

Sports

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Union routs Riverside; will host State for first time since '95

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Gainesville - Last week the Union County Panthers went to Riverside on a mission, seeking an accomplishment that hadn't taken place in most of their lifetimes - hosting a State Tournament series.

The Panthers responded with a resounding 13-2 victory on Tuesday at Riverside Military Academy.

Now after an 18-year drought, the State Baseball Tournament returns to Blairsville for the first time since 1995, when Union defeated Adairsville in the Elite Eight.

"We're very excited and it's been a long time coming," senior centerfielder Jared Croskey said.

The Panthers needed a win over the Eagles along with a Jefferson win over Rabun to clinch second place in 8-AA a week early and allow Union to line up its pitching rotation before the State Tournament on May 3rd.

"We are going to make sure they are rested, just not too rested," Union County Head Coach Brandon Bradburn said. "So they (Everett and Duckworth) will pitch some and it will open up the rotation for other pitchers to get more experienced and get their mechanics dialed in."

Coach Bradburn and his squad realize there is a fine line between resting the pitchers, while not creating rust entering next week's State Tournament. Senior right fielder T Bentley said that the team's goal since the start of the season has been a State Championship but knows the Panthers will have to peak at the right time for a ring to become a reality.

"Our goal before the season was to win a Region Championship, unfortunately we fell just short of that," Bentley said. "We do get to host a State Playoff and our goal is to win state but we've got to take it one game at a time. We've got to keep the arms fresh but at the same time, maybe get the younger guys some experience with the upcoming games since we have clinched. The team as a whole can freshen up and get some of the soreness out of our bodies and be ready to go to work."

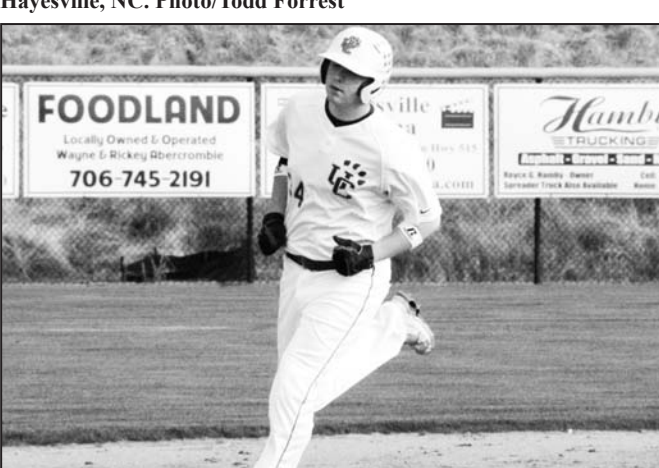
Coming off two losses,



Senior Cody Davenport on the mound in Union's recent game at Hayesville, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest



Seniors Jared Croskey and Zach Odom try to avoid a collision as Odom makes a diving catch in shallow center. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Wes Aulet rounds the bases after a homer. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior T Bentley



Senior Cooper Patton

where runs were at a premium, Bradburn wasn't the least bit concerned about the Panther bats falling into a late-season slump.

"It was a nice win to bounce back after losing to Jefferson and Hayesville," Bradburn said. "I wasn't worried that we lost to both of those teams, they had great pitchers that shut us down for the most part, and we are glad to see all of the great pitching so when we start the State Tournament we will have a better idea of what we will see."

A determined Panther squad took care of business by routing Riverside in five innings, then waited to hear the results of Rabun County's game at Jefferson.

Then, about an hour afterwards, while Union County was on the bus home, Bradburn received word via text message that Rabun had fallen 6-1 and Union would be hosting the first round of the State Tournament.

"I told the team as soon

as I found out," Bradburn said. "There was a huge roar from the back of the bus. So they are fired up."

Before the celebration could begin, Union had to do their part and take care of a scrappy Riverside squad that nearly knocked off the Panthers in Blairsville, 21 days prior.

Junior Kalvin Duckworth got the call from Bradburn and pitched four shutout innings in the win, until giving way to sophomore Tyler Odom in the fifth, who gave up two runs.

Duckworth helped his own cause in the early innings scoring the first run as the Panthers used small ball to post two runs in the first three innings. Bentley scored Duck on a fielder's choice in the first while Wes Aulet brought in pinch runner Robert Prunier with a sacrifice fly.

