

Sports

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Baseball: Panthers take two-of-three from East Hall to close season

Union County baseball bids farewell to seven players on Senior Day

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After winning back-to-back region titles in their first two years, Union County's senior class was unable to go out with another postseason berth, but they did close 2018 with consecutive Region 7-AAA victories for the first time all season.

On Tuesday, Union County (10-19) hosted East Hall for Senior Day and nearly pulled off a dramatic walk-off victory. Instead, the seventh inning rally fell one run short and the Vikings escaped with an 8-7 win.

Roles were reversed the following day as the Panthers visited Rabbittown and jumped in front 7-0 before fending off an East Hall rally in a 7-5 victory.

Looking to win its first series of the Region 7-AAA 2018 schedule, Union County used a five-run second to build a 5-1 advantage.

The Panthers tacked on a run in the fourth for a 6-1 lead before East Hall made things dramatic with two in the sixth and one in the seventh, but senior RJ Banton pitched out of a bases loaded jam to nail down the 6-4 win.

Panthers 6, East Hall 4 - The Vikings doubled up Union County 10-5 in the hits column but the Panthers delivered where it mattered most.

After East Hall grabbed a 1-0 lead with an RBI double in the first, the Panthers responded with five runs in the second.

A Cole Davis singled sandwiched between a pair of walks to Patrick Baggett and Candler Colwell, loaded the bases for Hunter Kelley, who was plunked by a 2-2 pitch, scoring Baggett.

Union tied the score when catcher Alec Scott drew another walk, forcing the Vikings to make a pitching change.

Panther starting pitcher Ean Harkins welcomed the new hurler with a two-run double - scoring Kelley and Colwell.

Logan Dyer added another run with a sacrifice fly that brought home courtesy runner Cayden Rich.

Coleson Daniel replaced Harkins on the mound in the third and used an inning-ending double play to erase a leadoff single.

Jackson Colwell took over for Daniel in the fourth and kept East Hall off the board despite yielding a walk and a leadoff single.

Like Harkins earlier in the game, Jackson Colwell helped himself with an RBI double that scored Dyer with two down in the fourth.

Rich entered with a 6-1 lead and pitched a perfect fifth before giving way to freshman Kaston Hemphill in the sixth.

Following two singles, a double, a walk, and two runs, Hemphill induced a 6-4-3 double play to get out of trouble and keep the Panthers on top 6-3.

Banton took over on the hill in the seventh and secured the save in the final appearance of his career.

It wasn't without a little bit of drama, however.

A leadoff walk and consecutive singles loaded the bases and put the tying run at first with nobody out.

Banton was able to induce a grounder to short for a force out at second, but not before East Hall made it a 6-4 game with runners at the corners.

A weak tapper back to the mound resulted in the second out when Banton tossed to Daniel at first. Then, with the tying run in scoring position, the Panthers clinched the W when Dyer snagged a soft liner headed for right field.

At the plate, Dyer finished 2-for-2 with a run and an RBI while Banton went 1-for-3.

Davis finished 2-for-2 with a run, Harkins was 1-for-1 with two RBIs and a walk, and Jackson Colwell went 1-for-1 with an RBI.

Kelley scored and drove in a run while Baggett, Rich and Candler Colwell scored one run apiece and Scott walked and added an RBI.

