

Football: Three Panthers make their decision on National Signing Day

Allison and Mancuso team up at Berry, Morlock sticks with Shorter

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Three seniors vital to Union County football's first state playoff win and 10-win season have signed on to play at the next level.

After Pierson Allison, John Mancuso and Kyle Morlock finalized their decisions on National Signing Day (Feb. 5), Union County High School hosted a ceremony for the trio later in the week, inviting family, friends, coaches and teammates to share the honor with three of the best to ever do it at UCHS.

During the signing day festivities, the *North Georgia News* was able to chat with all three.

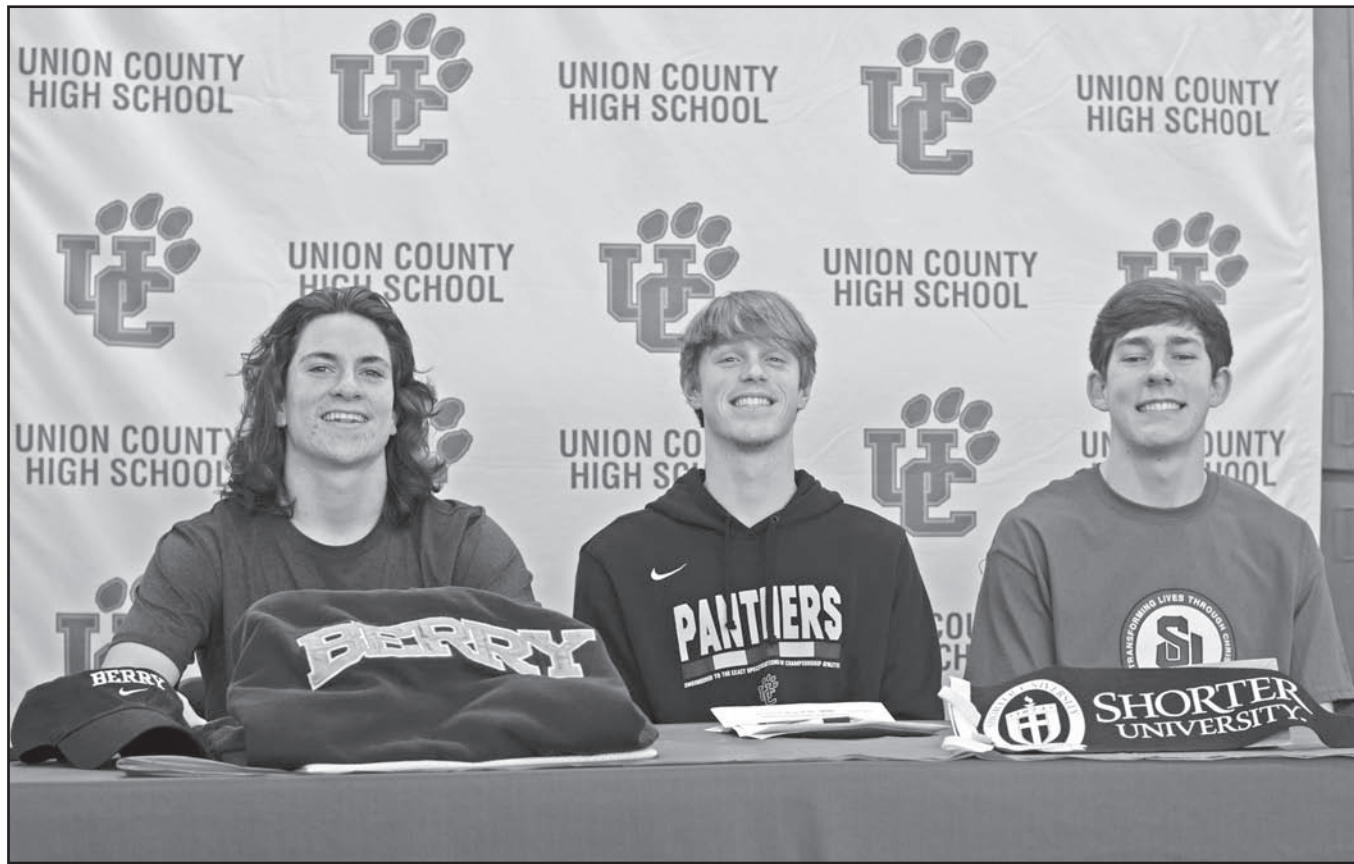
Allison, a two-year starter at quarterback, also started in the Union County secondary as a sophomore in 2017. As a result, Berry College has offered Allison the chance to join its football program as an "athlete," where he will have the opportunity to compete for a spot on both sides of the ball.

While at Union County, the son of Panthers head coach and Furman standout Brian Allison, Pierson was named the Region Offensive MVP in 2019 after leading Union to its first 10-win season in school history, following its 19-14 playoff victory over South Atlanta.

He ended his senior campaign with 3,103 yards and 28 touchdowns through the air. Overall, he accounted 3,531 yards (an average of 306 per game) while tacking on six rushing scores.

While playing mostly in dime and prevent packages on defense, Allison made 25 tackles, picked off one pass, added one pass break-up, forced a fumble and recovered a fumble.

