

Sports

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Cross Country: Garrison to defend title as Hughes returns for 15th season

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After retiring from teaching last November, Union County Head Cross Country Coach Jackie Hughes didn't know if she would be allowed to return for 2013.

Fortunately, the correct, and obvious choice was made, as Hughes received word earlier this year that she could stay on as coach. Union County Cross Country will also welcome Shawnetta Reece as an assistant coach for 2013.

"After I retired, I didn't know if I would be allowed to coach," Coach Hughes said. "They're also not allowed to say anything to you until after you retire. It wasn't until February when I knew that I would even be allowed to. Then they don't rehire coaches until the spring, so I had to wait for all of that to happen. I've got Shawnetta (Reece) who has moved up and is helping me this year, and hopefully when I'm ready, she can take over."

In her 14 years of coaching, Hughes has placed 14 runners in the Top 10 in State and has two State Championships on her resume, with the most recent one coming last November.

On the heels of one of the most successful seasons in school history, Hughes has high hopes for this fall and expects both squads to compete for a Region Championship, both individually and team-wise, before returning to the State Meet in Carrollton on Nov. 9th.

And speaking of the State Meet, Coach Hughes has the No. 1 runner in Georgia with defending State Champion Emma Garrison coming back. A luxury that not many coaches are blessed with.

Garrison, only a sophomore, will be rejoined with two more of the Lady Panthers'



Union County Cross Country practice is off and running at the UCHS track. Photo/Todd Forrest

top five from the 2012 Region 8-AA meet, where Garrison took home top honors, leading Union County to a second place overall finish.

Junior Rachel Todd - sixth in Region 8-AA and sophomore Stephanie Busse - 13th in 8-AA are back and should allow Union to compete with Jefferson for the top spot in 8-AA.

The Lady Dragons return most of their team from 2012, where they picked up the 8-AA title, placing four girls behind Garrison in the top five.

"Jefferson is going to be our toughest Region foe," Coach Hughes said. "They edged us last year by just a little bit."

Rabun County, who finished third in 8-AA, returns its top three runners, while fourth place Oglethorpe County has its top two coming back.

"With Emma (Garrison), Rachel (Todd), and Stephanie (Busse), coming back, I have

a good core with those three," Coach Hughes said. "I've got a couple of new girls coming out this year. Anna Danek is looking like she can be a good one. She didn't run last year, but she has a lot of potential. So if I can just fill in around our main three, then we should be okay."

Last year, the Lady Panthers took advantage of a loaded freshman class. This season it will be the Panthers who will be the beneficiary of a talented freshman class, who are coming off a league championship at Union County Middle School in 2012.

"Last year, I got a lot of good runners coming out of the middle school for the girls," Coach Hughes said. "This year the predominant number coming up from the middle school is boys. It makes such a huge difference when your middle school sends you kids who are ready to go."



Coach Hughes (standing left) and Coach Reece (standing right) address the teams before the first practice. Photo/Todd Forrest

As for the boys, Region 8-AA Champion Jeremy Webb, who finished fifth at State, has graduated and is now a Young Harris College Mountain Lion. However, Union's brings back five of its top six runners off a team that reached State thanks to a third place finish in 8-AA.

Sophomore Cristian Garcia - 14th in 8-AA, junior Andrew Nelson - 17th in 8-AA, senior Ryan Rogers - 24th in 8-AA, and Aaron Stafford - 32nd in 8-AA all return.

"Our goal every year is to get to State," Coach Hughes said. "With what we've got coming back and from what I've seen with the young ones, I think we can do it."

With practice underway at the Union County High School track, Coach Hughes plans on starting off slowly, gradually increasing the intensity as the month rolls on, which concludes with a home meet at Meeks Park

on Aug. 29th.

"We're going to (start off with) a two-mile steady run, a little bit of speed work, then just build from there," Coach Hughes said. "I'm going to try and incorporate speed runs into every practice, where as last year, some days all we did was steady runs."

Around mid-August, practices will move to Meeks Park, where Union County holds its meets.

"We'll be up here (at the track) all this week," Coach Hughes said. "Next week we'll do our speed work here on Monday, then be at the park next Tuesday (Aug. 13th). I like to have them at the track for a little bit, get them used to each other, then take them to the park."

Most of Union County's runners, including Garrison, had a productive summer and were already in shape when they got to Coach Hughes for the official

start of practice.

"She (Garrison) has run throughout the summer, but she has taken some much needed time off, as well," Coach Hughes said. "She went to a running camp at the beginning of July and put in a lot of mileage at that. I don't think she's been running 45-50 miles a week, but she has kept her running up enough. She ran the Green Bean (5K run) in 21 minutes, so I'm not concerned about her."

Hughes added that she doesn't want any heroes in August or Garrison worrying about State early on, but simply wants her to be where she needs to be when the Region Meet rolls around in late October.

