

Sports

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Panthers' upset bid denied in 26-12 loss at No. 5 Rockmart

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Rockmart - Union County (1-3, 1-1) gave No. 5 Rockmart all it could handle in a 26-12 region loss. Despite the Panthers' valiant effort, they ultimately gifted the Yellow Jackets 16 points courtesy of two botched punts, an interception and a turnover on downs.

The miscues netted Rockmart average starting field position at Union's 46-yard line, but stellar defensive play kept the visitors in the game until the final minutes.

"Coach (Mark) Wade and our defensive staff did a great job and our defense played their hearts out," Union County head coach Michael Perry said. "Our offense made a lot of critical mistakes, and if they did what they were coached to do, the result would have probably ended up a lot better."

Union County grabbed an early 6-0 edge and maintained possession throughout the first quarter after Rockmart couldn't corral a squib kick, recovered by Union, following the opening drive score.

Rockmart used a touchdown and a field goal to inch ahead 9-6 at the break before extending the lead to 16-6 after three.

Freshman Kamden Kendrick's second touchdown pass moved Union within 16-12 early in the fourth, but Rockmart turned an interception into 3 points and then tacked on a late touchdown run to secure the win.

Kendrick finished with a career-high 245 yards on 24 of 37, including 2 TDs and a pair of interceptions. Senior Maddox Young had 13 grabs for 88 yards and a score; junior Tyler Parker caught four passes for



Junior wide receiver Tyler Parker gathers a tipped pass during the fourth quarter that resulted in a 52-yard Union County touchdown. Photo/Todd Forrest

85 yards and a touchdown.

After a roughing the kicker penalty breathed new life into Union's opening series, Young capped off Union's 17-play drive with a 12-yard reception over the middle on fourth and 10. The Panthers' PAT attempt failed on a mishandled snap.

Moments later, Grant Smith's squib kick deflected off a Rockmart player, allowing Braden Plott to pounce on the loose ball, awarding Union possession at the Jackets' 47.

From there, Union advanced to the Rockmart 25,

but a costly ineligible receiver penalty negated a 13-yard completion to freshman Jax Dillinger on fourth and 3.

"On fourth down, we completed a little pop pass, and had a lineman go downfield - it was just things like that [that hurt us]," Perry said.

Following an incompletion on fourth and 8, Rockmart took over at the 30 and ran its first play from scrimmage with just over a minute left in the quarter and went 70 yards on 8 plays, tying the game via a 31-yard touchdown pass.

A Union penalty before the PAT brought the Jackets' offense back on the field to attempt a shortened 2-point conversion, but a botched snap kept the score tied at 6-6.

A blocked punt following a Union three-and-out handed Rockmart a short field at the 29, where the Union defense tightened up and limited the home team to a 37-yard field goal.

The ensuing Panthers' drive stalled at the Jackets' 34 with a minute to play in the half before the defense forced three Rockmart incompletions on four attempts, keeping the score at 9-6 going to the break.

Both offenses punted to begin the third quarter, but a bad snap on Union's try awarded the Jackets' optimal field position at the 9-yard line. Two plays later, Rockmart put it in the endzone to mount a 16-6 advantage.

The Panthers' next drive ended with a questionable interception, that appeared to hit the turf, but the defense delivered again with a fourth down stop at the 37-yard line. Three plays later, Kendrick went up top to Parker on a 52-yard scoring strike that saw the junior receiver pull down a tipped pass behind the secondary and take it to the house, moving Union within 16-12 at the 9:43 mark of the fourth.

Rockmart answered with a 30-yard field goal with 6:32 remaining and the Panthers' offense was denied on fourth and 10 just shy of the 5-minute mark. On the very next play, the Jackets broke a 28-yard scoring run to bump their lead to 26-12

Union responded by driving inside the Rockmart 15, courtesy of three timely catches from Young. However, the upset bid was put to bed when Kendrick was picked off at the goal line near the 2-minute mark.

Senior Connor Schuknecht rushed 14 times for 56 yards and added 2 receptions for 27 yards; sophomore Chetley Cox caught 2 passes for 38 yards; sophomore Robert Thompson had one grab for 7 yards.

Seniors Ethan Lester and Kaden Combs led the defense at 13 tackles each with Combs adding a TFL. Sophomore Alan Godinez, senior Darin Patterson and freshman Micah Wallace chipped in 6 tackles apiece.

