

Sports

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Soccer: Union sweeps Banks; will honor 2004 Lady Panthers on Friday

By Todd Forrest
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HOMER - Union County soccer opened its Region 8-AA schedule last Tuesday, Feb. 26 with a pair of one-sided victories at Banks County before rain washed away Friday's region showdown with Putnam County.

Both Banks County squads entered last week's contest with a record of 1-4 and Union had little trouble putting away the overmatched Leopards and Lady Leopards. The Lady Panthers (2-1, 1-0) opened with a convincing 6-1 victory while the Panthers (2-1, 1-0) followed that up with a 5-0 shutout in the nightcap.

Madison Yost scored a pair of goals with one assist; Mattison Ruff finished with a pair of goals and Anzly Sherman added two assists along with the first goal of the contest -- off a feed from Desaray Patterson in the game's third minute.

That would be Union County's only goal of the first half but they would explode after the intermission.

Yost picked up her first goal in the 43rd minute, set up by assists from Sherman and Isabella Nottage. Sixty-three seconds later, Ruff scored the Lady Panthers' third goal off an assist from Yost.

Nottage scored an unassisted goal in the 52nd minute and Ruff recorded her second goal in the 76th minute thanks to a Sherman assist. Yost concluded



Panther freshman Kyler Robbins sits up following a collision with the opposing goalkeeper during a match earlier this season. Robbins had two goals and two assists at Banks County last week. Photo/Todd Forrest

the Lady Panther scoring off a feed from Maddie Sutton in the 78th minute.

The Panthers, meanwhile, jumped out to a 3-0 lead just 12 minutes in, which proved to be more than enough for goalkeeper Aaron Helton as Union cruised to a 5-0 victory.

Freshman Kyler Robbins opened the scoring off an assist from David Van Pelt in the eighth minute. Kyler Robbins would strike again in the 10th minute, this time off an assist from Kobi Robbins.

Moments later, Kyler Robbins would notch an assist when Brian Smith struck in the 12th minute, wrapping up the first half scoring.

Kobi Robbins scored on a free kick in the 65th minute for a 4-0 Panther lead. In the 76th minute, Kyler Robbins fed Smith one more time for the final points of the evening.

Kyler Robbins finished with two goals and two assists while Smith also added a pair of goals. Kobi Robbins added a goal and an assist. Van Pelt chipped in one assist.

Union County was scheduled to host the defending State Runner-up and second-ranked Putnam County War Eagles on Friday but excessive rain forced that contest to be rescheduled for March 14.

The Pickens match previously scheduled for March 15

has been pushed back to April 10.

The Putnam County match was a big one for the Lady Panthers, as well. The Lady War Eagles are coming off a playoff berth in 2018 and that contest would have provided Union County its first measuring stick game in 8-AA.

This Tuesday, Union will travel to Rabun County for a 5 p.m. start.

Prior to the Friday, March 8 game vs Monticello, Union County soccer will recognize the 2004 Lady Panther soccer team on the 15th anniversary of its undefeated Region Championship season. Friday's games will get underway at 5:30 p.m.



Three Union County Lady Panther defenders (L-R: No. 11 Mattison Ruff, No. 6 Sheyenne Dyer and No. 8 Anzly Sherman) surround an opposing player during a recent home match. Photo/Todd Forrest