"I don't want her just focusing on a winning State again because that takes the joy out of running, and I don't want her to start having motivation issues," Hughes said. "I want her to keep that joy of running and not put too much pressure on herself. Trying to do so hard and if you put too much pressure on yourself it becomes even harder."

Hughes added that she's not looking at the early meets as a barometer of where Garrison will be in October. So nobody should panic if Garrison isn't winning every meet right out of the gates.

"As long as she's posting times in the 19-minute range, I'm not going to be worried," Coach Hughes said. "I know she's going to be dealing with the pressure of people expecting her to repeat, so I'm going to avoid taking that tact with her. A lot of her motivation is self-motivation so she doesn't need the intensity by putting extra pressure on her. I've never had a freshman win State, so I don't know how that will affect her. But she's such a good kid, and as long as she is running strong going into the Region Meet, she'll be okay."

Lady Panthers usher in season with 100 Inning Game



All the participants: players, coaches, alumni, family and friends all took part in the Lady Panthers annual 100 inning game on Saturday.



The Lady Panthers softball team strike a pose following the 100 Inning Game. The annual contest is held the last Saturday before the season opens. On Wednesday, Union will host White County in a scrimmage before taking part in the Lanier Point Invitational this weekend.



Seniors Allie Stroman (left) and Madison Rich (right) participate for the final time as players. The two are looking to reach their fourth Lanier Point Invitational Championship Game and their fourth Region Championship Game in October.

Mountain Gymnastics registration

Fall Registration for Gymnastics, Preschool, and Tumbling Classes has begun. Classes begun the week of Aug. 5th. Stop by the gym to sign up for a class. See our schedule at www.mtngym.com or call (706)745-3325.



MUSA registration ends Wednesday

Mountain United Soccer Association is ready for Fall Soccer. Registrations are currently being accepted for ages 4-18. Forms have been mailed to players who have participated in previous seasons. Forms are also available by visiting the league's website: www.mountainsoccer.org. The deadline for registration is Wednesday, Aug. 7th.



In Blairsville, CottBeverage is our community host for the soccer fields. In Hiawassee, the fields at the Towns County Fairgrounds are utilized through the cooperation of the local recreation department. The league is grateful for their commitment and support.

The fall season will begin in early September. Anyone who is interested in playing needs to register promptly. In some cases space is limited. MUSA is a volunteer run organization and

is also a 501C3 nonprofit. Any and all donations are directed to the youth player. Field Sponsors, Sign Sponsors and Team Sponsors are always needed. If you are interested in supporting the youth soccer players in our community through sponsorship and/or donation, please contact the association.

For additional information contact the league at 706-994-4351, musa.soccer@gmail.com or visit us on the web at www.mountainsoccer.org.

2013 UCHS Softball schedule

- Aug. 7th: vs White Co. (Scrimmage) 5 p.m.
- Aug. 9-10th: @ Lanier Tournament TBA
- Aug. 12th: vs Fannin County 6 p.m.
- Aug. 13th: vs North Murray 5 p.m.
- Aug. 19th: @ North Murray 5 p.m.
- Aug. 22nd: @ Rabun County 6 p.m.
- Aug. 23rd: vs Walnut Grove (@ North Georgia) 5 p.m.
- Aug. 24th: @ Oglethorpe County (DH) 1 p.m.
- Aug. 27th: vs Jefferson 5 p.m.
- Aug. 28th: @ Fannin County
- Aug. 31st: vs Greene County (DH) 12 p.m.
- Sept. 5th: vs Rabun County 6 p.m.
- Sept. 6-7th: @ Oconee County Tournament TBA
- Sept. 10th: @ Social Circle (DH) 4 p.m.
- Sept. 11th: @ White County 5:30 p.m.
- Sept. 12th: @ Jefferson 6:45 p.m.
- Sept. 16th: @ East Hall 5:30 p.m.
- Sept. 19th: vs Washington-Wilkes (DH) 4 p.m.
- Sept. 24th: 1st Round of Region Tournament TBA
- Sept. 28-30th: 2nd Round of Region Tournament TBA
- Oct. 5th: Region Championship TBA

2013 UCHS Football schedule

- Aug. 22nd vs White County (Scrimmage) TBA
- Aug. 30th vs Towns County 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 6th @ Fannin County 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 13th @ Andrews N.C. 7:30 p.m.
- Sept. 20th BYE WEEK
- Sept. 27th @ Washington-Wilkes 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 4th vs Oglethorpe County
- Oct. 11th @ Riverside Military Academy 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 18th vs Greene County 7:30 p.m.
- Oct. 25th vs Rabun County 7:30 p.m.
- Nov. 1st @ Social Circle 7:30 p.m.
- Nov. 8th vs Jefferson 7:30 p.m.