

# Sports

See the Sports Section at [nganews.com](http://nganews.com)

## Sophomores reign supreme at UCHS' annual Ulympics

### Seniors take home top honors in athletic and academics

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
[sports@nganews.com](mailto:sports@nganews.com)

Students, faculty and family sat with bated breath on Friday, May 17 in a packed UCHS gymnasium awaiting the Class of the Year announcement to close out the 18th annual Ulympics competition.

With the seniors coming out on top in both academics and athletics, most believed they were a shoe-in for the Class of the Year trophy. However, as the announcement was made and Class of 2026 stormed the court to accept the Class of the Year award, the outgoing seniors could only look on in disbelief.

The Ulympics are an annual year-long competition, which each class able to score points for school spirit, participation in extra curricular activities, good behavior and other areas.

Last Friday, the Ulympics closed out with the athletic contests, where students from each grade battled it out in a variety of athletic competitions ranging from football throwing, 3-point shooting, penalty kicks, spike ball, sprinting, weightlifting, tug of war and many others.



The Union County sophomores accept their trophy as UCHS' Class of the Year at the conclusion of Friday's athletic competitions at the school gymnasium. The clash of the classes began in 2007 and has been held each year since with the seniors winning the abbreviated Ulympics in 2020. This year marks the second victory in 18 years for a sophomore class.



Sophomore Vince Marevka during the sprints. Photo/Todd Forrest



The seniors cheer on their classmates during Friday's athletic competitions. Photo/Todd Forrest



Juniors Hayden Hughes (L) and Maddox Young (R) celebrate with their Class of 2025 mates after winning the 3-point shootout on Friday morning. Photo/Todd Forrest



UCHS freshmen compete in the girls' tug-of-war event on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

# XC: Payne picks Young Harris College



Natalie Payne (seated - center) with family and coaches during last month's signing day. Photo/Todd Forrest

**By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com**

Union County's cross-country runner Natalie Payne is staying home to spend the next four years as a Young Harris College Mountain Lion.

"Honestly, I didn't know where I wanted to go [to college], but I felt led there, so I ended up choosing [Young Harris]," Payne said.

Payne expressed that Young Harris started receiving genuine consideration after meeting her future teammates.

"Once I got to know some of the girls on the team and realized they were all really cool people, I was all in on Young Harris," she said.

As a senior, Payne placed 39th at the Class AA State meet with a time of 23 minutes, 23 seconds as a member of Union County's fourth-place team finish in Carrollton.

Payne finished 18th (23:12) in 8-AA nine days earlier to help the Lady Panthers qualify for State in a brutal region that featured 14 of the top 26 runners in Class AA, including the team state champion (Athens Academy) and runner-up (Fellowship Christian).

Payne's logged a per-

sonal-best time of 22:56 at West Hall's North Georgia Invitational on Sept. 15. She recorded her best career finish at Meeks Park on Aug. 24, crossing the finish line in fifth. She matched that performance on Sept. 19 when she came in fifth at Stephens County, clocking in at 23:36.

Earlier in the year, Payne placed 12th at Tri-County Early College (NC) on Aug. 30. Payne picked up her third top-10 of 2023 at Gilmer on Sept. 12.

The first top-10 of her career came as a sophomore in 2021, placing ninth at the 8-AA Region Meet. Her first-ever top-15 came a month earlier at Murphy, NC.

During Payne's junior year, she added another 15th-place finish at Gilmer on Sept. 13, 2022. She went on to place 22nd in Region 8-AA before posting her best time of the season at the State meet with a 24:19.

Payne's first high school race came at Meeks Park on Sept. 3, 2020, where she logged a time of 30:37 during a 27th-place finish.

She ended up 16th at the region meet at 26:39 as a freshman, resulting in a season-best time and finish.

"I've had the privilege

of coaching Natalie over the last four years, and it's been an honor - she is amazing," UCHS cross country coach Paige Dyer said. "Every year, she worked hard and had a great attitude. Cross country is hard no matter what, but the way she persevered says a lot about the type of person she is."

Payne was a member of Union County's track and field program, adding a region title in the 3200M race as a sophomore in 2022. She picked up four second-place finishes in 2024 between the 1600M and 3200M events. During her junior campaign, Payne collected seven top fours while competing in the 800M, 1600M and 3200M races.

Head track coach and assistant cross country coach Beau Kelley added, "When she first came out for cross country it was a struggle. But she just kept going, and the determination was there, and she got better and better, year after year."

As of her signing day, Payne remains undecided on her major.

"I want to thank my family, coaches and teammates," she added. "They've all been very supportive."

# Wrestling: Kennedy chooses Montreat



Brooke Kennedy (seated-center) with family and coaches during the April 30 signing day. Photo/Todd Forrest

**By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com**

Union County High School's Brooke Kennedy became the first female wrestler in program history to receive a college scholarship when she accepted an offer from North Carolina's Montreat College last month.