UC Soccer schedule*

Feb 5	Lumpkin Home	JVB 4:00 VG 5:30 VB 7:30
Feb 8	North Murray Home	VG 5:30 VB 7:30
Feb 9	Darlington Home	VG 2:00 VB 4:00
Feb 11	Towns Home (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
Feb 12	Fannin Home	VG 5:00 VB 7:00
Feb 14	@Lumpkin (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
Feb 20	@White	JVB 4:00 VG 5:30 VB 7:30
Feb 21	@Fannin (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
Feb 22	Riverside Military Home	JVB 5:00 VB 7:30
Feb 23	@Rabun Gap	JVG 4:00 VB 2:00
Feb 26	@Banks REGION	VG 5:00 VB 7:00
Feb 28	Dawson Home (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
March 1	Putnam Home REGION	VG 5:30 VB 7:30
March 4	@Towns (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
March 5	@Rabun REGION	VG 5:00 VB 7:00
March 6	@East Hall	VG 5:00 VB 7:30
March 7	@Clear Creek (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
March 8	Monticello Home REGION	VG 5:30 VB 7:30
March 12	@Hayesville	VG 5:00
March 12	Dawson Home	JVB 5:00 VB 6:30
March 14	White Home (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
March 15	Pickens Home	VG 5:30 VB 7:30
March 18	@Pickens (Middle School)	8G 4:15 8B 5:15
March 19	Elbert Home REGION	VG 5:00 VB 7:00
March 22	@Oglethorpe REGION	VG 5:30 VB 7:30
March 26	Towns Home	VG 5:00 VB 7:00
March 28	@Social Circle REGION	VG 5:00 VB 7:00
April 9	@Gilmer	JVB 4:00 VG 5:30 VB 7:30
April 18	Tri-County Early College	VG 5:00

* recent changes not included

Panthers suffer walk-off losses at Fannin, Banks; still searching for first victory

By Todd Forrest
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Union County fell to 0-6 on the young season following its first full week of action.

After suffering a walk-off defeat at Fannin and struggling in a loss to Gilmer early in the week, Union got its first taste of region play, dropping both games of a twin bill at Banks County on Friday.

Panthers 1, Banks County 2 (10 innings) - The Leopards waited until Zeke Swartz's day was done before making their move.

The Union County sophomore left-hander got the nod and fired a 5-hit shutout over seven innings, which is usually enough to pick up the complete game. Unfortunately, the Panther bats were also silenced by the duo of Ty Davis and Ty Burchett, who combined to strike out 16 batters over 10 innings.

Davis got the nod and allowed one hit and four walks while fanning seven over four innings. Burchett took over in the fifth and yielded four hits, one earned and two walks in six innings of work.

Union's lone hit off Davis came in the top of the first when Alec Scott followed up a leadoff walk to Issac Mullinak with a single. Davis would get out of trouble, however, with a pair of fly outs and a strikeout.

As for his counterpart, Swartz, he was more than up to the challenge. After pitching around a pair of singles in the first, Swartz worked a 10-pitch second and an eight-pitch third before giving up a one-out single in the fourth. Following another quick, eight-pitch inning in the fifth, the Leopards best chance at breaking the scoreless tie came in the sixth. Two errors and a single loaded the bases with nobody out but the young southpaw -- making just the third varsity start of his career -- struck out the side on 13 pitches, keeping goose eggs on the scoreboard heading into the seventh inning.

Banks would threaten again in the seventh when a one-out single turned into trouble thanks to a two-base error that moved the runner to third. Swartz, however, would record a punch out then induce a fly out to right.

As for Union County, its best scoring opportunity through the first seven innings came in the fifth when they also loaded the bases with no outs. Alec Youngblood and Peyton Ivester opened with consecutive walks, forcing Banks County to pull the plug on Davis. Burchett took the hill and proceeded to plunk Mullinak on a 3-2 count to load the bags.

An infield fly was responsible for the first out, followed by a strikeout and a force out at the plate to end the inning. Hunter Kelley reached on a two-out walk in the eighth but that was all the offense Union could muster as Coleson Daniel replaced Swartz in the bottom half of the inning.

A leadoff double and a sacrifice bunt put the winning run 90-



Zeke Swartz got the start at Fannin and at Banks. Photo/Todd Forrest

feet away but Daniel kept him from crossing the plate with a ground out and a pop up to send the game into the ninth inning.

Both squads went down in-order in the ninth before some offense was finally generated in the 10th. The Panthers' first extra-base hit of the season came at an opportune moment as Scott's two-bagger got the 10th off on the right foot. With one down, John Mancuso moved Scott to third with a groundout, bringing Swartz to the dish where he was intentionally walked.

With runners at the corners, Kelley made them pay with a RBI single to center, sending the game to the bottom half of the 10th with Union clinging to a 1-0 lead.

Daniel hit the leadoff batter but a 4-6-3 double play moved the Panthers just one out away from its first win of the season. Unfortunately, a single and a double tied the game at 1-1, then a two-base error allowed the runner to score from second and end the game with a 2-1 Leopard victory.

