

Sports

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Soccer: Lady Panthers open season with shutout of Fannin

By Todd Forrest
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Goals from Madison Yost and Brenna Innis were all the offense Union County needed in its season opener as senior goalkeeper Emmi Schakat kept the Lady Rebels off the board for 80 minutes.

Yost's goal came in the 17th minute off an assist from Isabella Nottage, allowing the Lady Panthers to take a 1-0 advantage into the half. Early in the second, Schakat denied Fannin County a shot attempt that would have tied the game, allowing Innis to extend the lead to 2-0 later in the half.

With 16:06 to play, Innis drilled a free kick into the back of the net to put the Lady Rebels away.

Up next, the Lady Panthers will host Rabun County for the final time as non-region opponents at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 20. Next season, Union will rejoin the Lady Cats in Region 8-AA, where the two schools battled it out from 2000-2016 after leaving Region 8-A together at the conclusion of the 1999-00 school year.

The Lady Panthers currently own a seven-game winning streak over Rabun County -- dating back to 2010. During the streak, Union has outscored the Lady Cats by a combined score of 32-2 with five shut-



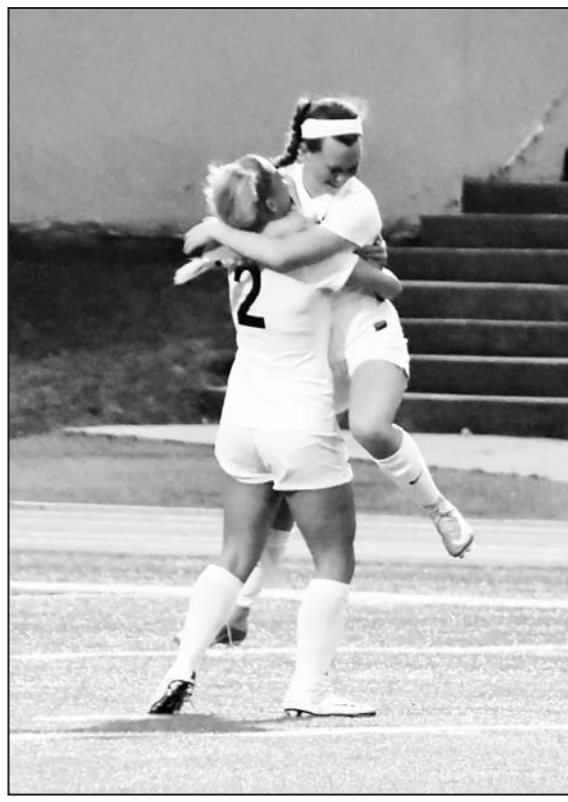
L-R: Isabella Nottage (17) recorded an assist in the win over Fannin County; Madison Yost (3) spotted the Lady Panthers an early lead with her first half goals.

The most lopsided margin came in 2015 when the Lady Panthers "mercy ruled" Rabun County 10-0. The last Union County loss in the series was in 2010 when they fell twice to the Lady Cats within a span of 21 days.

The Lady Panthers will return to action on Saturday, Feb. 24 when they host Rabun Gap at 2:30 p.m. This will be a

girls-only contest to balance the schedule after the guys visited Riverside Military Academy earlier this month.

Last year, the Lady Panthers edged Rabun Gap, 2-1 on the road. The Lady Eagles finished the 2017 season with a 6-13-1 record despite a brutal schedule that included Class AAAAA's Habersham Central, Class AAAA's Chestatee and West Hall, and last but



Ellie Garrison (2) congratulates Brenna Innis on her free kick goal during the second half vs Fannin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

not least, a 14-win Lakeview Academy squad from a very deep region in Class A.

Rabun Gap opens the 2018 season with a scrimmage contest vs Murphy, NC on Thursday, Feb. 22.

Union County will open its Region 7-AAA schedule on Tuesday, Feb. 27 when they visit Dawson County.

Last season, the Lady Tigers dominated Union, 10-1

in the regular season finale. Dawson County finished 2017 with a 14-3 record despite getting bounced by at home by lower-seeded Lovett in the first round of state.