"I'm really proud of Ethan Lester, Boomer (Combs), Plott, (Jaxon) Totherow and (Easton) Shumaker," Perry said.

Up next: Union County hosts North Murray for Homecoming at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 20. The annual Meet the Panthers event is scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 19 at 5:30 p.m.

North Murray enters Friday with a 3-1 record and a 2-0 mark in Region 7-AA. The Mountaineers handed rival Murray County a 40-14 loss last week despite trailing 7-6 after one and nursing a 14-7 halftime edge.

North Murray, a run-first offense, is led by junior quarterback Hudson Hulett who averages 170 yards rushing per game.

"They want to run the ball," Perry said regarding North Murray. "Their previous quarterback transferred to another school so they put their best athlete back there at quarterback and let him run. We need to be ready to play."

Thursday's JV game at Dawson County has been moved to Tuesday at 5:30 due to the Meet the Panthers event.

In injury news, Coach Perry expects freshman wide receiver Mikey Davis to be healthy for North Murray after missing the Rockmart game.

"He'll be back this week," Perry said. "We definitely need him."



Sophomore Jaxon Totherow (65) drops a Rockmart back with freshman Micah Wallace (27) in pursuit. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County offensive line coach Tyler Perry urges on the Panthers during the second half at Rockmart. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior linebacker Ethan Lester tightens his chin strap while recording 13 tackles on Friday. Lester suffered a near-career-ending injury 10 months ago in Union's last visit to Rockmart. Photo/Todd Forrest

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9:30a.m.

Shotgun Start
10:00a.m.

Lunch, Raffle & Awards Following

For More Information, call
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Softball: Union bats limited to 3 runs during three-game skid

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Union County (7-11) suffered three region losses last week at the hands of North Cobb Christian, Coahulla Creek and Rockmart, dropping the Lady Panthers to fifth place in 7-AA at 3-5.

Union hopes to get back on track with a trip to last-place North Murray on Tuesday, ahead of a Thursday home contest vs. eighth-place Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO).

Lady Panthers 2, North Cobb Christian 5 - Union County was limited to 2 hits and couldn't dig out of a 4-0 hole after four innings in Kennesaw on Monday, Sept. 9.

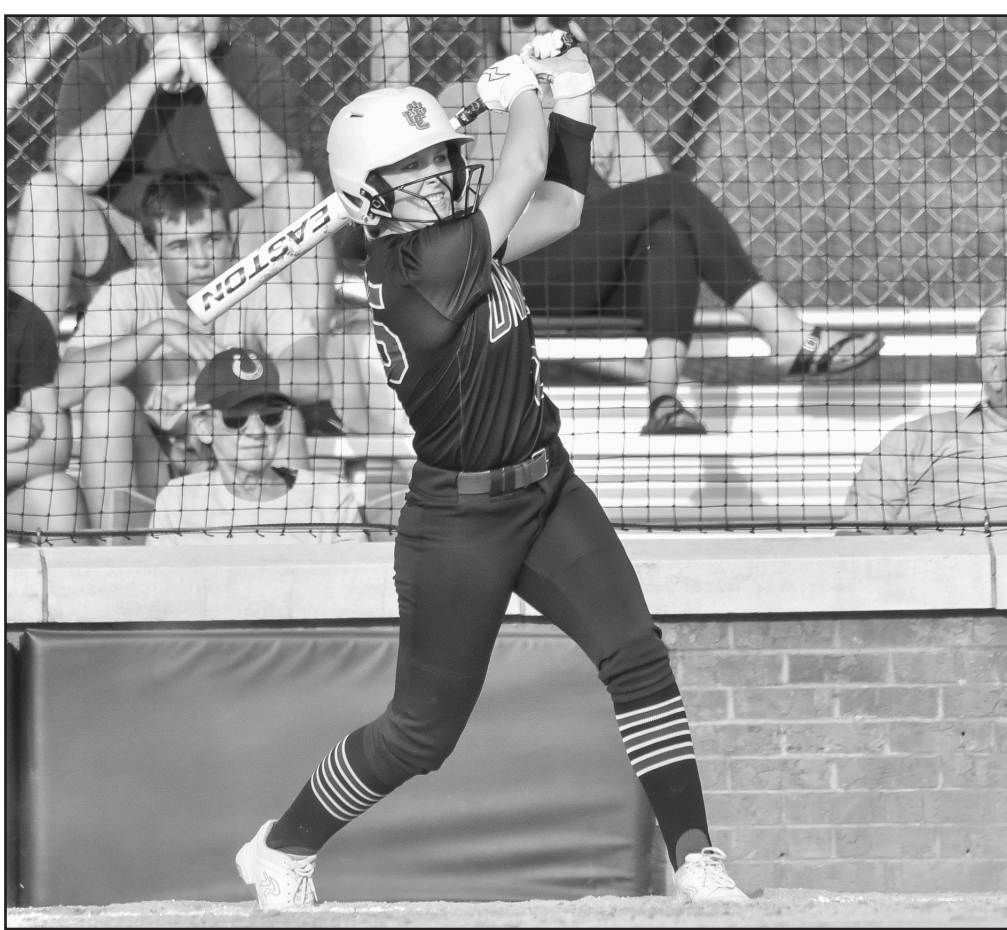
North Cobb scored a run in the first, tacked on three more in the third and added an insurance run in the sixth. Union scored a run in the sixth and seventh frames.

