

Sports

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Providence Christian sweeps doubleheader at Union County

Panthers need two wins vs. East Jackson to keep playoff hopes alive

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Following a pair of Saturday losses to Providence Christian, Union County is against the wall entering the final two weeks of the regular season, sitting two games back of fourth-place East Jackson (10-11, 4-5) with six games remaining in the hunt for the final playoff spot from 8-AA.

The Panthers (5-11, 2-7) and East Jackson square off this week in a make-or-break three-game tilt that would see Union County eliminated from postseason contention with a series loss. Union needs a sweep to overtake the Eagles while winning two of three keeps the Panthers' playoff hopes alive for another week ahead of the year's final series vs. first-place Banks County.

Panthers 1, Providence 3 (Gm. 2) - Union County hosted the Storm in a makeup doubleheader rescheduled from March 22. The Panthers lost the series opener 10-0 on March 19 in Lilburn, but rain washed out the weekend games at UCHS.

During the first of two games on Saturday, the Panthers stranded 10 runners in a 3-1 loss, including a pair of bases-loaded opportunities in the third and fourth innings to waste a stellar pitching performance from sophomore Gunnar Akins.

Akins went the distance, striking out five and not surrendering a walk while giving up three earned runs. He finished 2 for 4 at the plate -- his third multi-hit game of the year.

Providence grabbed a 1-0 lead via two first-inning singles before an RBI double made it 2-0 in the third.

Union County, which went six-up, six-down through two, answered by loading the bases in the bottom of the third when Eli Sosensky walked, Maddox Patton singled and Connor Swanson reached on



Sophomore Gunnar Akins tossed a complete game but took the tough-luck loss in the first half of Saturday's doubleheader vs. Providence Christian Academy despite going 2 for 4 at the plate. Photo/Todd Forrest

an error. But Providence kept the Panthers off the board courtesy of consecutive strikeouts to end the frame.

Moses Stevens wore an 81 mph fastball to lead off the Union County fourth, then back-to-back two-out singles by Bo Brown and Sosensky loaded the bags before a flyout halted the threat.

Akins' one-out single went to waste in the fifth and Providence's solo homer during the sixth bumped the margin to 3-0.

The Panthers finally broke through in the bottom half following a two-out single by Brown and a Sosensky walk, allowing Patton to plate the courtesy runner, Junior Davis, on an opposite-field single.

Akins escaped a two-

on, one-out jam in the seventh when he turned a tapper back to the mound into a 1-5-3 double play. Akins led off the bottom half with a base knock before two groundouts and a flyout closed the contest.

Patton finished 2 for 3 with his team's lone RBI; Brown ended the day 2 for 3; Sosensky went 1 for 1 with a pair of walks; Davis added a stolen base.

Panthers 1, Providence 2 (Gm. 3) - The Storm manufactured the go-ahead run in the sixth inning after Union County tied things up in the bottom of the fifth.

The Panthers left the winning run at first base in the seventh after Hayden Hughes worked a leadoff walk, and Swanson was plunked with two away.

Sophomore Eli Gwynn delivered Union another dominant pitching performance, working into the seventh, allowing 6 hits, 3 walks and 2 runs (one earned) while recording 5 punch outs in 6 1/3 innings. Hughes shut the door in the seventh, picking up a strikeout over the final 2/3.

Patton went 2 for 3 at the plate, accounting for two of Union's three hits; Hughes walked and scored a run during a 1-for-3 day.

Hughes scored when his base hit to center led off the fifth and Sosensky's one-out walk advanced him into scoring position. A two-out wild pitch had the runners on the move when the Storm's catcher short-hopped his throw into left field, bringing home Hughes.



Sophomore Maddox Patton went 4 for 6 with a triple and an RBI during Union County's doubleheader vs. Providence Christian on Saturday, April 6. Photo/Todd Forrest

Tied at 1-1, Providence answered in the sixth via an error, a sacrifice fly and a two-out double.

Patton's one-out triple in the bottom half had Union in business until a lineout and a groundout kept the score at 2-1.

The Storm got on the board in the second inning on a steal of home after two hits put runners on the corners.

Union went hitless until the fourth when Patton singled to left field, but the sophomore was cut down trying to stretch it into a double.

Up next: The Panthers traveled to East Jackson on Monday with the previously scheduled trip to Gilmer canceled.

Union County hosts East Jackson in a Friday double-

header beginning at 5 p.m.

Region standings: Banks County sits atop 8-AA with a 7-2 region record and owns the tiebreaker over Providence and Athens Academy.

Providence and Athens Academy are tied for second at 6-3; East Jackson is fourth at 4-5. Union and Fellowship Christian are in fifth place at 2-7.

Union holds the tiebreaker over Fellowship, while Athens and Providence square off this week to take control of the No. 2 seed.

Remaining on the schedule for first-place Banks County is Fellowship and Union. Providence has Athens and East Jackson; Athens will meet Providence and Fellowship. East Jackson has Union and Providence.



For the second time in eight days, sophomore Eli Gwynn did enough to pick up the W but was let down by his offense during a 2-1 loss vs. Providence Christian in Saturday's second game. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore catcher Bo Brown hangs on to a foul-tip third strike during game one of Saturday's doubleheader vs. Providence Christian. Photo/Todd Forrest