

Sports

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Track and field: Panthers begin home stretch ahead of Region

Union County's postseason prep continues Saturday at Buford

By Todd Forrest
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Murrayville - Union County Track and Field is gearing up for its Region 8-AA meet with a step-up in competition, beginning with a pre-spring break trip to Chestatee's Lake Lanier Classic Invitational on April 1.

As the smallest school in attendance, Union County challenged some of the top programs in northeast Georgia, including Flowery Branch, Jefferson and White County. Overall, the Panthers were one of eight teams in attendance at their deepest meet to date.

This weekend, Union will continue to punch up a weight class when they participate in Buford's Dexter Wood Invitational on April 16. Joining Union is a handful of Class A and AA programs, e.g., Tallulah Falls, Atlanta Classical Academy and South Atlanta. However, rounding out the field is a long list of higher-classification opponents like Cedar Grove, Clarke Central, Duluth, Grayson, Lanier, Monroe Area, West Hall and host Buford.

Meanwhile, during its first major test of 2022, Union County took home a pair of gold medals and 11 top-three finishes at the Lake Lanier Classic Invitational.

Union County's 4x400 men's relay squad of Brady Guild, Hunter Hartzog, Zander Rotko and Trace Wright finished first, crossing the finish line in 3 minutes, 32.24 seconds. The Panthers edged second-place Flowery Branch (3:33.93) by nearly 1.7 seconds while pulling away from third-place Jefferson (3:37.96)



Union County Senior Hayden Payne covers a personal-best distance of 17-10 in the long jump at Chestatee. Photo courtesy of Alicia Payne

and the rest of the eight-team field.

As for Rotko, the sophomore also collected individual gold, clocking in at 51.94 in the 400M dash. Rotko defeated White County sophomore Ethan Anderson (52.95) by more than a second with Jefferson freshman Michael Roberts (53:05) and White County sophomore Jackson Jarvis (53.21) rounding out the top-four in a tightly-contested three-way battle for second.

In ladies' action, senior

Lexi Sisum turned in a runner-up performance (28.05) in the 200M dash, falling by three-tenths of a second to Chestatee freshman Amanda Nunez (27.75). Fellow senior Hana Gregory placed second (2:34.57) in the 800M race, just over 1.5 seconds back of Jefferson sophomore Kiley Powell (2:33.00).

Another senior, Hannah Long, came in second during the 300M hurdles event with a time of 49.80. Jefferson senior Josie Loggins set the pace with



Senior Daniel Snow placed sixth at Chestatee with a 5-6 in the high jump event. Photo courtesy of Alicia Payne

a 47.16. Junior Mattie Brookshire's throw of 100-feet was good enough for second in the discus, behind White County's Kendra Dye, who logged a 102-03. Senior Hunter Hartzog finished second (2:00.05) in the men's 800M race behind Jefferson's Matthew Schoeder's time of 1:57.75.

Bronze-medal performers included the men's 4x200 relay team of Rotko, Wright, Eli Peugh and Wilson Walker, who clocked in at 1:34.36, right on the heels of runner-up Jefferson (1:34.10). Neither squad was able to challenge West Hall, who paced the field with a 1:32.38.

Sisum placed third in the 100M dash with a 13:58 -- three-tenths of a second back of Lumpkin County senior runner-up Mercedes Housman and one second behind Jeffer-

son's Jada Pittman. Sophomore Natalie Payne came in third at 6:11.84 in the 1600M event, edging fourth-place teammate Allie Brey by less than two seconds (6:13.74). The Jefferson duo of Powell and Emily Byrd ran away from the pack with times of 5:52.13 and 5:52.84, respectively.

Payne also took home bronze (13:21.76) in the 3200M race, finishing more than 17 seconds back of second-place Abbie Hilchie of Lumpkin County.

Senior Mia McCombs placed fourth in the long jump, Brey came in fourth in the 1600M race and Ellie Adams finished fourth at 800M. The 4x400 girls relay team of Adams, Brey, Gregory, Long and Noel Hyatt was fourth. Rounding out the Union ladies' top-five performances

were Brey in the 800M, Long (100M hurdles), Linley Jones (300M hurdles), Brookshire (shot put) and the 4x100 and the 4x200 relay teams.

Guys finishing amongst the top five were Trace Wright in the 200M dash and Kanon Abercrombie (110 hurdles).

Other UCHS athletes participating at Chestatee were Gage Barnes, Renee Bravo, Brooklyn Brown, Katie Byers, Logan Duckworth, Ivan Garcia, Ellie Geavonta, Tyler Grasty, Benton Gregory, Ethan Hill, Jonah Keluth, Michael Kronz, Tyler McBride, Luke McPherson, Brady Mull, Sam Page, Hayden Payne, Noah Payne, Katelynn Rash, Giovanna Salazar, Daniel Snow, Nolan Thompson, Eli Underwood, Lydia Wagner, Taylor Whitehead, Alec Wilder, Griffin Young and Maddox Young.