The Lady Tigers' three losses came to a pair of Final Four teams from AAA (Lovett and GAC) and an Elite 8 squad from AAAAA (Blessed Trinity).

Dawson County (2-0) already has two games -- plus

one exhibition -- under its belt this month. The scrimmage resulted in a 5-0 win over Mountain View, while the other two ended with shutout victories for the Lady Tigers: An 8-0 win vs Pinecrest Academy and a 10-0 rout at Region 6-AAA's Murray County.

The Dawson County contest will get underway at 5 p.m. with the guys to follow.

Baseball: Union bats awaken in second game to force a split at Commerce

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Commerce - It took Union County one game to shake off its opening day rust before jumping out to an 8-2 lead after three innings of game two. The Panthers would cruise to a 9-5 victory to split the season-opening doubleheader at Commerce.

Chayton Schafer finished 2-for-3 with a solo homer in the third that extended the Union County lead to 7-2. Meanwhile, coach Robby Roxbury handed the ball to the trio of Ean Harkins, Jackson Colwell, and Cole Davis, who combined for a five-hitter while fanning six and walking 10 in the win.

As the Panthers struggled to find the strike zone early, Commerce took advantage with a run on three walks in the first; then a leadoff walk led to a run in the second.

Colwell worked around leadoff walks in the third and fifth innings but wasn't as fortunate in the fourth. After issuing a free pass to open the inning, the Tigers manufactured a run with a stolen base and a two-out single.

Commerce would trim the Union County lead to 9-5 in the sixth with a one-out walk followed by a base hit and a two-out, two-run double.

As for the Panthers, they were the beneficiary of nine



Senior shortstop Patrick Baggett with a two-run single vs Commerce to tie the score at 3-3 in game one. Photo/Todd Forrest

walks issued by the Tiger pitching staff.

Two walks, a hit-by-pitch, an error, and a Jonathan Everett sacrifice fly gave Union its first run of the game.

Trailing 2-1, the Panthers took advantage of back-to-back walks to spark a five-run second inning. With two aboard, Schafer loaded the bases with a bunt single before consecutive one-out singles by RJ Banton and Everett gave Union County its first lead of the season.

Later, with two down, Candler Colwell drew a bases-

loaded walk and Logan Dyer singled to left - spotting the Panthers a 6-2 advantage.

With one down in the third, Schafer homered to left then Patrick Baggett drew a base on balls and stole second. With two outs, Hunter Kelly scored Baggett with a single to center for an 8-2 Union County lead.

Alec Scott drew a leadoff walk in the fifth and immediately swiped second - setting the table for Baggett to drive him in with a grounder up the middle.



Junior Chayton Schafer went deep in game two for the Panthers' first homerun of the 2018 season. Photo/Todd Forrest

As for Baggett, the senior shortstop finished 1-for-2 with two runs, two walks, and an RBI. In game one, he went 2-for-2 with two walks and 4 RBIs in the Panthers' 9-5 loss.

Union County was limited to five hits while six costly fielding errors allowed Commerce to blow things open with four in the fifth and two more in the sixth.

Del Ruff got the start on the mound and the senior worked two innings before Cayden Rich took over to open

the third. Trailing 3-0 after three, the Panthers roared to life with three in the fourth. Kelley, Dyer, and Cayden Rich loaded the bases with three walks before Scott put Union on the board with a two-out, bases loaded walk.

With nowhere to put Baggett, the senior laced a two-run single into left - knotting the score at 3-3.

The Tigers, however, would regain the lead with a four-spot in the fifth. Two walks and a single chased Rich from the game and brought the left-handed sophomore Pierson Allison to the hill.

Commerce would record two singles off Allison before a fly ball to center ended the inning with Union in a 7-3 hole.

The Panthers refused to go away, and in the sixth, Everett singled, Allison walked, and Schafer advanced them with a bunt, bringing the switch-hitting Baggett to the plate.

Returning to the left side of the plate, Baggett singled to

right, scoring a pair and pulling Union within two at 7-5.

Unfortunately, the Tigers got both runs back in their half of the sixth, forcing Roxbury to call upon Banton to stop the bleeding.