According to Kennedy, Montreat recently underwent a coaching change, but the new staff continued its pursuit of the UCHS senior.

"I had originally talked to one of Montreat's coaches, but he left and a new [coach] came in, and he decided to reach out to me and see if I was interested," she said.

Kennedy chose Montreat over Emmanuel, Bethany (WV), Elmira (NY) and Manchester (IN).

"I considered a lot of other schools, but Montreat felt like where I was supposed to be," she said. "I visited [Montreat] and it was a great campus with great people. It's a growing program and a smaller team is what I'm used to. It felt like home 2.0."

Kennedy suffered an injury that prevented her from competing during the 2024 postseason. However, with the limited number of girls' wrestlers in Georgia, the girls region and state tournaments aren't divided by classifications. As a result, Kennedy, during her junior season, finished fifth in Area at 190 lbs behind wrestlers from larger schools like Chestatee, Gainesville, Stephens County and West Hall.

Kennedy wrapped up her junior year with an 8-6 record.

"Brooke has been with the program for six years, and she is a hard worker," Union County wrestling coach Justin Byers said. "What always stood out to me in practice about Brooke is, even when she was dealing with injuries, she was always at practice helping the younger wrestlers and being a good mentor to them. I know she is going to go on and be successful in college, and with her work ethic, I know she is going to go really far. She's going to be really missed, but I'm looking forward to watching her in college."

During her sophomore season in 2022, Kennedy qualified for State at 197 lbs, where she won her opening bout and finished the year at 9-2. She took home first place at Sectionals with a 54-second pinfall of Lanier County's Raychel Caldwell.

Kennedy finished 3-8 as a freshman, advancing to State where she reached the consolation quarterfinals.

"This was my first year [coaching wrestling], and I could not have done it without Brooke," said UCHS girls' wrestling coach Murphy McConnell. "She not only coached the other girls, but she coached me. She explained a lot to me, and how the sport works, so she was just as much a coach as I was."

Kennedy will major in business with a minor in anatomy. From there, she hopes to enter the field of medical malpractice law.

"I want to thank coach [Michael] Smith-Foot for getting my parents to let me wrestle," she said. "I want to thank my parents, obviously, and everybody who supported me along the way."

# The Old Union Women's Golf Association League's Opening Day excitement

The Old Union Women's Golf Association league had a busy and exciting Opening Day! Twenty eight of the 43 members attended! The league started out with country breakfast sausage, Mimosas, and Jello-shots. The Mimosas and breakfast sausage was provided by the league, and the other goodies were provided by two of the members. The format was 3 Blind Mice. The Pro Shop drew 3 holes to drop from the players net score while the ladies were completing their rounds. Two places were paid out in 5 flights. Congratulations to the winners; Flight A: Kalyn Kight, Connie Leips, Flight B: Glenda Geddings, Martha Zimmer; Flight C: Jane Childers, Sheila Baggett; Flight D: Becky London, Connie Dockery, Flight E: Debbie Estes, Sandy Snyder. Also, the league paid out for birdies and chip-ins.

Congrats to Kalyn Kight with 4 birdies, Vi Copenhaver with 2, Glenda Geddings and Donna Tipton with 1!

The chip-in winners were Vi Copenhaver, Connie Leips, Vicky Healy. The Closest to the Pin winner was Martha Zimmer! Thank you, Old Union, for sponsoring a "Closest To The Pin" each week and for a whopping value of either a free round of golf or a \$25 gift card at the Pro Shop.

Next week's payouts will be even better, thanks again, to the Old Union Golf Course support! Two formats will be used. Coach Matt Cook will be playing the first "Beat The Pro" of the season. He will participate once a month. Any members whose NET scores beat Coach Cook's gross score will win a free sleeve of golf balls. Each month, two ladies

are selected to play in Coach Cook's group. This week will be Vicky Healy and Vikki Fortner.

The second format will be "Birdie Bash." Players with the most net birdies within their flight will split the prize money.

As always Old Union Golf Course will sponsor the Closest to the Pin which is just another opportunity to be a winner. Pizza will be delivered to the golf course and members volunteer to bring a salad or homemade cookies!

Welcome to the new members to our 2024 Season! Susan Furman, Lana Gebhardt, Gail Havron, Kalyn Kight, Connie Leips and Linda Miles.

Anyone interested in joining this great group of ladies is asked to contact Karen Musoline at 352-638-3649 or Cynthia Panter at 706-633-7587.

# Union Co. Recreation Dept. Meeks Park Pool 2024 Info

## Pool Parties

The Union County Recreation Department will begin taking reservations for pool parties on Monday, May 13 at 8am for UC Residents only. We require you to be here in person May 13 to reserve a pool party, as many people are wanting the same days. After May 13, you may call to reserve the pool for a party for the dates we have left. Booking for non-residents will be June 3. The fee for pool parties is \$160. This includes use of the splash pad, pool, and 2 lifeguards for up to 40 people in the water. You must pay a non-refundable fee of \$25 the day you book your party.

