finished 2 for 3 vs. No. 5 Ringgold on Thursday, March 27. Photo/Todd Forrest

line of 1 1/3 innings, one hit, one strikeout, three walks and three earned runs.

Hughes lasted 2/3 of an inning, giving up four hits, three earned runs and striking out one. Gibson tossed an inning of no-hit ball, walking one and striking out one.

"We got beat on some crazy things that happened, but that's been the story all year," Robbins said. "We make mistakes at the absolute wrong time and we get absolutely punished for them."

"We should have swept Ringgold," Robbins said. "We let one get away against North Cobb Christian and we let one get away against Sonoraville, otherwise, we'd be right there at the top of the region. Those were three big games that we beat ourselves. We have just shot ourselves in the foot too many times."

Panthers 9, LFO 8 - Union County led 7-1 in the third but escaped with a one-run victory despite out-hitting the home team 14-6 on Friday in Fort Oglethorpe.

"I was thinking about putting some of the younger guys in, but then we had an error that we compounded into six [LFO] runs," Robbins said. "I don't think they had more

than one or two earned runs."

Brown homered and recorded the win on the mound, allowing three hits and one earned run over four innings. Gibson picked up the save, tossing two no-hit innings, allowing two walks and striking out a pair.

Patton recorded the first four-RBI game of his career during his second four-hit game of the season, going 4 for 5 with two runs and a triple.

Akins went 2 for 3 with an RBI; Haney drove in a run during a 2-for-5 day; Hughes also finished 2 for 5 at the plate.

Union County raced ahead 2-0 in the first via Haney's RBI single and Cayden Miller's sacrifice fly.

LFO manufactured a run in the bottom half until the Panthers' five-run third spotted the visitors a 7-1 advantage.

During Union's huge third inning, four of the five runs came with two outs after Hughes opened the frame with a base hit to left. Miller was plunked with one away and Tracy's single to left plated Hughes.

After Gibson's pop-up marked the second out, Gwynn was hit by a pitch to load the bases for Patton, who immediately cleared them with a

three-run triple. Haney made it 7-1 when he jumped on a 77 MPH fastball and singled home Patton.

LFO responded with two in the bottom half, taking advantage of a Union error and two walks. But the Panthers' lineup worked more two-out magic in the fourth when Gibson's single kept the inning alive, Gwynn was hit by a pitch and Patton's single made it 8-3.

Brown belted a two-out solo homer in the fifth before giving way to Rich on the mound to begin the bottom half.

LFO quickly loaded the bases with one down, scoring one via a base hit to right. Rich punched out the ensuing hitter, but another single and a Union County error allowed the Warriors to get within a run before Rich induced a pop-out to preserve the lead.

The Panthers couldn't add on, despite Patton's base hit and Chetley Cox reaching on an error during the sixth. Fortunately, Gibson slammed the door over the final two innings, only yielding a one-out walk in both the sixth and the seventh frames.

Brown finished 1 for 4 with a pair of runs; Miller drove in one and scored once during a 1-for-2 day; Tracy went 1 for 4 with an RBI and a run; Gibson was 1 for 4 with a run; Gwynn was plunked three times and scored once.

Rich tossed an inning on the mound, allowing three hits, two earned runs, three walks and striking out two.

With one game vs. LFO and two against Murray County coming up, two squads with two combined region wins, the Panthers have an excellent opportunity to improve their region position and pad their numbers in the power rankings. However, Robbins acknowledges his team can't get complacent and allow another win to slip away.

"I told the boys, we have to own these next five games," Robbins said. "We're hoping to get Eli Gwynn back on the mound soon, and if we can get through these three games, then two vs. Coahulla Creek next week, we can go into Rockmart at full force to close out the regular season and set ourselves up in a good position in the power rankings."

Golf: Union sweeps Murray County at Butternut



Junior Sofia Charbonneau celebrates after saving par during Union's win over Murray County on Thursday, March 27 at Butternut Creek Golf Course. Charbonneau shot a 46 and Peyton Grisham turned in a 54 to lead Union County to a 100-117 victory. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Hayden Price's 38 led the undefeated Union County men to a 166-191 win over Murray County at Butternut Creek Golf Course. William Henson fired a 41, Huston West shot a 42 and Grant Smith finished at 45 in the Panthers' victory. Photo/Todd Forrest

Soccer: Union takes two from LFO, swept at Coahulla Creek

Union County hosts Murphy, North Hall this week

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With Region 7-AA action wrapped up for Union County soccer, both the Panthers and Lady Panthers are sitting among the top 20 in Class AA's GHSA postseason rankings and in an ideal position to qualify for the 32-team State tournament later this month.