Union then blasted its way to a 13-0 lead with nine runs in the fourth. The Panthers sent 14 hitters to the plate in a fourth inning that included five walks, three singles, and

Cody Davenport double.

"The game was close early," Bradburn said. "We manufactured a run in the first from Duckworth's double. We scored once again in the third inning, again just playing 'ABC' baseball and having quality at bats. Duckworth got down a punt to move the runners over."

Bradburn expressed last week that he wanted his team to jump out to an early lead and be the aggressors from the get go, and in the fourth, the Panthers smelled blood in the water and went for the kill.

"When we broke out with nine runs in the fourth inning, we had six stolen bases early in that inning, putting pressure on their defense then coming up with clutch hits," Bradburn said.

Senior Zach Odom, who is the only returning starter from Union's last trip to State in 2010, led off the fifth inning with a solo shot. Union tacked on another run, making it a 13-0 game, midway through

the fifth.

Zach Odom was a freshman starter in the outfield when Union traveled to Hogansville, to take on Callaway in the opening round of the 2010 State Tournament. Unfortunately, the Panthers lost in three games, and were unable to advance.

When Zach Odom signed with Young Harris College last fall, he said that anything less than a State title would be a disappointment. With three State Tournament games already on his resume, Zach Odom believes this year's squad is better equipped than the 2010 group to advance well beyond the first round.

"I learned the first time around that you can't take it (State Tournament) for granted and we've got to come out with some intensity," Zach Odom said. "When we made it my freshman year, I was real nervous, and honestly, I was just trying to get the nerves out. This time around, we're going to come ready to play."

The Panther team that

reached State three years ago was more one dimensional compared to the 2013 edition according to Zach Odom, and the senior shortstop believes that the current team will be tougher for the opposition to prepare for.

"My freshman year we were more of a power hitting team," Zach Odom said. "We hit a lot of home runs that year. We're a better contact hitting team from top to bottom and our pitching is stronger and has more depth, so we should be in good shape."

Follow senior Croskey concurred and hopes that his class can provide a foundation for future classes to build on so Union County won't have to wait the equivalent of a high school senior's lifetime to host another series.

"I think we're a better hitting team than we were my freshman year," Croskey said. "Lane and Kalvin are more developed pitchers so I think we have a very good chance this year. I hope this continues year after year and we can start something special here with our baseball team."

Union will now await the No. 3 seed from Region 5-AA - Jordan, Bowdon, or Heard County.

Jordan (17-5) currently resides in second place by one game after splitting with third place Bowdon (11-9), but still have a doubleheader left with fourth place Heard (10-11) on Tuesday. Jordan leads Heard by two games in Region 5. However, Bowdon holds the tie-breaker over Heard by sweeping them in the regular season. Whoever, Union welcomes in Round 1, the Panthers will be well prepared, according to Davenport, a senior who plays left field and pitches.

"I like our chances," Davenport said. "We've looked at the other teams that we could be playing, and they looked to be about on the same level as some of the teams we've played this year, and done well against. We're just really excited to get to host (a State playoff series) for the first time since 1995."

"Our pitchers, Lane (Everett), and Kalvin are doing well, and me and Jared (Croskey) are starting to throw a little bit to add a little bit more depth."

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Union soccer honors its seniors; now await State Tournament locale after both teams clinch

By Todd Forrest
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Where Panther soccer team will play its State Tournament game is still a mystery.

What we do know is that both the Panthers and Lady Panthers are headed to the State Tournament for the first time since 2009.

After falling 2-1 to Jefferson, the Lady Panthers will travel to a Region 5-AA opponent, while the Panthers, who beat Jefferson 3-0, could still host if Rabun County were to lose on Tuesday. If the Wildcats are victorious, the Panthers will also travel southwest of Atlanta to a Region 5 opponent.

On Tuesday, Union County held its Senior Night festivities as the soccer teams hosted Class AAAA's Lumpkin County Indians, who have traditionally put out solid soccer teams year in and year out.

The Lady Panthers finished in a 1-1 tie after sophomore Camryn Carter scored inside the box in the 67th minute to force a draw.

