

Sports

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Softball: Newcomers power Union in two week-one victories

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County Lady Panthers won two of three to start the 2024 season, splitting a doubleheader at Pickens on Thursday, Aug. 1, before thumping Woodland (Cartersville) 10-2 during Saturday's home opener.

Lady Panthers 10, Woodland 2 (5 innings)- First-year Lady Panthers Jordane Mullanack and Reece Kelley combined for five hits and 6 RBIs in the win over Woodland as Union County rattled off 9 unanswered runs following Woodland's two-run third.

Sophomore Izzy Anthros went the distance in the mercy-rule-shortened contest, striking out six while allowing four hits and no earned runs over five innings.

Anthros kicked off the scoring, leading off the Union County first with a hit-by-pitch. Senior Sloane Dyer advanced her to second and Mullanack's two-out single to left put the Lady Panthers on the board.

Anthros left three Woodland runners stranded over the first two frames but ran into trouble in the third following a hit batter and a one-out single. An error allowed the Wildcats to knot the score at 1-1 and a sacrifice fly made it 2-1 before a strikeout ended the inning.

Union County put up three in the bottom half of the third, starting with a Peyton Grisham walk. With two away and Grisham at second, Mullanack delivered in the clutch once again, lacing a game-tying double into left field.

An error off the bat of Lily Helton scored Mullanack, followed by a Kelley double that plated Helton.

The Lady Panthers broke things open with a 6-spot in the fourth after Mikala Souther walked and Stella Collins reached on a bunt single. Grisham loaded the bases by beating out an infield single, setting the table for Anthros, who ripped an RBI single to



Senior centerfielder Jordane Mullanack singles in a run during Union County's 10-2 win over Woodland on Saturday in Blairsville. Through the first three games, Mullanack is hitting .600 with a 1.736 OPS and a team-leading 6 RBIs. Photo/Todd Forrest

left-center. Dyer made it 6-2 via a bases-loaded walk and Mullanack drove in her third run of the day with another base hit to left. Helton followed with a run-scoring walk and Kelley plated two more via a single.

Anthros worked around a leadoff single in the fifth to secure the 10-2 victory.

Mullanack finished 3 for 3 with 3 RBIs and 2 runs; Kelley drove in three during a 2 for 3 afternoon; Anthros went 1 for 2 with a run and an RBI; Dyer and Helton each scored and knocked in one; Grisham scored twice and went 1 for 1 at the plate; Collins and Souther added a run.

Lady Panthers 9, Pickens 7 (8 innings) - Union County

held on in extras during Thursday's season opener after building a 4-0 lead through five.

Anthros fanned a career-high 15 batters and carried a two-hit shutout into the sixth inning before running into trouble. Anthros issued a leadoff walk, followed by a single and a hit batter. A bases-loaded walk with one away put Pickens on the board, then consecutive two-out single put Union in a 5-4 hole entering the seventh.

Freshman Addison Whitener's one-out single kept hope alive, allowing Delaney Moses to extend the game with a two-out knock. Souther reached on error and Grisham put Union up 7-5 courtesy of a triple to

right field.

Pickens knotted things up in the bottom half when a one-out walk was followed by a two-run homer, bringing Whitener to the pitcher's circle.

The freshman induced a groundout, but a walk and an infield single had the winning run at third when Whitener escaped the jam with a swing-and-miss strike three.

Jules Dyer drew a free pass to start the eighth, Mullanack put Union County on top with an opposite-field triple and Sloane Dyer's infield single bumped the lead to 9-7.

Whitener tossed a scoreless eighth to nail down the win, navigating a one-out single and a two-out walk.

Moses and Mullanack



Senior shortstop Reece Kelley knocks in a run during Union's 10-2 victory over Woodland. She is currently second on the team with 3 hits and 4 RBIs. Photo/Todd Forrest

each went 2 for 4 with a run and 2 RBIs; Dyer drove in two while going 2 for 5; Anthros walked twice during a 2 for 3 game; Grisham ended 1 for 2 with 2 walks and a pair of RBIs; Souther went 1 for 4 with 2 runs; Kelley finished 1 for 4; Whitener scored and went 1 for 2; Helton went 1 for 2; Collins added a run.

Anthros fanned 15 over 6 1/3 innings, allowing 6 hits, 6 walks and 7 earned runs. Whitener struck out two and gave up 2 hits during 1 2/3 innings of work.

Lady Panthers 2, Pickens 10 (5 inn) - Pickens County paid Union back in game two, scoring five in the second, two in the third and three in the fourth innings of a 10-2 victory.

Trailing 5-0 in the third, the Lady Panthers pushed across two runs when Jules Dyer walked, Mullanack tripled and Kelley added a run-scoring groundout.

