

# Sports

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## Volleyball: Panthers roll, punch ticket to Elite Eight

### Union County visits Ringgold Tuesday in quarterfinals

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Union County volleyball (18-18) is back in the Elite Eight for the fourth time in six years following a pair of blowout victories over Redan and Spencer.

The Panthers will visit Region 7-AA foe Ringgold on Tuesday, Oct. 22, in a rematch from Union's 2-0 September loss. However, with her team peaking at the right time, there's nothing Union County head coach Megan Brown would love more than for Ringgold to overlook her squad.

"We were missing some players [in the previous meeting vs. Ringgold] so I'm looking forward to the rematch," said Brown, who becomes the program's third different coach to guide Union to the State quarterfinals. "I think we'll surprise them a bit now that we've had a few weeks to gel and get everyone back together. But I'm excited. As long as we play our best, I think we'll be fine."

**No. 21 Panthers 3, No. 12 Redan 0 (25-13, 25-14, 25-10) - Union County opened the postseason with a straight-set victory at Stone Mountain's Redan High School on Tuesday, Oct. 15.**

The Panthers have won five straight first-round State playoff games and are 5-1 during the opening round since the program's inception in 2017.

Redan entered as the runner-up from Region 6-AA. No individual stats are available for the win over Redan.

**No. 21 Panthers 3, No. 28 Spencer 0 (25-10, 25-3,**



Union County celebrates its win over Spencer on Saturday afternoon in Blairsville, earning a spot in the Elite Eight. Photo/Todd Forrest

**25-15) - Union's win at Redan, coupled with Spencer's upset of No. 5 Miller Grove, awarded the Panthers their first home playoff game since 2021.**

And following a four-hour bus ride from the southside of Columbus, Spencer was sent packing in under an hour with Union controlling all three sets and punching its ticket to the Elite Eight.

The Panthers stormed out to leads of 5-0, 7-1 and 15-3 in

the opening set and were never threatened in a 25-10 win.

Junior Reese Jones' 3 aces and senior Katelyn Brown's 2 kills spotted Union its early 5-0 edge. Consecutive kills from senior Charlei Robinson made it 7-1, followed by senior Mallory Rouse's kill, a service error and a kill by Jones built a 10-3 advantage.

Four consecutive aces from Brown and a Jones kill all but put things away at 15-3.

Sophomore Sofia Foster made it 16-4, then two Rouse kills and three service errors grew the lead to 21-7.

Rouse, Foster, Robinson and Brown provided Robinson's last four points of the set.

With Spencer on their heels, the Panthers went for the jugular during the second stanza, taking the set 25-3 on the heels of a 7-0 spurt out of the gate.

Brown, Jones and Robin-

son each delivered in the early going, and then Rouse got in on the action to make it 10-1. Senior Lily Brookshire grew the margin to 14-1 before Spencer answered with consecutive points.

Up 14-3, Union County closed with 11 straight, sparked by Robinson's kill and freshman Livia Haney's ace. After Foster and Brown made it 19-3, Haney's second ace put her team up by 17.

Brown and Robinson poured in four of Union's last five points in the 25-3 shellacking.

The Panthers started the third set by mixing in some of their younger players against an overmatched opponent. And after jumping in front 4-1 on the backs of Brown and junior Mady Adams, Spencer tied the set at 5-5.

Jones, Foster and Brown bumped Union ahead 9-5, but Spencer responded by seizing its first lead of the match at 12-11. Rouse quickly tied things up at 12-12, then the senior answered again with her team down 13-12.

Robinson's ace pushed Union out front to stay at 14-13 and Rouse's kill made it 16-14.

Despite their team's early hiccups, Adams, Brown, Foster and Jones quickly had the Panthers back in charge at 20-15 as Union eventually closed the match on a 9-0 run.

The Panthers move to 18 wins on the year -- matching the 2021 squad for the second-most in program history. With one more, they would equal the 2020 team's school-record 19-9 season.

