

Sports

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Softball: Trinity Queen chooses Anderson University

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Union County Softball standout pitcher Trinity Queen inked a scholarship last week with South Carolina's Anderson University.

Joined by family, coaches and teammates, Queen officially made her college selection during a ceremony hosted by Union County High School on Tuesday, Nov. 10.

In three seasons as the Lady Panthers' ace, Queen led Union County to the State Tournament three times, including a Sweet 16 berth in 2019. As the Region 8-AA Pitcher of the Year the same year, the junior right-hander finished with a 2.44 ERA and a 1.15 WHIP with 81 strikeouts over 91 2/3 innings.

This fall, Queen helped Union County climb as high as No. 5 in Class AA while claiming a regular-season Region 8-AA title. She finished her 2020 campaign with a 1.78 ERA and a 1.07 WHIP. Queen earned 70 batters allowed just 68 hits over 86 2/3 innings.

Lady Panthers head coach Stephen Mitchell, who took over before Queen's sophomore season, said he knew almost immediately that he had a winner in the pitcher's circle.

"You're always concerned that you're not going



Union County senior Trinity Queen (seated center) is joined by family and coaches during last week's signing day ceremony at UCHS. Photo/Todd Forrest

to have pitching, but once I saw her, during her sophomore season, I knew she had what it takes to play at the next level," he said. "There were times during her career where she was pretty unhittable."

While her talent was undeniable, Mitchell also realized very quickly that Queen is the type of player that makes

a coaches' job much easier, on and off the field.

"Anyone that knows Trinity knows that she's quiet and doesn't say a whole lot, so my first impression of Trinity was her work ethic," he said. "She does everything you ask her and she takes every rep at 100%, whether it's baserunning, hitting, defense or pitch-

ing; everything she does is at 100%. She is fully committed in the weight room and she set a great example for our program when she was here."

When it came time to choose where she would attend college, Queen credited the Anderson softball coach as playing a factor in her decision.

"It's a private Christian college and when I visited, the coach showed me around and introduced me to some of the girls," she said. "It's a beautiful campus, and I want to major in criminal justice, and they have a great criminal justice program."

"I want to thank my family, my brothers and my

coaches for helping me get where I am," she added.

"Even though she's a quiet person, once she opens up she's just a cheerful person and really, really solid individual," Mitchell said. "I wish her nothing but the best and she's going to do great things no matter what she decides to do."

Football: Undermanned Panthers no match for No. 2 Rabun County

Upcoming regular-season finale at Gilmer rescheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday

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Tiger - Rabun County (9-1, 3-0) scored the game's first 49 points, 35 coming in the first half, as they knocked off shorthanded Union County for the ninth straight time on Friday night, 63-14 at Frank Snyder Memorial Stadium.

Down two starters in the offensive backfield, quarterback Logan Helcher and running back Jonah Daniel, the Panthers finished under 300 total yards for the fourth consecutive game while totaling less than 100 yards rushing in their third straight outing.

After surrendering a 39-yard Gunner Stockton touchdown run less than 50 seconds into the contest, the Union defense kept Rabun off the board until the 9:43 mark of the second quarter.

Despite holding up well for much of the half, the flood gates eventually opened on the Panthers' defense via a 21-point onslaught over the final 5:10, putting Union County away for good.

"Our kids battled for four quarters," Union head coach Brian Allison said. "We try to teach our kids that that's what they need to do in life. When you walk off the field after playing hard for four quarters, you can hold your head up high."

Trailing 49-0, the Panthers' special teams finally broke through late in the third when JJ Littles returned a Rabun County kickoff 90 yards for a score. Fielding the ball at the 10-yard line, the senior safety looked for room along the right hash before cutting right and hitting a seam at the 30, allowing him to streak untouched down the Union sideline for six points.