Seniors Mikala Souther and Jordane Mullanack accounted for the Lady Panthers' two hits with Mullanack and senior Sloane Dyer scoring the Union runs. Delaney Moses added an RBI.

Sophomore Izzy Anthros tossed a complete game, allowing 6 hits and 3 earned runs while striking out seven.

Mullanack started the sixth with a one-out single and advanced to second on a passed ball before stealing third. She came around to score via an error off the bat of Anthros.

Dyer reached on an error to lead off the seventh, eventually scoring on Moses' error.



Freshman Addison Whitener with one of her two hits vs. Coahulla Creek last Tuesday. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers 1, Coahulla Creek 5 - Union returned home on Tuesday, Sept. 10 but couldn't get back in the win column, allowing two runs each during the third and fifth innings.

Coahulla Creek got on the board in the first but the Lady Panthers tied it up in the second when Mullanack reached on an error and came home on a Jules Dyer base hit.

Four singles and a double in the third allowed Coahulla Creek to regain the lead at 3-1 and Union County couldn't capitalize on a two-on, nobody-out situation in the bottom half.

The visitors put the game away in the fifth after a leadoff single and a one-out error resulted in a 2-run inning. Later, the Lady Panthers wasted an Anthros double in the fifth and a pair of singles in the sixth.

Freshman Addison Whitener doubled and went 2 for 4; Anthros finished 1 for 3 with a walk; Mullanack scored during a 1-for-3 day; Jules Dyer went 1 for 3 with an RBI; Lexi Davenport added a pinch-hit single in the sixth.

Anthros allowed 7 hits and 3 runs (2 earned) in 2 2/3 innings. Whitener gave up 2 hits and 2 unearned runs in 2 2/3. Ayla Jamison worked the final 1 2/3, allowing one hit.

Lady Panthers 0, Rock-



Sophomore catcher Jules Dyer drives in Union's only run of the game vs. Coahulla Creek. Photo/Todd Forrest

mart 9 - The Jackets scored four in the top half of the first on Thursday, Sept. 12 in Blairsville, then limited Union County to 3 hits over 7 innings.

Stella Collins, Sloane Dyer and Lily Helton accounted for Union's three hits with Helton's going for two bags.

Rockmart added 3 runs in the fifth and 2 in the seventh as the Lady Panthers used four pitchers in the loss.

Whitener allowed 4

earned on 3 hits in just 1/3 of an inning; senior Reese Kelley allowed 2 hits and 2 runs in an inning of work; Davenport tossed 4 innings, giving up 5 hits and 3 runs; Anthros yielded one hit over 1 2/3.

Up next: Union County visits North Murray at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday. The Lady Panthers and LFO get underway at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday. Union hosts Gilmer in non-region action on Saturday at 10 a.m.

Volleyball: Union opens Region 7-AA with losses to Rockmart, Sonoraville

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Union County lost all three matches last week, falling in straight sets in the region opener vs. Rockmart and Sonoraville on Tuesday, Sept. 10, then suffering a 3-1 loss to Andrews, NC on Thursday.