Scott finished 2-for-5 with a run while Kelley, Mullinak and Swartz had one hit apiece. Daniel allowed 3 hits and 2 runs (one earned) over 2 2/3 innings after replacing Swartz in the eighth.

Panthers 8, Banks County 9 - Union County rallied from a 9-1 deficit after four innings but eventually ran out of time before they could catch Banks County in the second game of the Region 8-AA doubleheader. The Leopards' momentum from the walk-off win in game one carried over as they put up five runs in the first inning of game two. They would tack on one more in the third before chasing Mullinak with three runs in the fourth.

Senior Ean Harkins made the final out of the fourth then worked two scoreless innings, allowing just one hit and fanning two.

Union County put one run on the board when Harkins scored Austin Garrison with a sacrifice fly in the second inning. But trailing by eight to start the fifth, the Panthers began chipping away.

Mullinak was hit by a pitch to lead off the inning and Scott plated him with a double to center. With one down, an error off the bat

of Garrison allowed Scott to score. Later, a John Mancuso RBI single brought home Garrison to make it a 9-4 game.

Harkins pitched out a jam in the fifth when back-to-back two-out errors put runners on second and third. The sixth inning got underway with a Youngblood base hit, entering JJ Littles as his courtesy runner. With one down, Mullinak drew a walk, then Scott scored Littles with a sacrifice fly. Swartz put runners on first and second with a walk before Garrison brought home Mullinak when he reached on an error. Kelley made it a 9-7 game with an opposite field, RBI single. The final run of the inning came on a wild pitch that scored Garrison -- bringing the Panthers within a run.

Harkins kept Banks off the board in the bottom of the sixth but Union County went down quietly in the seventh with a pair of strikeouts and a grounder to short.

Mancuso was 2-for-3 with a walk and an RBI; Scott finished 1-for-3 with a double, a run and 2 RBIs; Mullinak went 1-for-3 with 2 runs and Austin Garrison scored three times, stole a base and drove in a run.

Kelley turned in a 1-for-3, one RBI, one steal performance and Youngblood also finished 1-for-3 at the dish. Meanwhile, Harkins drove in a run and Littles scored a run.

Mullinak struck out four over 3 2/3 innings, allowing 9 runs (6 earned) on 9 hits and a walk.

Harkins went the final 2 1/3, yielding just one hit while fanning two.

Union County pitching overcame five fielding errors.

Panthers 4, Fannin County 5 - Union County suffered a heartbreaking defeat at rival Fannin County on Tuesday, Feb. 26 despite taking a 4-2 lead into the fifth inning.

The Rebels struck for two runs in the bottom of the fifth to even the score at 4-4 before a bases-loaded single won it with two down in the seventh.

Mullinak finished 1-for-3 with two runs, a walk and a stolen base. He also pitched the final 3 2/3 innings for the Panthers, striking out four while giving up three earned runs on seven hits.



Panther coach Zach Odom addresses the team prior to Tuesday's home opener vs Gilmer. Photo/Todd Forrest

Swartz went 1-for-2, driving in two runs and getting the start on the mound. The sophomore left-hander went three innings, allowing two hits and two earned runs with five strikeouts.

Senior Jonathan Everett also drove in two runs during a 1-for-3 day at the plate.

Union County got on the board with a run in the top half of the first when Mullinak led off the game with a walk and later scored on a Swartz sacrifice fly.

The Rebels answered with a two-out, two-run homer in the bottom of the first after a one-out single. Swartz would settle down and hold Fannin hitless over the next two innings. He would depart after three innings with the Panthers holding a 4-2 lead.

Swartz would tie the game in the third with a two-out base hit after Mullinak and Scott opened the inning with back-to-back singles. Ivester entered as a courtsey runner in place of Swartz and scored on a two-run single by Everett -- spotting Union a 4-2 advantage.

Mullinak tossed a perfect fourth but the Rebels answered by striking out the side in the Union County half of the fifth. Mullinak ran into trouble in the bottom half of the inning when a leadoff single and a one-out double, followed by an RBI single, tied the game at 4-4. Fannin County would strand runners on second and third after Mullinak ended the inning with a grounder to first.