His 490 passing yards vs Monticello was a school record and his 534 total yards in the same game was second most (Cole Wright) in program history. A week later, he piled up a school-record 8 touchdowns



L-R: Seniors John Mancuso, Pierson Allison and Kyle Morlock during last month's signing announcement at UCHS. Photo/Todd Forrest

(6 passing TDs - also a record) in a 74-57 victory at Putnam County.

For his career, Allison tallied more than 6,200 passing yards and 1,200-plus on the ground. He connected on 56 touchdowns through the air to only 12 interceptions, giving him 72 total touchdowns and nearly 7,500 total yards.

As a sophomore safety, Allison recorded 60 tackles, two tackles for a loss and one pick - giving him 90 tackles, 3 TFL and two interceptions for his career.

NGN: What was it about Berry that made you want to spend the next few years there?

PA: In my opinion, I feel like it's a special place. It's a really nice campus with some really nice people and I feel like I will fit in well there.

NGN: How much did staying close to home and having John (Mancuso) as a future teammate play in your decision?

PA: Yes, that was a big part of it. Having someone you know going there and having

someone to room with made me even more comfortable with the decision. Plus, it's less than two hours from home and I've been talking with Berry for a while and they've always been one of my first choices.

NGN: Is there anyone special you would like to thank?

PA: I want to thank my family, my friends and my teammates for always supporting me and my coaches for getting me to where I am.

While Allison made a few appearances here and there on the defensive side of the ball, his future Berry teammate John Mancuso made it a full-time job over the past two seasons, leading the team with 122 tackles in 2019.

Since his junior season, Mancuso has recorded 210 tackles, 12 TFL, two sacks, one pick, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery.

As a senior, the All-Region selection tallied 40 tackles in Union's three region games vs the eventual playoff teams - including a career-high 16 at Putnam County and 13 vs

Region 8-AA champion Rabun County.

When getting snaps at the wide receiver position, Mancuso made the most of it, including a six-catch, two-score game at Banks County, helping the shorthanded Panthers edge out a 14-7 win.

NGN: What stood out to you the most about Berry and had the biggest influence on your signing?

JM: The campus is super nice and I just really liked the vibe that I was getting from the coaches, the staff and everybody. The facilities they have are top-notch so that was a big deal too.

NGN: When did you first appear on Berry's radar? Do you remember what that was like?

JM: I went to a camp there over the summer and the (defensive backs coach) introduced himself and we started talking a little bit. Then he stayed in touch with me throughout the season and during the recruiting process.

NGN: What was it that put you over the top and made

you commit?

JM: I really liked Berry from the beginning, even if they didn't offer me because I wanted to go there for academics. So getting a chance to play football there makes it even more special.

NGN: Is there anyone you want to thank or give a special shout out to?

JM: I want to thank my family, especially (older brother) Joe for making me tougher. He used to always say that he's going to make me tougher. But I just mainly want to thank my family, teammates and everyone who has helped me along the way.

Last but not least is wide receiver Kyle Morlock, who was playing like Randy Moss before a midseason ankle injury cost him the better part of five games.

Before going down on the first play of the game vs Elbert County, Morlock was averaging 106 yards per game with six touchdowns and 21 catches in five games.

He would play one snap vs Rabun County before return-

ing in the first round of State, where he caught two passes. The following week, Morlock caught four passes in a season-ending loss at Metter.

Despite missing almost half the season, Morlock finished with 591 yards on 28 grabs and six scores - good enough to earn him an All-Region nod.

In his final game at 100% percent, Morlock put on a show, hauling in seven passes for 172 yards and two scores at Putnam County.

The 6-foot-5 inch athletic phenom will take his talents to Shorter, where he could add some weight and move to tight end. Either way, Morlock will remain a matchup nightmare, whether he's out wide or in a 3-point stance.

NGN: What was it that attracted you to Shorter at first and what ultimately led to your signing?

KM: The main thing was I just wanted to stay close to home. I had some other offers, a few (Division 1) offers, but I wanted to be close to home so I could be with my family.

NGN: When did Shorter first become an option for you?

KM: Shorter was actually the first school to take notice of me, sometime during my junior year. They were the first school to contact me so that was very special.

NGN: How important was it that Shorter remained supportive during your injury?

KM: That was huge because a couple of schools actually stopped talking to me after that. But (Shorter) was completely okay with it, they talked to me throughout my recovery and helped me through the process.

NGN: Is there anyone you would like to thank or anything you'd like to add?

KM: First, I have to thank God for everything he's given me. I want to thank my parents and my sister, she has done so much for me, both here and my parents. I can't thank them enough.

UC football's academic success recognized at annual banquet

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During the year-end banquet for Union County football, the Panthers were not only honored for their accolades underneath the bright lights of Friday night, but their dedication to the classroom and academics.

The entire Union County football team maintained a B-average, while 68% (34 of 50) held down an A-average.

And that's something that often goes overlooked, according to head coach Brian Allison.

"Of all the accomplishments this season, the fact that our team held a B-average makes me as proud as any," he said.