Down 9-5, Kelley opened the seventh with a single but remained stranded after the next three Panthers were retired in order.

Kelley and Dyer each finished 1-for-2 with a run while Everett was 1-for-1 with a run.

Ruff, the starter, allowed four hits and three runs while fanning two in two innings. Rich worked 2.2 innings, striking out four and surrendering three hits and three runs.

Allison allowed five hits and three runs while fanning a batter in one inning on the mound. Banton induced a ground-out vs the only batter he faced.

In the second game, Harkins went two innings, fanning three and walking four. He yielded one hit and two runs - one earned.

Colwell scattered four hits over four innings while striking out two, walking five, and giving up three earned runs. Meanwhile, Davis recorded a walk and a strikeout while facing four batters in the seventh inning.

At the plate, Banton went 1-for-2 with a run, an RBI, and a walk. Everett finished 1-for-1 with 2 RBIs; Kelley was 1-for-2 with an RBI; Dyer drove in two during a 1-for-4 outing; Colwell walked twice and drove in one; Ruff finished 1-for-2; Scott scored three times and Davis scored once.

Up next is the home opener on Tuesday, Feb. 20 at 4 p.m. vs Gilmer -- last week's road contest at Gilmer was postponed.

After hosting the Bobcats, the Panthers will welcome Rabun County to town on Monday, Feb. 26 at 4 p.m.

Soccer: Panthers open 2018 with losses vs Fannin, at RMA

By Todd Forrest
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Union County's young soccer team dropped one on the road and one at home to open the 2018 season.

On Friday, Feb. 9, the Panthers traveled to Riverside Military Academy to face a legit Eagles squad that won 10 games to earn a spot in the 2017 State Tournament.

Despite an early free kick goal from Kobi Robbins, Union County found itself trailing 3-1 at the intermission. Riverside would pull away with three more goals in the second half to take a 6-1 victory.

Last week, the Panthers hosted Fannin County in the home opener but were unable to crack the scoring column behind a solid performance from its defense and keeper Nathan Helton.

The Rebels got on the board in the 17th minute before Union County settled down and began to seize control of the game. Unfortunately, several missed opportunities came back to haunt the Panthers, allowing Fannin County to escape with the victory. Union County will host



Union County goalkeeper Nathan Helton prepping for the home opener vs Fannin. Photo/Todd Forrest

Rabun County on Tuesday. The Wildcats are currently 1-0 on the year with a 3-2 win over Stephens County on their resume.

The Panthers are currently riding a four-game win-streak over Rabun County - dating back to 2013.

The girls game will get underway at 5 p.m. Tuesday with the guys to follow.

Union County will open its Region 7-AAA schedule on Tuesday, Feb. 27 when they travel to Dawson County for a 5 p.m. girls start-time.

Turkey Calling Contest February 24

NWTF - Coopers Creek Sportsmen for Kids will host the Steve George Memorial Sanctioned Turkey Calling Contest on Saturday, February 24th at the Union County Civic Center. Doors will open at 10 a.m. Contest begins at 1 p.m. Lunch will be available.

There will be a 20 Gauge Youth Model Turkey Gun Raffle. Lots of great door prizes will also be distributed.

Come out and support Coopers Creek Sportsmen for Kids and hear some of the best callers from the south.



For more information call Tony at 706-897-2032 or Troy at 706-897-5211. N/Feb14 21/4CA

FULL-OF-LIFE

Outdoor Exercise and Walking Program
Union County Recreation Department
Spring 2018 Session
Ages: 50 and over

It is that time of year! Do you have spring fever? Do you feel you need to be outdoors and moving? The Program Director of Union County Parks and Recreation will be leading a free walking session two times a week, and two days a week of outdoor exercise using our park equipment. Both walking and outdoor exercise run for 12 weeks in the upcoming spring session! We have two levels of walking to choose from. Meeting times run for approximately 60 minutes.

**Spring Session 2018 Registration begins on February 12, 2018 and ends March 1, 2018 at the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn Street)

Registration must be done in person. If you have any questions, you can call (706) 439-6074 and ask for Jennifer.

