

Sports

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Union track team cracks top-20 at State despite limited action in 2014

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Albany - At less than a month old, the Union County track team left the State Meet with four top-15 finishes and a 20th place overall finish.

Union County High School hasn't featured a track team since the 1980's despite the tremendous success that the program has shown, dating back to the early 1970's.

The Panther and Lady Panther track stars participated in one meet before the Region 8-AA showdown in Jefferson. And although the program was still in its infancy, Union County proved that they're for real.

Following another strong showing at Sectionals during the final weekend in April, the Lady Panthers earned the privilege to compete in four events at the State Meet in Albany last weekend.

With only one senior, the Lady Panthers' 4x400 relay team of Emma Garrison, Kim Coyne, Amy Cummings, and Allie Stroman placed 15th.

"These girls have shown tremendous improvement since the Region meet only two weeks prior to State," Union County Track Coach Shawnetta Reece said. "They run a strong race and I'm very excited to get three of the four back for next year."

Julia Lindsey took 11th in



Union County track at Greater Atlanta Christian Schools in Norcross. (Standing L-R) Julia Lindsey, Amy Cummings, Kim Coyne, Allie Stroman, and Emma Garrison. (Front) Cristian Garcia.

the 3200M race with a personal best time of 13:03.

"She said going into the race that she was going to cut 20 seconds off her time, and she did," Coach Reece said. "She ran an amazing race."

Emma Garrison picked up a fifth place finish in the 1600M event with a personal best time of 5:23.

"Emma fell into a position that had her boxed in lane one for approximately 300m," Coach Reece said. "At that point, her speed was dictated by the runner

in front of her. She still managed to run her best time and finished 5th, missing fourth by only two-tenths of a second."

Garrison also recorded Union's best finish of the weekend by taking third in the 800M race with another personal best time of 2:24. The two-time Cross Country State Champion's pair of top five finishes is impressive considering she has spent the previous three months on the soccer team, not training for three different track events. Yet, she was still able to win a Region 8-AA

Championship in the 1600M despite the entire team only taking part in one meet prior to the Region Meet. Which says a lot about these athletes.

"There is a possibility for approximately 64 AA schools to compete at the State Championship meet in Albany," Coach Reece explained. "Out of the 64 schools, each school is allowed to enter two individuals into each event. That is roughly 128 contestants trying to get into the top 16 in order to even be able to compete at the State Champion-



Union County Lady Panther seniors: Allie Stroman (L) and Madison Rich (R) at the Region 8-AA meet in Jefferson last month.

ships. I am very proud of the UCHS girls who accomplished the top 16 in the State in their first year ever of running track."

Remarkably, Union County was able to finish 20th overall despite a limited number of events that they could compete in.

"As a team, we finished in the top 20," Coach Reece said. "This is without any field events to be scored since we only competed in running events this season. Hopefully in the near future, we can add field events."

As for the future, Union County is hoping to continue the track and field program, however, they don't have the facilities to hold meets. But UCHS has shown once more that they can compete with the best of the best on the track.

Union County's first ever State title came in field events when Larry Turner won a State Championship in the triple jump in 1972. Recently, Chris Jones won State in 2007 in the 1600M and in 2008, he earned gold in the 1600M and 800M.

Wesleyan bats overpower Panthers, put up 21 runs in two-game sweep

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Region 6-AA's private schools proved to be too much for all of Region 8-AA, including the State's top-ranked Jefferson Dragons.

Jefferson, Union County, Rabun County, and Oglethorpe County were a combined 0-for-8 in the first round of the Class AA State Tournament last Friday. Westminister, Lovett, Wesleyan, and GAC each advanced, unblemished, into this week's Sweet 16.

In Union County's (18-7)

opener with Wesleyan, Panther sophomore Joseph Mancuso got the call and kept the Wolves in check for more than four innings, but three Union errors were only made worse when the Panthers mustered just one Jake Sisum single on the offensive side.

In the early stages it looked as if Mancuso brought his A-game to the mound when he froze the leadoff hitter looking, and set the Wolves down 1-2-3 in the first.

Josh Daniel drew a leadoff walk for Union but three strikeouts ensued, leaving him stranded.

In the second, Mancuso escaped without any damage following a single and a walk. Sisum would lead off the Panthers' half of the inning with a single to left, but once again, Union went three-up, three-down, after the leadoff man reached.

A one-out walk spelled trouble in the third when Wesleyan's Jahmai Jones sent Mancuso's 1-0 offering over the centerfield fence for a 2-0 lead.

Daniel reached with another leadoff walk but a double-play resulted when Hughes lined out to short.

A single and an error put

two aboard in the top half of the fifth when the Wolves' Carter Hall hooked a deep fly off the foul-pole for a 3-run homer and a 5-0 lead.

Chase Barnett walked in the bottom of the fifth but the Wesleyan put up five more runs in the sixth, bringing Daniel to the mound to try and stop the bleeding.

Trailing 10-0, Union went down quietly in the in the bottom of the sixth, ending the game via the mercy rule.

Mancuso worked 5.2 innings, allowing 6 hits, 8 earned runs, 5 walks, and struck out four. Daniel finished the game

by recording one out following a base hit.

In the second contest, Union was the visitors and came to the plate first. After Wesleyan got a run in the bottom of the first, the Panthers answered with a game-tying run in the second.

Mancuso doubled to lead-off the inning and Sisum brought him in with an RBI single. Jackson Bur was hit-by-a-pitch and Lance Rich advanced the runners, putting two in scoring position but Union had no luck getting them across.

The Wolves would go for the jugular in the bottom half of

the second, getting six runs off senior ace Lane Everett. They later added a leadoff homer in the third for an 8-1 lead.