"We had a rough season with injuries," Coach Brown said. "But I feel like now, with everyone healthy, we're starting to come together at the right time. These girls never give up and never quit, and I think it showed [playing] in a tough region. We're looking good right now and we're excited to keep going."

**Up next:** Union County visits Ringgold Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. The winner advances to the Final Four and would travel to the winner of No. 1 Morgan County vs. No. 8 East Jackson.

## Softball: Lady Panthers overwhelm Shaw, advance to Sweet 16

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**Columbus - Union County is two wins from returning to Columbus for a second time this month following a pair of victories in its best-of-three series at Shaw High School on Wednesday, Oct. 16.**

The Lady Panthers will visit No. 6 Burke County on Wednesday night. Burke advanced to the Sweet 16 via a forfeit victory over Carver-Atlanta. Union County joins LFO, Murray County, Ringgold, Rockmart and Somnorville from Region 7-AA in the Sweet 16 of the public school State tournament.

The Union-Burke winner will advance to the Elite Eight in Columbus beginning Oct. 30.

**GM 1: No. 22 Lady Panthers 9, No. 11 Shaw 0 (5 inn) - Union County dealt Shaw a mercy-rule-shortened loss to open the State tournament, courtesy of 12 hits and a 5-inning, 1-hit shutout from sophomore Izzy Anthros.**

The Lady Panthers got one run in the second, three in the third and four in the fourth and Anthros slammed the door following a Shaw single and walk during the first.

During the Union second, Sloane Dyer, Lily Helton and Jules Dyer singled to open the inning, spotting the visitors a 1-0 edge.

Anthros started the third with a leadoff walk, freshman Addison Whitener was hit by a pitch and Jordane Mullanack's



Freshman Addison Whitener finished the Shaw series 4 for 6 with four RBIs, four runs and two doubles. Photo/Todd Forrest

base hit scored Anthros. Helton kept things rolling with a one-out, two-run double to mount a 4-0 advantage.

Mikala Souther opened the 5-run fourth with a base hit to left, Anthros doubled and Whitener's two-bagger plated two more runs. Mullanack's single scored Whitener and Sloane Dyer's double made

it 8-0.

Sloane Dyer came around to score courtesy of Lily Helton's sacrifice fly.

Anthros worked a perfect fourth and fifth to end the game at 9-0.

Helton drove in three and went 2 for 2; Mullanack finished 2 for 2 with 2 RBIs; Whitener scored twice and



Senior Lily Helton drove in three of Union County's 9 runs in the game-one victory at Shaw. Photo/Todd Forrest

knocked in two more during a 1-for-2 day; Jules Dyer went 3 for 3 with an RBI.

Anthros went 1 for 2 with a run; Souther scored once and finished 1 for 2; Ayla Jamison scored a run.

**GM 2: Lady Panthers 8, Shaw 3 - Union County -- the home team in game two -- raced ahead 6-1 behind three**

in the first, two in the third and one in the fourth.

The lead grew to 8-2 in the sixth before Shaw got one in the seventh.

The Lady Panthers, the beneficiary of five Shaw errors, belted six extra-base hits in the win as Anthros fanned five in four innings of no-hit softball before giving way to

Reese Kelley in the fifth.

At the dish, Anthros went 3 for 4 with a double, 2 runs and an RBI. Whitener finished 3 for 4 with 2 doubles, 2 RBIs and a run. Mullanack ended her day with 2 doubles, 2 runs and 2 RBIs during a 2-for-3 performance.

Shaw grabbed a brief 1-0 lead courtesy of a walk, two stolen bases and a wild pitch, but the edge was short-lived as Mullanack drove in Anthros and Sloane Dyer, then came around on a Shaw error.

Mullanack's second double scored Whitener in the third, and Jules Dyer's two-out single plated Mullanack. Union County worked some two-out magic in the fourth when Anthros singled and Whitener's RBI double built a 6-1 lead.