The Panthers visit Ringgold on Tuesday, Sept. 17 to face the Tigers and Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe. Union travels to Hiwassee Dam, NC on Thursday.

Panthers 0, Rockmart 2 (23-25, 25-27) - Union County dropped two tightly contested sets to the Yellow Jackets last Tuesday at the Union County rec center.

The opening set saw the Panthers rally from a 22-18 deficit to tie the score at 22-22 behind two aces from Payton Murphy and a Mallory Rouse kill before eventually falling 25-23.

Union County led throughout the second set, racing ahead 4-0, 8-3 and 10-5. Sofia Foster and Katelyn Brown's net play was instrumental in Union's early advantages, but Rockmart inched within two at 11-9 and 12-10.



Sophomore Sofia Foster (11) and senior Katelyn Brown (10) did everything they could to keep Union County close in its two region losses while playing shorthanded last week without injured junior Reese Jones. Photo/Todd Forrest

Kills from Foster pushed the Panthers ahead by scores of 15-10 and 17-13, but Rockmart stormed back to build a 21-19 edge.

Senior Lily Brookshire knotted the score at 24-24 and Foster kept things even at 25-25 until Rockmart scored the

next two points.

Foster finished the match with a career-high 10 kills, Brookshire had four, while Rouse and Charlei Robinson added three each.

Brown and Mady Adams chipped in one kill apiece. Murphy recorded 2 aces

and Brown had one. Foster led the way with 2 blocks. Brookshire had 16 digs and 7 assists and Brown finished with 14 digs and 6 assists.

Panthers 0, Sonoraville 2 (22-25, 19-25) - Union County jumped ahead 5-0 in the first set courtesy of Brookshire,

Brown and Foster, but Sonoraville pushed in front 9-7 and inched away at the end following a back-and-forth for much of the set.

After falling behind 9-7, Robinson and Brown put Union back on top 10-9, then Rouse kept the Union margin at 11-10.

Adams and Brown had the Panthers out in front again at 16-15 and Emmy Kight kept things tied at 18-18. Brown's ace made it 22-20 in Union's favor before Sonoraville scored the next five.

In the second stanza, Robinson and Foster moved Union on top by margins of 4-1 and 5-2, but the Phoenix quickly tied it up at 6-6. The Panthers inched ahead 9-6 via freshman Samantha Combs' ace and continued to lead 11-8, 14-11 and 16-12 until Sonoraville rattled off seven consecutive points to pull ahead for good.

Foster finished with 5 kills; Brown and Kight had four each, Brookshire and Rouse netted three apiece. Brookshire, Brown and Robinson had an ace.

Brown finished with 7 digs and Brookshire had 6 digs and 12 assists.

Panthers 1, Andrews, NC 3 (20-25, 25-20, 11-25, 22-25) - After defeating the Wildcats 3-0 last month, Union County couldn't secure the rematch, falling in four sets in Blairsville on Thursday, Sept. 12.

No individual stats were available for the loss to Andrews.

XC: Union ladies 10th at North Georgia Invitational, men finish 15th



The Union County ladies are currently ranked among the top-three in Class AA. Photos/Todd Forrest

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Oakwood - Class AA's top-ranked runner, Lola Hunter, placed fourth at Saturday's North Georgia Invitational, leading Union County to a 10th-place finish among 18 squads.

Hunter finished the race in 19 minutes, 16 seconds behind first place Audrey Hotard of Habersham Central (18:28), second place Erin O'Brien of Jackson County (18:39) and third place Carly Black of White County (19:00). Lumpkin County's Keli George (19:35) rounded out the top five.

In the boys' race, Union County finished 15th out of 22 schools and was paced by Oliver Hillman's 56th-place performance at 17:54.

Andrew Nushtayev placed 63rd at 18:11, Noah James Payne was 73rd with a time of 18:28, Cole Brown came in 88th at 18:59 and Ander Faulkner rounded out Union's top five in 95th at 19:12.

Other Union runners included Trey Hawley in 106th with a time of 19:34. Bryson Brooks was 108th at 19:35; Cody Dupuis placed 127th at 20:03; Michael Lindsey finished 147th at 20:49; Logan Duckworth was 162nd at 21:58.