Youngblood was stranded after drawing a two-out walk in the sixth. Meanwhile, the Rebels wasted a one-out single after Mullinak picked off the runner at first base.

Daniel led off the seventh with a pinch-hit walk and Kelley entered as a pinch runner and immediately stole third. Mullinak moved him to third with a grounder to the right side but a strikeout and a groundout ended the inning with the go-ahead run 90-feet away.

Mullinak battled back from a 3-1 count to strike out the leadoff hitter in the seventh but a base hit and hit batter followed -- putting the winning run in scoring position. Another strikeout followed but a double steal moved the runners up for Hunter Gray -- who homered

in the first. Coach Odom elected to walk the Rebel slugger, bringing Blake Rogers to the plate to deliver the game-winning hit to center on a 1-0 count.

The decision to walk Grey was the smart move as Rogers was 0-for-3 until his clutch hit. Meanwhile, Grey was 2-for-3 with a two-run homer.

Panthers 3, Gilmer 7 - After getting shutout through six innings on Wednesday, Feb. 27, Union County did its best to make things interesting in the bottom of the seventh, bringing the tying run into the on-deck circle. But in the end it proved too little, too late for the Panthers, who dropped their second game in as many days.

The Bobcats put up three in the first as the first four runners reached base off Harkins. After a one-out error, Harkins would settle down and retire six-straight before giving way to Cayden Rich.

Harkins was pulled following a 49-pitch outing and Rich entered with one down in the top half of the third. The junior would induce a pop-up and a tapper back to the mound to end the inning with Union County still trailing 3-0.

After stranding one in the second, the bottom of the third saw the Panthers' put two aboard when Ivester and Scott each drew a walk. Ivester was forced out at second on a Mason McCombs fielder's choice. Later, Union took advantage of a passed ball, moving two into scoring position but both were left on base when a ground out ended the threat.

Garrison spelled Rich in the fourth and fanned the leadoff man before surrendering back-to-back singles followed by a walk. With the bags packed, Gilmer used a sacrifice fly to make it a 4-0 game before Garrison halted the damage with his second strikeout of the frame.

The Bobcats starter, Jonas Griggs, held Union hitless into the fourth until Rich broke up his no-hit bid by lacing the 1-0 offering back up the middle. That would be the only hit allowed by Griggs, who worked six shutout innings.

Meanwhile, the Gilmer bats would tack on another run in the fifth with a walk, a stolen base and a base hit.

Kelley worked his way

aboard with a leadoff walk in the Union half of the fifth. After stealing second, Ivester moved him to third with a grounder to the right side of the infield but a strikeout and a fly out left him on.

Garrison ran into some trouble in the sixth after recording two quick outs to open the inning. Two singles and a run-scoring error later, Daniel went to the hill and got the Panthers out of trouble with an inning-ending ground out.

Griggs struck out his sixth and seventh batters of the day as Union County went down 1-2-3 in the sixth.

Gilmer tacked on its final run of the day when a dropped third strike and an error allowed the Bobcats to add an unearned run off of Daniel in the seventh.

Hunter Bowers replaced Griggs as the Panthers came to the plate in the final frame.

Rich opened the bottom of the seventh by reaching second on an outfield error. Consecutive fly outs allowed Rich to move up to third, then Ivester put runners at the corners with a two-out walk. McCombs brought home the first Panther run when the Gilmer first baseman couldn't handle a low throw from short.

A balk brought home Ivester, then McCombs came around to score on a base hit by Scott. John Mancuso followed with an infield single but the Union rally would finally come to a close on a fly out to center.

Scott finished 1-for-3 with a walk, a steal and his team's only RBI. Ivester walked twice and scored once, Rich went 1-for-2 with a run and McCombs was 0-for-3 with a run. Kelly and Jonathan Everett each walked and stole a base.

Harkins struck out three in 2 1/3 innings, allowing three earned, three hits and a walk. Rich was perfect in 2/3 of an inning; Garrison lasted 2 2/3 innings, striking out a team-high four Bobcats but surrendering five hits, three runs (two were earned) and two walks. Daniel fanned three and didn't give up a hit in 1 1/3 innings while allowing one unearned run.

Union hosts Fannin on Monday, West Hall on Tuesday then visits Social Circle on Friday.

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