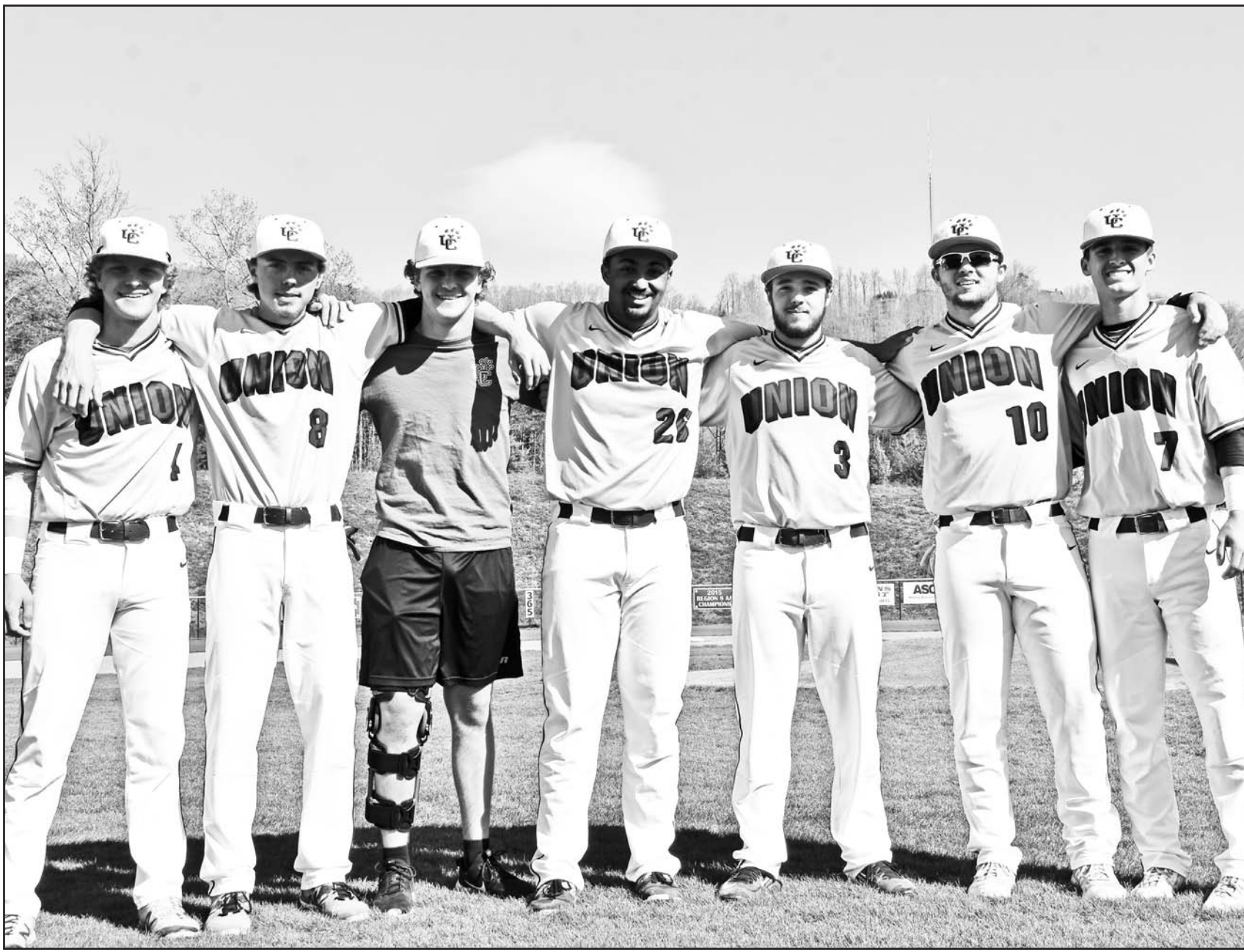
Band Concert and Awards Ceremony

Union County High School will be hosting a concert on Tuesday, May 1 at the Fine Arts Center beginning at 6:30 p.m.

The event will feature the concert band, the jazz band and the percussion ensemble.

It will be a very entertaining concert that will be followed by the awards ceremony for the band students.

Admission is \$5.



Union County baseball seniors (L-R): Candler Colwell, Cole Davis, Crawford Colwell, RJ Banton, Del Ruff, Logan Dyer, and Patrick Baggett on Tuesday following the Senior Day ceremony held before game one of the East Hall series to conclude the season. The Class of 2018 has been coached by Robby Roxbury for the past three seasons. During their freshman year of 2015, they were coached by Brandon Bradburn and won the first of back-to-back Region 8-AA titles. All UCHS Senior Day photos by Todd Forrest

On the mound, only Harkins pitched more than one inning; fanning two while giving up three hits and one earned run over two innings.

Daniel and Jackson Colwell each surrendered one hit in one inning while Rich induced two ground outs and a fly-out during his 1-2-3 inning.

Hemphill allowed three hits, one walk, and one earned run in his one inning of action. Finally, Banton gave up two hits, one walk, and one earned while recording the save.

Panthers 7, East Hall 5 - RABBITTOWN - Union County scored three in third and four in the fourth before the Vikings stormed back with five unanswered runs.

Pierson Allison recorded his second win in his last three starts with six solid innings. The sophomore lefty scattered eight hits, allowing four runs, three earned, three walks while striking out two in the win.

Senior Del Ruff picked up the save despite yielding two hits, one walk, and one earned in the seventh.

Banton drove in three during a 2-for-4 day and Daniel knocked in two while going 1-for-3 with a double.

The duo of Banton and Daniel put Union on the board in the third when Banton singled home Rich, who led off the inning with a base hit.

Daniel followed with a two-run double that plated Banton and Dyer, who singled earlier in the inning.