Last week, Union County soccer suffered a sweep at Coahulla Creek, ending any shot at earning a top-16 seed and the right to host a playoff game. However, both Union teams bounced back with victories at Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe, all but guaranteeing their spots in Class AA's field of 32.

With a handful of region games remaining in 7-AA and three non-region contests upcoming for Union County, the final playoff seeding will not be determined until later this month.

Panthers 3, LFO 0 - Kainen Shirley found the net three times during the first half as Union County put away LFO in the first 40 minutes on Thursday, March 27.

The Warriors recorded their lone score in the second half. Union County fired 13 shots on goal to LFO's one.

Brayden Torres, Antonio Solorio and Noah Sommers each added an assist for the Panthers.

Lady Panthers 1, LFO 0 - Senior Kiella Strand drilled



Senior Kiella Strand's second-half PK was the difference in Union County's 1-0 win at LFO. Photo/Todd Forrest

a second-half penalty kick to put Union County over the top in a Thursday night trip to LFO.

The Lady Panthers entered the night one-game back of third-place LFO in the 7-AA standings and escaped with a critical region win. With the tiebreaker over LFO secured, Union County needs North Cobb Christian, who defeated

the Lady Panthers, to lose against Murray County or Sonoraville to prevent a three-way tie for third.

Panthers 3, Coahulla Creek 4 (OT) - The Union County men dropped a heartbreaker at first-place Coahulla Creek on Tuesday, March 25, allowing a 3-1 second-half lead to slip away before giving up an overtime goal.



Junior Kainen Shirley finished the week with four goals and one assist, highlighted by a hat trick during Union County's 3-1 victory at LFO on Thursday night. Photo/Todd Forrest

The Colts struck first but Ander Faulkner found Shirley for the equalizer in the 16th minute.

Tied up at 1-1 in the second half, Solorio scored off a feed from Shirley in the 45th, and then Union County added on in the 56th when Torres hit Solorio for a 3-1 edge.

Moments later, a Coahulla penalty kick trimmed the

margin to 3-2 before the Panthers surrendered the game-tying goal late in the second half.

The Colts connected on the game-winner early in the 20-minute overtime session.

Lady Panthers 0, No. 3 Coahulla Creek 3 - The Colts scored two first half goals en route to a 3-0 win over Union County on Tuesday, March 25.

The loss eliminated Union County from a top-two spot in 7-AA and a home playoff game in round one.

Up next - The Lady Panthers host Murphy, NC on Tuesday, April 1 at 6 p.m. in a girls-only contest. The Union County men are back in action on Thursday, April 3 when both teams face North Hall beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Track-and-Field: Union County collects 11 gold medals at home meet

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Union County hosted its second-annual Mountaintop Invitational on Thursday, March 27, collecting 11 gold medals on the day.

In the girls' sprinting events, junior Ava Lloyd dominated the 100-meter dash, clinching first place with a time of 12.71 seconds. Teammate Ava Klein also earned gold in the 200-meter dash, finishing first at 27.66. Klein continued her winning ways in the 400-meter dash with a time of 1:03.89.

The girls' 4x100-meter relay team also emerged victorious, recording a season-best time of 50.61 seconds. Abby Barrett claimed first place in the triple jump, marking 32 feet, 5.5 inches. Sofia Foster's shot put distance of 34-4 was also enough to take home gold.

On the boys' side, Jacob Turner earned gold in both hurdle events, clocking in with a season-best time of 17.26 in the 110M hurdles and posting a 44.77 in the 300M hurdles. Kyler Juracka was first in the high jump at 5-8; Christian Mullins' 19-9 led the way in the long jump, while his 40-4.25 triple jump was also good enough for a gold medal.

In other girls' action, Lola Hunter secured second place in the 3200-meter run, clocking in at 12:26.34. Gracie Miller placed second in the 100-meter hurdles with a season-best time of 18.60 seconds and third in the 300-meter hurdles at 54.10. She also took home silver in the high jump, clearing 4-10.

The 4x400 and 4x800 relay teams both placed second with season-best times of 4:46.51 and 11:23.67, respectively. Leslie Rash was second in the discus event with a throw of 99-6. Her 31-10 was good enough for a silver in the shot put.



Sophomore Sofia Foster placed first in the shot put and fourth in the discus throw at Union County's home meet. Photo/Todd Forrest

In the long jump, Lloyd earned another podium finish with a distance of 15-3.25 for second place. Barrett took third with a jump of 15-0.25; Ragan McCarter was third in the triple jump at 28-10.