On the girls' side, Macy Payne placed 55th at 22:51; Lydia Wagner was 79th at 23:54; Avery Hussion came in 88th at 24:31; Averie Tanner was 91st at 24:39; Katie Payne placed 92nd at 24:43; Kate Barrett was 102nd at 25:02; Julie Schmitt was 126th at 26:20; Lelah Tincher came in 140th

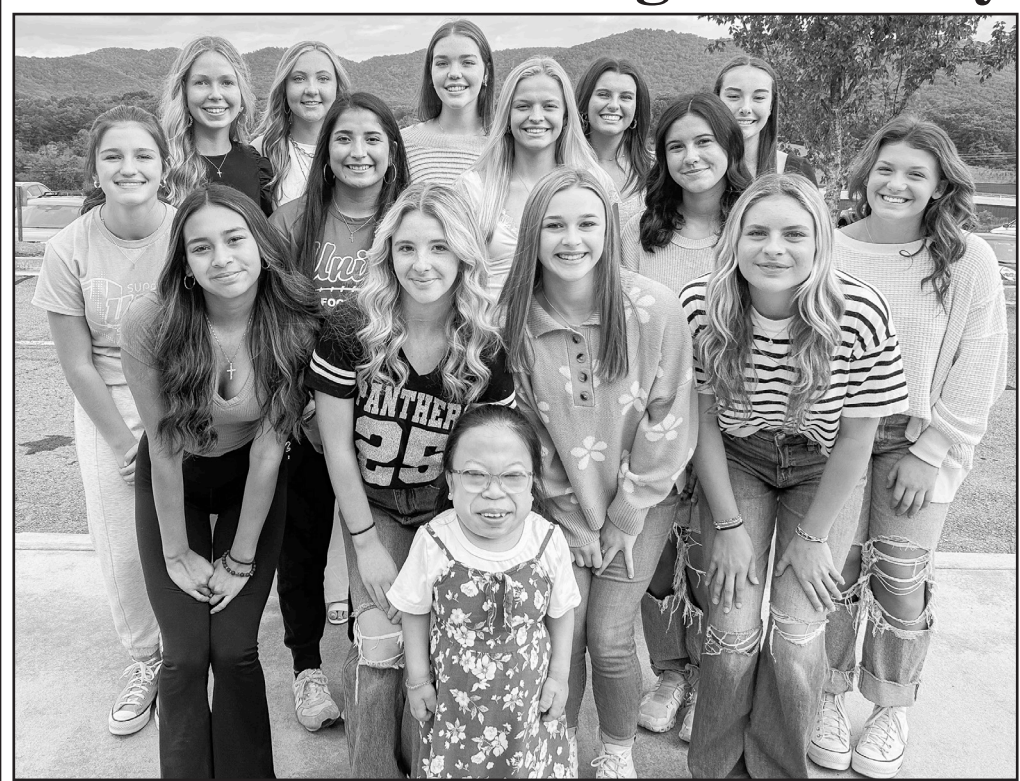
at 27:21; Ava Irvin was 148th at 28:47.

The Union ladies finished with 281 points, coming in behind ninth-place Lumpkin County (216) and ahead of 11th-place Clarke Central (311). The men had 344 points and finished 14 points back of 14th-place White County (330) and well in front of 16th-place Hart County (452).

Lumpkin County senior Wyatt Windham took home first in the guys' race at 14:54. Oconee County's Aaron Brodrick was second with a time of 15:00. Clarke Central was first overall with 54 points.

Union County will race at Stephens County on Thursday, Sept. 20 vs. Bremen, Franklin County, Hart County, Towns County, West Hall, White County and Stephens.

UCHS Homecoming on Friday



Union County High School will crown its 2024-25 Homecoming Queen on Friday night ahead of the Panthers' Region 7-AA showdown vs. North Murray.

The 2024-25 Homecoming court is as follows: Back row: (L-R) Ella Akins, Leah Cox, Mady Adams, Sloane Dyer and Abby Barrett.

Middle row: (L-R) Grace Wright, Giovanna Salazar, Lily Brookshire, Ava Serrano and Leighton Hunter

Front row: (L-R) Gabriella Perez, Lucy Vinez, Avery Frechette and Peyton Grisham.

Middle front: Elli Harper.

Union County will host its Meet the Panthers event on Thursday, followed by Friday's Homecoming Parade.

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