Grisham, Kelley and Whitener saw action in the circle for Union County, allowing 9 hits, 9 earned runs and 6 walks.

Mullanack finished 1 for 3; Whitener went 1 for 2 and Souther ended her day 1 for 3. Dyer, Helton and Grisham each drew a walk.

Up next - Union County visits White County on Tuesday, Aug. 6 before hosting Dawson County on Thursday, August 8 -- the first pitch is scheduled for 6 p.m. on both days.



Sophomore Izzy Anthros struck out a career-high 15 batters in 6 1/3 innings at Pickens on Thursday in the 2024 season opener. On Saturday, she drove in a run in the win over Woodland. Photo/Todd Forrest



Peyton Grisham beats out an infield single vs. Woodland. On Thursday at Pickens, she tied the game in the seventh with an RBI triple before Union won in extras. Photo/Todd Forrest

Football: Panthers to host Chestatee in Friday scrimmage

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Friday, Aug. 9 marks the unofficial beginning of Union County football's 2024 season when the Panthers host Chestatee (Gainesville) in a preseason scrimmage game at 7:30 p.m.

Head Coach Michael Perry enters his fourth year at the helm fresh off a pair of 8-win Sweet-16 campaigns in 2022 and 2023. However, most of the firepower from those squads has graduated, leaving Union County with an inexperienced batch of playmakers at the skill positions.

Headlining the offensive makeover is junior quarterback Cade Dockrey -- an all-region defensive back in 2023 while splitting time at receiver. According to Perry, Dockrey possesses all the athletic tools to be an impact player with his arm and his legs, as evidenced by his school-record 14-reception performance at Providence last October.

As for his targets, the Panthers will feature a new crop of receivers led by senior Maddox Young and junior Tyler Parker. Young is returning to the gridiron after sitting out his junior season, and with Dockrey moving behind center, that leaves Parker as the team's top returning pass catcher (4 receptions, 75 yards, TD).

Senior Braden Plott, an all-region honorable mention defensive back in 2023, is the frontrunner to take over as the team's third receiver, leading a deep but untested batch of underclassmen.



Coach Michael Perry with freshman tight end Jax Dillinger (L) and junior quarterback Cade Dockrey (center) during Union County's second day in full pads on Friday, Aug. 2. Photo/Todd Forrest

In the Panthers' backfield, senior Connor Schuknecht will handle the ball-carrying duties following the graduation of workhorse Braylen Rader. The more-than-capable Schuknecht was well on his way to being a four-year starter at running back after winning the starting job in late 2021. However, the return of Rader to the gridiron in 2022 bumped Schuknecht down the depth chart, prompting a move to linebacker in 2023, where he earned an 8-AA honorable mention nod.

Due to his physical downhill running style, Schuknecht still saw plenty of

carries in 2023, piling up 248 yards and 2 TDs on 37 touches while adding one receiving touchdown.

Over the last three seasons, Schuknecht accumulated 928 yards rushing and 7 touchdowns, while also gaining 236 yards and scoring once on 21 catches. Sophomore Bentley Rich is set to back up Schuknecht, with both players splitting time in the backfield and at linebacker.

Fortunately, Dockrey and the running backs will be protected by a stellar offensive line that returns three full-time starters and a pair of players who saw spot starts in 2023.



Senior defensive back Darin Patterson picks off a pass during practice last Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Headlined by all-region senior guard Kaden Combs, who enters his third season as a starter, the O-line returns a pair of starters in sophomores Easton Shumaker and Jaxon Totherow at tackle. Meanwhile, junior Kye Burnette or senior Beau Webster will take over at the other guard spot. Junior Trent Webster or sophomore Alan Godinez will replace the graduated Cody Meeks at the center position.

Freshman Jax Dillinger has emerged at the tight end position following the graduation of Tyler Grasty - a second-team all-region selection.

"[Dillinger is] only a freshman, but he's good, he just needs to continue to work on his blocking," Perry said.

The defensive line suffered a blow when its lone returning starter, Dusty Aaron, suffered a season-ending knee injury during the summer. At the moment, Totherow, Shumaker and sophomore Gunnar Franklin return as Union's best options on the D-line.

Along with the aforementioned Schuknecht and Rich, Plott, Shumaker and Combs will see action at linebacker. Additionally, the Pan-

thers expect their leading tackler, senior Ethan Lester, to return to the field later this month.

The secondary remains up in the air with senior Darin Patterson, junior Daniel McPhee and sophomores Brandon Lynch, Chetley Cox, Kevin Kilpatrick, Sir Thompson and Young leading the way in the defensive backfield.