Parties are Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM beginning, 6/1 and ending 8/6 then only weekends 8/10, 8/11, 8/17, 8/18, 8/24, 8/25.

## Swimming Lessons

Swimming lessons will be offered at Meeks Park Pool. Group lessons will be provided for ages 3-12. Sessions last 1 hour, 4 days a week, 8 AM-9 AM. Fee \$65 per child. You MUST register in person at the Union County Sports Center. SPACE IS LIMITED!

## Dates of Lessons:

June 3rd - 6th (ages 3-5) Parent/Guardian required to be in the pool with child. June 10th-13th (ages 3-5) Parent/Guardian

required to be in the pool with child. June 17th- 20th (ages 3-5) Parent/Guardian required to be in the pool with child. June 24th - 27th (ages 6-9). July 8th-11th (ages 10-12).

## Pool Passes

Family Passes and individual passes will be available for purchase at the UCRD beginning May 13th. Prices are as follows: Resident of UC Single

Membership \$70. Resident of UC Family Membership up to 5 people in the household \$130. Non-Resident of UC Single Membership \$80. Non-Resident of UC Family Membership up to 5 people in the household \$155. For each additional person added on to membership after 5 is \$25. Gate fee is \$5 per person. Children 5 and under are free. 706-439-6074.

## Summer Camp 2024 at The Union County Recreation Department

June 3th - 7th **Pickleball**, 5:30 PM - 7 PM  
Ages 8-17, \$40

June 10th - 14th **Outdoor Adventure Camp**, 10 AM - 3 PM, Ages 8-13, \$80

June 17th - 19th **Volleyball Camp**, 9 AM - 12 PM, Grades 3rd-5th, \$75

June 24th - 28th **Cheerleading Camp**  
K-3rd grade, 5:00 PM - 6:15 PM  
4th-6th grade, 6:30PM-8:00PM, \$50.  
**\*Must be registered for 2024-25 UCRD Cheer to participate.\***

June 24th - 27th **Tennis Camp**, 10:30 AM - 12 PM  
K-4th grade, \$40

June 24th - 27th **Soccer Skills Camp**, 9 AM - 11 AM  
Age 8 and up, \$40

July 8th - 11th **Tennis Camp**, 10:30 AM - 12 PM  
5th-8th grade, \$40.

July 13th and 27th **Softball Camp**, 11 AM - 1 PM  
Ages 7-10, \$30

July 15th -19th **Baseball Camp** 8 AM - 1 PM, Ages 8-14,  
Lunch will be provided, \$50.

Skill levels will range from beginner to advanced. Grade based is grade you are going into for 24-25 school year. SPACE IS LIMITED and you must register in person at the Union County Recreation Department located at 519 Industrial Blvd. More info will be given at registration. Please call 706-439-6074 with any questions. Our office is open M-F 8 AM-4:30 PM, closed for lunch 12 PM - 1 PM.

# Band: Woolwine selects Reinhardt



Drum major Willard Woolwine (seated - center) with family and band director Will Stafford. Photo/Todd Forrest

**By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
sports@nganews.com**

Union County High School band drum major Willard Woolwine signed a music scholarship with Waleska's Reinhardt University during the May 1 signing day ceremony at UCHS.

"[Reinhardt has] an amazing band program and a great staff," Woolwine said when asked about his college choice. "I met with some of the band members, they just seemed like a family and that's something I look forward to." Woolwine chose Reinhardt over Western Carolina and Kennesaw.

"I considered a lot of public universities, but the smaller private school has more of an appeal to me," he

said. "That was the biggest factor. Living in a small town all your life, you get used to it."

Union County band director Will Stafford summed up Woolwine's four years at UCHS in one word.

"When I think of Willard, the first word that comes to mind is 'leadership,'" he said. "He epitomizes leadership by setting an example for his peers every day. He's always prepared, he's always on time and he leads by example. He's the person who's always encouraging those around him and building others up. He's earned this scholarship and he deserves every bit of it. I look forward to seeing what he accomplishes over the next four years."

UCHS athletic director Mandy Hunter added, "I never had Willard in class, but I know

when I see him at ball games leading the band, he is putting his whole self into the band," she said. "We appreciate all of the hard work his family put in and everything they did with the concession stands. It did not go unnoticed."

Woolwine's music degree will include a secondary in psychology. After college, he plans to attend graduate school and become a licensed therapist.

"My grandma has been a major part of my life and my success," Woolwine said. "She's been there to support me throughout my entire high school career in the band or whatever else I decided to do."

"Mr. Stafford saw a lot in me, and I always felt loved in the band. So my grandma and Mr. Stafford were two of the big [influences]."



Woolwine with fellow UCHS bandmates during his May. 1 signing. Photo/Todd Forrest