A sac fly made it 6-2 in the sixth, but Souther's single in the bottom half, followed by consecutive doubles from Anthros and Whitener, blew things open at 8-2.

Kelley limited Shaw to one run in the seventh, allowing two singles and a hit batter before settling down and retiring the final two batters.

Jules Dyer went 1 for 3 with an RBI; Souther scored during a 1-for-2 game; Delaney Moses finished 1 for 2 and Sloane Dyer added a run.

**Up next:** The Union County at Burke County series gets underway with a 4 p.m. doubleheader on Wednesday, Oct. 23.

The if necessary game would be Thursday, Oct. 24 at 4 p.m.

# Panthers force three turnovers in 35-20 win at Coahulla Creek

## Union County back home on Friday night vs. Sonoraville

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**Dalton** - It wasn't the most stylish of victories on Friday night, but Union County is back to .500 and controls its own destiny for the No. 2 seed and a home playoff game following a 35-20 win at Coahulla Creek on Oct. 18.

Connor Schuknecht scored twice during a 126-yard rushing performance, and Darin Patterson added a pick-six, helping Union County overcome 100+ penalty yards in Friday's road win.

"The defense got three huge turnovers for us, otherwise things could have went a lot different because of all the penalties and drops we had," head coach Michael Perry said. "I'm really proud of Connor [Schuknecht] and the offensive line. I'm also really proud of Bentley [Rich] he came in and did some good things for us [at running back]."

The Panthers have won three of four since beginning the year 1-3, improving to 4-4 overall and 4-2 in Region 7-AA.

Patterson's second-quarter interception awarded Union County a 21-0 lead, which increased to 35-7 entering the fourth before Coahulla Creek added two late touchdowns during the final 5+ minutes.

Union County's offense played turnover-free, while the defense came up with three critical takeaways.

"We did some good things tonight and forced a few turnovers," senior DB/LB Braden Plott said after the game. "It was the first game after the bye week and we need to fix a few things. We need to cut out the penalties and fix a few things on defense. Sonoraville is a better team than [Coahulla Creek], but if we can fix those issues, we should be good and keep things rolling."

Freshman Kamden Kendrick completed 8 of 13 passes for 99 yards and two touchdowns - the first TD coming via a short toss to Tyler Parker, spotting the Panthers a 7-0 lead. The score completed a 17-play, 75-yard drive after the defense denied the Colts' fourth-and-1 conversion deep inside Union territory.

The Panthers' second score came moments later when Coahulla Creek fumbled Antonio Solorio's kickoff, recovered by Brandon Lynch,



Senior DB Darin Patterson is off to races after picking off a Colts' pass during the second quarter. Photo/Todd Forrest

and Kendrick set up shop at the plus-29. From there, a 12-yard completion to Young followed by two gives to Schuknecht had Union County out front 14-0.

Both offenses swapped punts early in the second, and Coahulla Creek eventually took over near midfield. But on the first play of the series, Patterson jumped a short route in the flat and raced 51 yards untouched down the visitors sideline to build a 21-0 advantage.

"We knew coming in when [Coahulla Creek WR No. 15] lines up inside, he's going outside," Patterson said regarding his pick-six. "And when I saw him lined up inside, I just jumped it and saw the endzone in front of me and took it in for six."

"Props to [Coahulla Creek]. They fought hard and battled to the very end. I'm just excited I was able to help us win."

However, the Colts answered before the half when they finally cashed in on their third straight drive starting near midfield. Coahulla Creek went 50 yards on six plays, finding the endzone on a 17-yard completion on third and 7.

In response, the Union County offense went to work on its first possession of the second half. On its fourth play, Kendrick hit Maddox Young on a quick slant, and the senior

wideout split two defenders in the middle of the field en route to a 43-yard scoring strike and a 28-7 lead.

"Kamden [Kendrick] made a great read on an RPO and threw a strike," Perry said.