"Not many people realize how hard these guys work in the classroom, on the practice field, and the weight room. We're proud of our results on Friday nights, but

a lot more goes on behind the scenes."

Here is a list of the individual awards handed out at the banquet. **Captain Awards:** John Mancuso/Pierson Allison; **Defensive MVP:** Mancuso; **Defensive Line:** Nathaniel Ledford; **Outside LB:** Noah Underwood; **Inside LB:** Sloan Sutton; **Defensive Back:** Kaston Hemphill; **Special Teams:** Mason McCombs; **Offensive MVP:** Pierson Allison; **Offensive Back:** Jonah Daniel; **Offensive Line:** Aaron Helton; **Wide Receiver:** Sawyer Drake / Kyle Morlock; **Iron Panther:** Drake Groves; **Leatherman:** Cayden Rich; **Academic:** Clayton Lester.

The 2020 season gets underway Aug. 7 with a scrimmage at Towns County. After a Thursday scrimmage at White County on Aug. 13, the regular season opens at home on Aug. 21 vs Fannin County.

Youth Basketball: 12U boys returning to State Tournament



The Union County 12U boys basketball team will participate in this weekend's State Tournament in Claxton following a dominating performance during last month's District Tournament in Lexington. After receiving a first-round bye, the Panthers opened with a 57-31 win over Towns County. They followed that up with a 65-46 title game victory over Lumpkin County. The Panthers are coached by Ricky Tanner, Ivan Walker and Dustin Rogers. The team members are: Gunner Akins, Kayden Combs, Cade Dockrey, Zeke Ellis, Brodi Elrod, Samuel Ensley, Braden Hogsed, Ethan Hogsed, Cole Lager and Jaxon Thoterow. (Editors Note: More Union Co. youth basketball info will be published in next week's North Georgia News)

Soccer: Mixed results vs Fannin headline snow-shortened week

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The young Union County Lady Panthers squad received a boost of confidence after battling Fannin County to a 2-2 draw.

Desaray Patterson accounted for both Union County goals to put her team ahead at 1-0 and 2-1. However, Fannin was able to answer each goal to finish all even at 2-2.

Patterson's first goal came in the 37th minute but Fannin was able to notch the equalizer before intermission.

In the 53rd minute, Patterson drew a foul in the box and converted the penalty kick. But once again, Fannin County responded to force the draw.

Despite not getting the win, Union County avoided its first 0-2 start during coach Tim Hunter's 21 years at the helm.

In the nightcap, the second-ranked Panthers suffered their first

loss of the season, a 2-1 defeat to the Rebels.

Suffering from a letdown and battling a few bumps and bruises following the Riverside win, Union County struggled throughout the first half.

They finally got on the board in the second when Zach Jackson scored an unassisted goal in the 52nd minute.

The Panthers were forced to dwell on the loss a little longer when the weekend matches were both canceled due to snow.

Friday's region showdown at top-ranked Putnam County will be rescheduled. Saturday's non-region contest with Darlington was also canceled but there is no word yet on a makeup date.

Last week's region opener vs Banks County has been rescheduled for Monday, March 9.

Up next - Union County will host Rabun County on March 3 at 5 and 7 p.m. On Friday, Union visits Monticello at 5:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Lady Panthers... continued from 2C

49-41.

Union County struggled at the charity stripe and from beyond the arc, making just 11-of-22 (50%) at the line and 3-of-15 from downtown. Despite averaging just over two 3-point makes per game and shooting at a 23% clip from deep coming in, Early County made 5-of-10 from long distance, including 3-of-4 in the fourth.

The Lady Panthers were able to keep it close by winning the turnover battle 18-15 and out-rebounding the Bobcats 41-29 overall and 17-8 on the offensive

glass.

In addition, Early County wasn't much better at the charity stripe, hitting 55% on 11-for-20.

Hill finishes her career with a 15-point, 10-rebound double-double. She scored all 15 in the second half after her team trailed by 13 early in the third quarter. Hill was Union's most effective free throw shooter, hitting 4-for-5. The rest of the team was just 7-for-17.

Dockrey went out with 14 points, five boards, two assists and a steal. McCarter ended up with 4

points and six boards before fouling in the final minute. The three-year starter and Brenau commit held Timpson in check for most of the night, holding the nation's 11th ranked power forward to five points below her season average and just 6-of-14 (43%) from the floor -- her worst shooting performance since Jan. 14.

"(Kait) played really well in the previous round against Butler and I felt confident that she could keep (Timpson) in check," Beach said. "Yes, (Timpson) got 18 points but that's not a lot for

her, and that's because Kait did what she was supposed to do defensively."

Freshman Ellie Cook finished with 3 points on a first-quarter trey that gave Union County a 5-2 advantage. Locklear added 3 points, four rebounds and a steal. Sophomore Riley Allison chipped in three rebounds and a pair of steals.

Early County met Douglass in Saturday's semifinal, eventually falling in a rematch of last year's Class AA State Championship Game.



Lady Panther seniors (L-R): Mattison Ruff, Desaray Patterson, Sadie Underwood, Jennifer Jimenez and Shelby Polling. Photo/Todd Forrest