"McPhee will be at one corner, he's had a really good summer," Perry said. "Kilpatrick has done a really good job for us and [Thompson] has gotten a lot of reps [this summer]."

Senior soccer star Antonio Solorio and sophomore Grant Smith are Union's top two options at kicker, but Perry added that could change at any moment.

Friday's scrimmage will feature the varsity for three quarters followed by the younger players. Special teams will be involved minus returns and blocked kicks. According to Perry, Dockrey won't play the scrimmage under the protected red-jersey status due to his by-design impact on the offense's running game.

Union County will benefit from a bye week following the scrimmage before visiting Gilmer on Aug. 23 in the season opener.

"I think [the week off] is a good thing," Perry said. "That gives us an extra week to prepare for Gilmer after playing Chestatee and they run a similar offense. We can fix some things that week, make some corrections and move some guys around if we need to. Hopefully we can get some guys healthy; we're really banged up right now."

Union County wrestling's first-annual Grapple Fest a hit for all ages



Union County wrestling alum David Heredia (L) and senior Asa Smith-Foot (R) are impressed with the skills of the young grapplers while the duo served as coaches during the event. Grapple Fest featured hundreds of visitors and more than 25 vendors on Saturday, Aug. 3. Union County wrestling would like to thank all the vendors, visitors, volunteers and everyone that made Grapple Fest a success. Union wrestling would like to offer a special thank you to Dr. Crystal Gary for making everything possible. Photos by Todd Forrest





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UCHS 2024 Volleyball Schedule

DATE	OPPONENT (R) = Region Play @ = Tri-Match Host, vs. = Additional Team	LOCATION	TEAM <small>Varsity</small>	TIME
June 24-26, 2024	White County Camp 2600 Hwy 123 North, Cleveland, GA	Away		5:00 PM 7:00 PM
July 8-9, 2024	Gainesville Training Camp 830 Century Place, Gainesville, GA	Away		5:00 PM 7:00 PM
August 8, 2024	Pickens County - Dragons	HOME	JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
August 13, 2024	Rabun County - Wildcats Stephens County - Indians	HOME	Varsity Varsity	5:00 PM 7:00 PM
August 15, 2024	@ Franklin County - Lions vs. Commerce - Tigers 8570 GA Hwy 145, Carnesville, GA	Away	JV / Varsity JV / Varsity	5:00 / 6:00 PM
August 19, 2024	Andrews, NC - Wildcats	HOME	Varsity	6:00 PM
August 20, 2024	vs. Stephens County - Indians vs. Tallulah Falls - Indians 323 Indian Trail, Toccoa, GA	Away	JV / Varsity JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
August 22, 2024	@ Dawson County - Tigers vs. West Hall - Spartans 1665 Parrimeter Rd., Dawsonville, GA	Away	JV / Varsity JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
August 26, 2024	Rabun Gap-Nacoochee - Eagles	HOME	JV / Varsity	5:00 / 6:00 PM
August 27, 2024	@ Banks County - Leopards vs. Habersham County - Raiders 1486-A Historic Homer Hwy, Homer, NC	Away	JV / Varsity JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
August 29, 2024	Hiwassee Dam, NC - Eagles	HOME	JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
September 5, 2024	Commerce - Tigers Dawson County - Tigers	HOME	Varsity Varsity	5:00 PM 7:00 PM
September 7, 2024	Gordon Lee Tournament Gordon Lee High School 105 Lee Cir., Chickamauga, GA	Away	Varsity	TBD
September 10, 2024	Rockmart - Yellow Jackets (R) Sonarville - Phoenix (R)	HOME	JV / Varsity JV / Varsity	5:00 / 7:00 PM
September 12, 2024	Andrews, NC - Wildcats	Away	JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
September 17, 2024	@ Ringgold - Tigers (R) vs. Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) - Warriors (R) 29 Tiger Trail, Ringgold, GA	Away	Varsity Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
September 19, 2024	Hiwassee Dam	Away	JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
September 24, 2024	@ Murray County - Indians (R) vs. North Murray - Mountaineers (R) 1001 Green Rd., Chatsworth, GA	Away	JV / Varsity JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
September 26, 2024	East Jackson *Senior Night	HOME	JV / Varsity	6:00 PM 7:00 PM
October 1, 2024	@ Coahulla Creek - Colts (R) vs. North Cobb Christian - Eagles (R) 3361 Crow Rd. NE, Dalton, GA	Away	JV / Varsity JV / Varsity	5:00 PM 6:00 PM
October 12, 2024	AREA TOURNAMENT	TBD	Varsity	TBD
October 14, 2024	AREA TOURNAMENT	TBD	Varsity	TBD