Candler Colwell and Rich set the stage in the fourth with back-to-back singles to open the frame.

Scott would make it a 4-0 game with an RBI single. Then, an opposite field single by Harkins loaded the bases once again, bringing Dyer to the dish where the senior brought home Rich with a sacrifice fly.

Leading 5-0, Union appeared to put the game out of reach when Banton lined a base hit into right, scoring Harkins and courtesy runner John Mancuso.

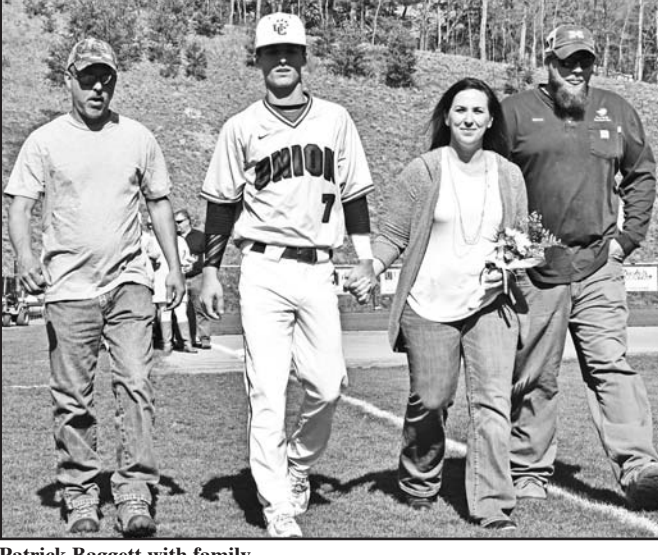
The Vikings finally cracked the scoring column when a two-out error made it a 7-1 game after four innings.

A two-out, two-run single brought East Hall striking distance at 7-3 in the fifth inning. Another two-run single made it 7-4 after six, bringing Ruff in to work the seventh.

East Hall brought the tying run to the plate with no outs after opening the bottom half of the seventh with a single and a walk.

A grounder to short resulted in a force at second but the ensuing batter was plunked, bringing the winning run to the plate.

A base hit made it 7-5 and put the tying run on second with the leadoff hitter on deck. Fortunately, the Panthers escaped when another ground ball to Baggett at short resulted in a game-ending double play.



Patrick Baggett with family.



Candler Colwell (4) and Crawford Colwell with family.



RJ Banton with family.



Cole Davis with family.

Dyer, Baggett's double-play partner for the last three seasons, finished 1-for-3 at the plate with a run and an RBI.

Rich, the third baseman, turned in a 2-for-3, two-run performance; Scott was 1-for-2 with a walk and an RBI while Harkins and Candler Colwell each finished 1-for-3 with an RBI.

Panthers 7, East Hall 8 - Trailing 8-3 in the fourth, Union County battled back to within a run before the rally stalled in the bottom half of the seventh.

After East Hall scored a run in the first, the Panthers answered with a 3-spot in the second when Kelly was plunked with the bags full and Harkins followed with a two-run double.

The Vikings had a response of their own, however, putting up five in the third and two in the fourth for an 8-3 advantage.

But no lead is safe when the opposition is protecting its home turf on Senior Day, and Union posted three runs in its half of the fourth.

With two down, Harkins doubled home Candler Colwell, who singled, and Kelley, who walked.

After Dyer was hit by a pitch, Banton went the other way to score Harkins with an opposite-field base knock.

Back within two, the Panthers turned to freshman Zeke

Swartz, who fired a no-hitter a week earlier in a JV contest vs Fannin, and the lefty continued to roll - catching two Viking hitters looking at strike three and keeping Union close.

A two-out single went to waste in the fifth, then the Panthers were retired in-order in the sixth, sending them into their final at-bat still trailing 8-6.

Banton opened with a single and Rich scored pinch runner Jonathan Everett with a double down the third base line.

With Allison running for Rich, Baggett singled to left to put the tying run just 90-feet away with no outs.

A sacrifice bunt by Davis moved Baggett to second but East Hall's Trey Campbell buckled down and fanned the next two Panther hitters to end the game with the potential-winning run at second.

Banton, Baggett, and Candler Colwell each finished 2-for-4 at the plate with Banton driving in a run and Candler Colwell scoring a run.

Harkins also went 2-for-4 with two doubles while knocking in four of his team's seven runs and scoring once.

Ruff finished 1-for-3 with a run and Rich was 1-for-1 with an RBI. Kelley scored twice and recorded one RBI while Allison and Everett also scored a run.



Del Ruff with family.