With a running clock in



Senior JJ Littles returns a kickoff at Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

effect, Rabun opened the fourth quarter with a 58-yard scoring drive to build a 56-7 advantage. With under 6 minutes to play, the Panthers took over at their own 40 and needed just two plays to go 60 yards. The score came via a 40-yard hookup from senior quarterback Kaston Hemphill to junior receiver Keyton Chitwood. The connection resulted in a pair of firsts: Hemphill's first career passing score and Chitwood's first career touchdown grab.

Rabun took over with just over four minutes to play and Stockton quickly led the Wildcats back into the endzone with a 40-yard completion, an 8-yard keeper and a 5-yard scoring strike with 3:27 left, capping off a 63-14 victory.

Hemphill hit a leaping

Mason McCombs down the seam for 26 yards on the ensuing Union drive before scrambling for eight more, but the Panthers ran out of time at the Rabun County 31.

Trailing 7-0 in the early going, Hemphill and the Panthers stalled in Wildcats territory. Facing a third and 5 from the 26, Union County avoided a three-and-out when the senior signal-caller took a quarterback draw up the gut for 11 yards, sprung by a block from senior left tackle Christian Poe.

Hemphill hit McCombs for seven on the next play, then Carson Walker picked up four on third and 2.

The drive finally stalled in Wildcats' territory when Union's second-and-short run went for



Senior Kaston Hemphill in his first career start at QB. Photo/Todd Forrest

no gain, and the third-down play resulted in a loss of three and a punt.

"We could have went no-huddle with Kaston [Hemphill at quarterback] because he's done it before, but we were trying to slow the game down a little bit," Allison said regarding Union County's decision to scrap its hurry-up offense on Friday. "The main thing is, we just wanted to make sure everyone was on the same page with [Hemphill]."

A Rabun fumble near midfield handed the ball back to Union, but the Panthers went three and out as the first quarter came to a close.

The second quarter saw the Wildcats roar to life with 28 points to take a 35-0 advantage into the locker room. The

first score came on a 29-yard completion at the 9:43 mark of the quarter. Rabun would make it 21-0 when a Union interception on third down set up the Wildcats at midfield.

Six plays later, Rabun punched it in from four yards out with 5:10 on the clock.

"We tried keeping everything in front of us [on defense] but they are a very good football team," Allison said. "We did our best to contain them, but once [Rabun] got into the open field we had a hard time tackling them."

Another Union three and out allowed the Wildcats to make it 28-0 on a 22-yard run with 90 seconds to play before halftime. Using all of its timeouts on defense, Rabun got one last shot in

the final minute and connected on a 39-yard scoring toss with 10 seconds remaining.

After a Union punt started the third, Rabun needed only two plays to stretch its margin to 42-0 on a 38-yard run. A five-play scoring drive followed Union's third straight three and out as the Wildcats built a 49-0 advantage late in the third.

Hemphill finished 9 of 15 for 124 yards, one score and one interception. He also rushed four times for 15 yards.

Walker returned to action and led the Panthers with 61 yards rushing on 15 carries; McCombs caught four passes for 61 yards and Chitwood had two grabs for 49 yards and a touchdown.

Eli Peugh, Trace Wright and Hunter Young led the defense with five solo tackles each. Aaron Helton had four stops and Noah Underwood added three.

Rabun County finished with 10 plays of 20-plus yards while racking up 528 total yards (309 passing) on 49 plays. The Wildcats went 5-for-5 on third downs and ended the game with 22 first downs.

Next is a regular-season ending trip to Gilmer on Thursday at 7 p.m. Gilmer canceled last week's contest vs White County due to COVID-19-related issues. Pickens is the only common opponent between the Panthers and Bobcats with the Dragons coming away victorious 17-8 on opening night. Union County downed Pickens 28-14 in September.

Kickoff is slated for 7:00 p.m. Thursday in Ellijay.

"We're going to do everything in our power over the next four days to beat Gilmer and not worry about the playoffs until Friday," Allison said. "[Helcher] should be back Thursday and [Daniel] has a chance to return."