Lumpkin County scored in the less than three minutes into the game, but the Lady Panther defense put the clamps on the Indians for the final 77 minutes of the contest.

Later, the Panthers were unable to force a tie after Lumpkin scored, making it a 1-0 game, and the lone goal held up and the Indians escaped with the victory.

Against Jefferson, Mad-dy Morlock scored off a rebound less than 10 minutes into the contest.

Meanwhile, T.J. Smith scored twice. Once off an assist from Jair Gonzalez and the other on a rebound. Eric Hougrand also added a goal, thanks to another Gonzalez assist.

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Anselly Gutierrez



Kenna Bauman



Kristena Zeger



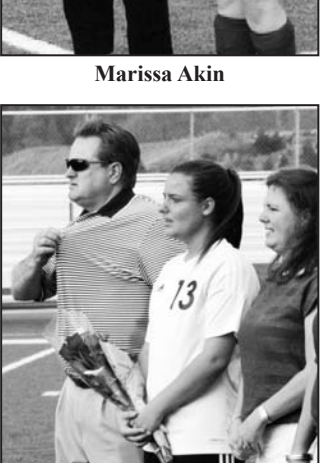
Marissa Akin



Mikala Jones



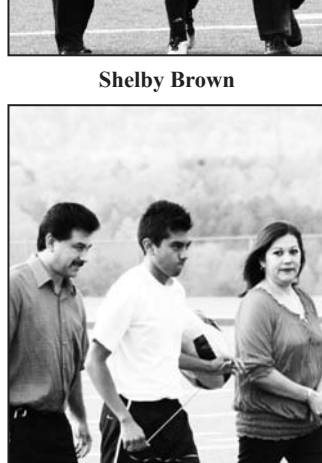
Shelby Brown



Taylor Burton



Eric Hougrand



Jair Gonzalez

Union County Panther and Lady Panther Soccer Senior Night photos by Todd Forrest

Tips from the Range

For several weeks now, we have been studying the mechanics and fundamentals of the golf swing to try and understand how the whole of the swing works. We've looked at balance, posture, grip, alignment, rotation and weight transfer. All of these elements need to be as close to proper as possible in order to give yourself a decent chance of moving the club to what our focus will be about this week and that is our ultimate goal, impact.

That magical point in the swing where the ball actually makes contact with the face of the club is what determines the flight and direction of the shot. All our efforts are focused on the split second that the ball leaves the ground and begins its journey to what we hope is our chosen target.

It's the impact, of the ball and the clubface, which gives us the instant feedback that determines what the next word out of our mouth will be when, or sometimes before, the swing is finished. The only way to control the impact is to correctly do the things which return the club to the original set-up position and those are the mechanics and fundamentals we have been discussing the past few weeks.

Once the club head has moved through the ball, or has passed impact, we move into what we call the "follow-through".

This area is the mirror image of the backswing with the triangle in front of the chest and the arms extended. This burning off of energy is where you will find out if you have made a good swing or a bad swing so always finish the follow-through or you will cheat yourself out of some good feedback.

Someone once asked the great Sam Snead before a tournament round if he was going to play a fade or a draw that day and he replied, "can't say cause I haven't been to the range yet, I'll let you know in a little while."

This is an example of how fickle the golf swing can be so if he had trouble from day to day then imagine what us normal people will go through. Good luck and I will see you on the course!

This information is vital in determining whether or not you made a good effort at swinging the club.

If we were to try and pick out the one thing that will affect impact the most, when the swing is done correctly, it would have to be the function of the forward arm.

Balance is always first and foremost the primary goal, but if the balance is perfect and the forward arm doesn't perform correctly, the shot can still end up bad.

The forward arm should be straight throughout the swing until the follow-through is nearly finished.

Always allow the forward arm to rotate naturally so the following arm will finish over the top of the forward arm after impact. This will make the swing feel smooth and graceful.

This concludes my overall look at the golf swing and the elements that define the proper function of the swing. Remember that you want to think of swinging the club and not "hitting" the ball.

The ball simply gets in the way as the club approaches the bottom of the swing. Swinging a golf club correctly is difficult and should be given the respect it deserves by practicing. Nobody hits the ball the same way as anybody else and rarely do we hit it the same way from round to round.

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