Other top-five girls' finishers included Sara Patterson (3rd - 100M hurdles and 5th - 300M hurdles); Katie Payne (3rd - triple jump); Kensley Payne (4th - 100M hurdles); the 4x200 relay team came in fourth; Miya Totherow (4th - high jump and 5th - 400M); Foster (4th - discus); Nomi Nelson (5th - 200M); Kate Barrett (5th - 800M); Hannah Maier (5th - high jump).

Other boys taking home medals were the 4x200, 4x400 and 4x800 relay teams, all finishing at 1:38.86, 3:47.37 and 9:24.21, respectively. Micah Wallace placed second with a time of 17.96 in the 110M hurdles, and third in the 300M hurdles at 46.53. Daniel McPhee was second in the long

jump (19-7.5) and the triple jump (39-4.5); Jack Wilson earned silver in the discus event with a 149-2; Jaxon Totherow placed second in the shot put at 47-7.

Additional top five boys finishers included Cole Brown (4th - triple jump and 400M); Ethan Hogsed (4th - high jump); Juracka (4th - 300M hurdles); Haze Burnett (4th - 100M); Oliver Hillman (4th - 3200M); Wilson (5th - shot put); Jaxon Totherow (5th - discus); Anthony Heredia (5th - 110M hurdles); Arthur Bowman (5th - 1600M and 3200M). The 4x100 relay team also placed fifth.

Union County faced Dawson County, Fannin County, Gilmer, Hiwassee Dam (NC) and Robbinsville (NC) at last week's home meet.

Union County traveled to Rabun County on Monday, March 31 but no results were available at press time.

Arnick's Awesome Avengers the last class standing in UCPS 2025 Battle Ball tourney



Ms. Arnick's second-grade class came out on top in Union County Primary School's annual Battle Ball tournament. Arnick's Awesome Avengers outlasted Mrs. Georgia's Georgia Bulldogs, Mrs. Carly's Cool Kids, Ms. Gill's Goliath Groupers, Underwood's Undefeatables, Snow's Stingrays, McCarter's Megaladons, Bridges' Baddies, Mrs. Gladding's G.O.A.T.'s and Warren's Wolfpack on their way to the championship trophy.

Local racing results: Tri-County

The lights are back on at Tri-County Racetrack.

After being closed for more than a year, the track is reopening under new management. J&J Promotions, led by Jamie Oliver and Jason Welshan, is taking over.

The first race was held on March 22 and there have been many changes to the track, including updates to parking and concession stands.

More than 100 cars attended the first race, setting a positive tone for the reopening. The next race is scheduled for Saturday, April 12.

Crown Vic: The Crown Vic class featured 15 laps with seven cars participating. The winner was No. 120Z Adam Phillips, followed by No. 97 Joe Rigdon in second place and No. 6 Richard Ames in third.

Front Wheel Drive: The front wheel drive class

had 15 laps and included 17 cars. No. J15 Justin Beal took the win, with No. 199 Jason Crowder finishing second and No. 11 Christopher Kane in third.

Super Late Model: This class consisted of 25 laps with 18 cars in attendance. The feature win went to No. 00 Shawn Chastain, with No. 03 Dante Curtis placing second and No. 21 Devon Morgan taking third.

Street Stock: The street stock class ran 15 laps with 10 cars. The feature winner was No. 81 Dylan Hannah, followed by No. T11 Tim Kilby in second and No. 32 Logan Exum in third.

602 Crate Late Models: This class featured a lengthy 50-lap race with a remarkable 26 cars participating. No. 00 Kenny Collins was the feature winner, with No. 48 Booger Brooks in second and No. 98 Tyler Millwood placing third.

604 Crate Late Models: In this class, 12 cars competed in the 25-lap race. No. 4 Jacob Parris emerged as the winner, followed by No. 2 Mitchell Childress in second and No. 31 Brad Seagle taking third.

Open Wheel Modified: There were 12 cars in attendance for the 20-lap race. No. 41 Johnny Cloer secured the win, with No. 12 Gabe Wilson finishing second and No. 42 Joseph Galloway placing third.

Jason and Jamie want to thank everyone for coming to the track. The next race will be on April 12.

Ticket prices are as follows: Pit tickets are \$35 for ages 16 and up, \$25 for children aged 11-15, and free for those 10 and under. Grandstand tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for children aged 11-15, and free for those 10 and under.



Union County's Christian Mullins placed first in both the triple jump and the long jump during Thursday's home meet. Photo/Todd Forrest



Tri-County Racetrack is gearing up for another season of racing. Photo/Killboy.com