The Panthers got the ball back when senior linebacker Kaden Combs dropped the Colts' QB for a sack on third-and-12, and the offense took over at the 19 following a punt.

With Schuknecht carrying the load, Union moved out to midfield, where a costly Coahulla Creek penalty on fourth and 4 gifted the visitors a fresh set of downs. And Schuknecht made them pay, gashing the Colts for 39 yards, followed by an 8-yard carry on first and goal.

On the ensuing Coahulla Creel possession, Union nearly collected its second defensive touchdown when freshman Micah Wallace scooped a fumble off the turf and raced 85 yards for an apparent score. Unfortunately, one of several costly Panther penalties negated the score, moving Union back to its 13-yard line. The offense couldn't convert the turnover into points, stalling at the Colts' 42.

The 35-7 score would hold until the 5-minute mark when Coahulla Creek went 58 yards on seven plays. Later, the Colts tacked on a 2-yard rushing score during the final



Sophomore OT Easton Shumaker (53) and senior RB Connor Schuknecht (26) following Schuknecht's second rushing TD of the night at Coahulla Creek. Photo/Todd Forrest

minute. Young caught a team-high five passes for 79 yards; he rushed five times for 29 yards. Parker finished with two catches for 8 yards. The freshman duo of Mikey Davis and Jax Dillinger each caught one pass for 6 yards.

Sophomore Bentley Rich carried the rock eight times for 51 yards.

Senior linebacker Kaden Combs had 12 tackles, 1.5 sacks and 3 TFL. Easton Shumaker recorded 9 tackles, a TFL and half a sack. Ethan Lester finished with 9 stops.

Wallace ended the night with 7 tackles, a TFL and fumble recovery. Sophomore Alan Godinez made 7 stops

with a sack and a TFL. Lynch had 6 tackles, a forced fumble and a recovery.

Union County outgained Coahulla Creek 287-252 but accumulated 105 yards in penalties.

"The biggest takeaway from this game is eliminating all the stupid penalties before we play Sonoraville," Perry said.

**Up next:** Union County hosts Sonoraville (2-7, 2-5) at 7:30 p.m. Friday needing to win out to host a first-round playoff game.

"They key is getting on Sonoraville early," Perry said. "This is their last game of the season and they really don't have a shot of making

the playoffs.

"They throw the ball a lot and have a decent quarterback, so we're going to have to rely heavily on our linebackers and secondary in coverage."

With a win, the Panthers would improve to 5-4 following a bumpy start to the 2024 season.

"Coming into the year, a lot of people didn't think we'd be that good," Plott said. "But getting to five wins and getting into the playoffs would be huge for this program."

Patterson added, "We got these last two at home, and if we win them both, we get a playoff game at home. It's an awesome opportunity for us and we're excited."

## UCRD Football: 6th grade still perfect; 2nd and 4th add wins to playoff resume



Union County's 2nd grade team improved to 4-2 with a 25-0 win over Gilmer, and have a firm hold on the fourth and final playoff spot in the Mountain Athletic Conference. Photo/Shaye Cobb



Senior Braden Plott chases down a Coahulla Creek wide receiver during Friday's road win. Photo/Todd Forrest



On the heels of a thrilling 13-6 win over Gilmer, Union County's 4th grade team is 4-2 on the year and in third place in the MAC with a shot at moving up to second. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman linebacker Micah Wallace picks up a Colts fumble and goes the other way for a would-be scoop-and-score and a 41-7 lead, however, a late penalty flag on the return brought the Panthers back inside their own 15-yard line. Photo/Todd Forrest



Union County 6th grader Tripp Mayfield swallows up a Gilmer ball carrier in the backfield during his team's 28-0 win. The undefeated Panthers have not allowed a point in back-to-back games. In other games from Saturday, Union's 1st grade lost 34-0 to Lumpkin; Gilmer's 3rd grade defeated Union 32-8; Gilmer's 5th grade won 38-0. Photo/Todd Forrest