A leadoff double, a walk, a hit batter, and a single got Wesleyan another run in the bottom of the fifth. Later in the inning they scored on a fielder's choice and an error, making it 11-1 and ending the game by the mercy rule.

Everett was pulled in the fifth after allowing 10 hits but just 3 earned runs. He walked two and struck out one.

Odom gave up 2 hits and 2 earned runs in 1.2 innings of work.



Play at the plate: Barnett tags a Wesleyan runner out but pitcher Josh Daniel was called for interference, allowing the run to score. Photo/Todd Forrest



Jack Sisum slides into first base to beat the Wesleyan runner in a bang-bang play at first base. Sisum had three hits in the two-game series. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers allow four early goals, succumb to Westminister

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Just like the 8-AA baseball postseason, 8-AA was unable to pick up a victory on the soccer field against the private school region, a.k.a. Region 6-AA.

The Lady Panthers fell victim to an early scoring surge in an 8-0 loss to Westminister, the No. 3 team in the State.

The visitors came to Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium with an 8-6-3 record with all of their losses or ties coming to ranked schools in an assortment of classifications, from AAAAAA down to No. 1 GAC and No. 2 Lovett in

Class AA.

Westminister's first goal came 183 seconds into the contest when they went right up the middle for the score.

Goal number two came in the sixth minute of the game when they connected from just inside the box.

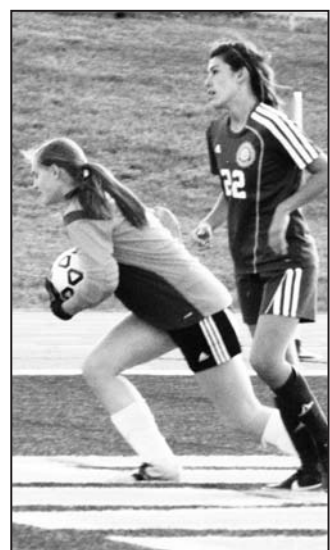
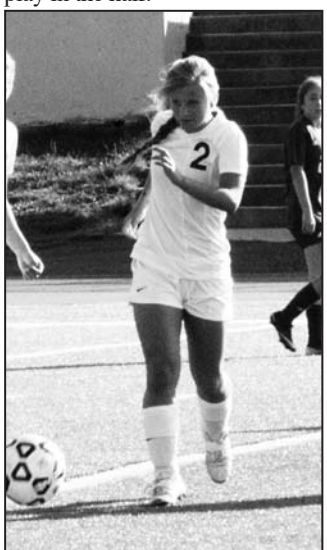
Westminister's onslaught continued as they scored their third goal in the ninth minute when a corner kick was unsuccessful but the rebound found the foot of a Lady Wildcat.

Then in the 11th minute of the first half, Westminister connected from long range for a 4-0 lead and almost 30 minutes left to play in the half.

However, the Lady Panthers' defense would buckle down and hold the Lady Wildcats in check. Westminister scored four more goals with the final one coming with 14 minutes to play. Yet the Lady Panthers surrendered four goals in the final 70 minutes after allowing four in a 7-minute span in the first half.

Like the Panthers, the Lady Panthers feature a young lineup and will no doubt be in the mix for a Region title in 2015.

Jefferson dropped their match to Wesleyan 8-1, Lovett defeated the visitors from Oglethorpe 10-0, GAC hosted Social Circle and also won 10-0.



GAC catches fire in final minutes of first half en route to 10-0 victory

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After clawing their way into the Class AA State Tournament, the Panthers were awarded the grueling task of taking on an 18-0 Greater Atlanta Christian team that is regarded by many as the best high school soccer team in the nation.

However, the unanimous No. 1 team in the State didn't scare the Union County Panthers (6-7) and Coach Tim Hunter's squad arrived in Norcross last Thursday ready to play. For nearly 33 minutes in the first half, Union limited the Spartans to just one

goal before the home team used three goals in the final 2:25 of the half to take a 5-0 lead at the break.

In the second half, GAC ended the game early by the mercy rule when they stretched the advantage to 10-0.

The Spartans didn't get on the board until the 16th minute of the game when they connected from the back-right corner of the penalty box.

They wouldn't score again until the 7:04 mark of the half when they scored from close range. GAC attacked the middle again for their third goal in the 38th minute.

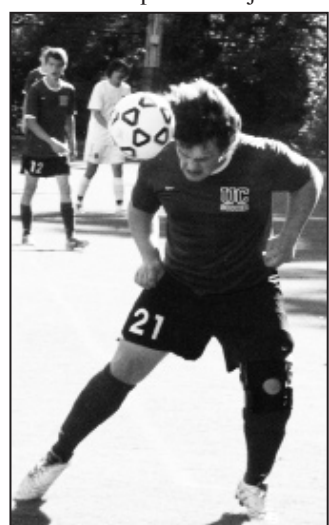
The game eventually got

out of hand when the Spartans tacked on two more goals in the final 54 seconds.

Goal number four came when Union was unable to clear and GAC scored on a tap-in with 54 seconds left. The fifth goal came with 3 seconds left on a break away through the middle.

The future is bright for the young Panthers as they squared off with the mighty Spartans without a senior, relying heavily on eight sophomores and freshman.

In other 8-AA action, Jefferson fell 1-0 to Lovett, Oglethorpe lost 5-0 to Wesleyan, and Riverside Military Academy traveled to Westminister and suffered a 7-0 defeat.



Left to right: Brett Dobbins (#21) with a header, along with John Spaulding and Keaton Dyer (left), were everywhere on the defensive end for the Panthers at GAC. Photos/Todd Forrest