Volleyball: Morgan Fussell discusses her college decision

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Senior Morgan Fussell inked a scholarship last month to continue her volleyball career at Penn State Altoona.

At the conclusion of her signing day ceremony at UCHS, the *North Georgia News* sat down with Fussell to get the full story on her frantic week back in February that culminated with a scholarship offer to the Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference program.

NGN: How did you end up in Pennsylvania? Did they reach out to you, how did it all come about?

MF: I had already been accepted there in the fall but I was still unsure, so my parents and I decided to do a tour of the campus. And then, on a whim, my recruiting coach texted my mom and they started talking and [the recruiting coach] suggested that I email the [Penn State Altoona] coach since I was going up there. So I emailed him on Wednesday, drove up on Tuesday, met him on Friday and accepted his offer on Saturday.

NGN: So Altoona was basically your final shot at playing college volleyball, right?

MF: Yes. We were driving home Saturday when I accepted the offer officially. This is a day that I've been waiting for for a long time.

NGN: What was it about Altoona that attracted you to apply in the first place?

MF: I had applied to eight schools and only heard back from



Morgan Fussell (seated-center) with UCHS coaches and teammates at signing day. Photo/Todd Forrest

a couple. One of them being Auburn, where I was accepted. But Altoona was the one school where I could possibly play volleyball, so it was a perfect fit.

NGN: What was your impression during the visit?

MF: I loved the campus and everyone was so nice. My dream has always been to play collegiate volleyball, but after awhile, I started to think it wasn't possible. But to have the opportunity to play at such a good school is just the best possible thing for me and I'm excited to get up there. It's very close to the main campus of Penn State so I'll be able to go to football games and everything else.

NGN: What do you plan to major in and where do you see yourself in four years?

MF: Nursing. I would love to move to Boston and work at the children's hospital up there.

After that, I don't know, but I would really love to move to Boston after I graduate.

NGN: Is there anything you would like to accomplish on the volleyball court before you graduate college?

MF: The team hasn't won conference in a few years so I would like to help them accomplish that. But I just want to do whatever I can to help the team out.

NGN: Is there anyone you want to thank or mention?

MF: Obviously my parents, because this wouldn't be possible without them. And really, my entire family. My grandmother passed away in January and she had come to every one of my games this past year, so I really wish she could have been here today.

Then my coaches, because I wouldn't be where I am today

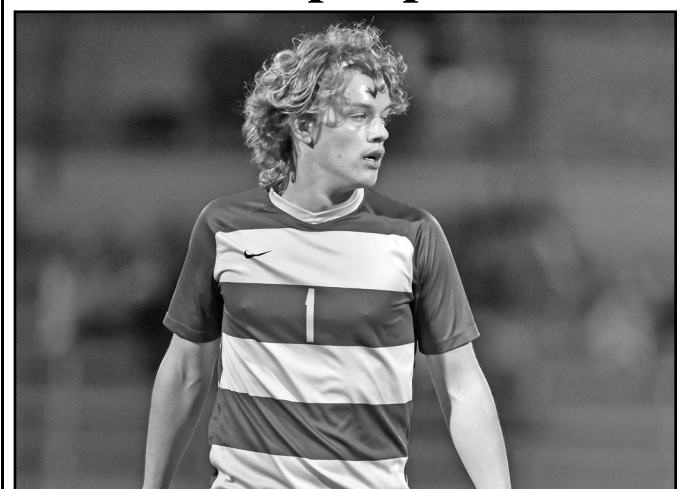
without them. My teammates - they made it so incredibly easy to succeed individually and as a team. All my friends and co-workers - the ones that are here and the ones that couldn't be here today.

I also want to thank Paige Ellis. I would drive to Woodstock every Sunday to play volleyball with her. But I just want to thank everyone who supported me on this journey, whether it was four years ago or today.

NGN: Looking back four years ago at your first volleyball match, would you have ever imagined that today would be possible?

MF: No way. Four years ago, I would have never thought I'd be sitting here today. Maybe a year ago, then I started to realize it was possible, but not freshman year. I knew nothing at all about volleyball back then.

Soccer playoffs kick off, baseball wraps up this week



Senior Kyler Robbins looks to remain undefeated in the first round of State when Union hosts ESA on Friday. Photo/Todd Forrest

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Union County returns from spring break with postseason soccer and baseball's Region 8-AA finale this week.

Union baseball hosts Rabun County on Tuesday in a three-game set to determine the No. 3 and No. 4 seeds in the upcoming Class AA State Tournament. A Friday doubleheader in Tiger concludes the series where the Panthers need to take at least two of three to secure third.

The state playoffs begin April 29-30 with Union going on the road in round one, where the top-two seeds from Region 6-AA await the Panthers and Rabun County.

As of this writing, Class AA's top-ranked Pace Academy and second-ranked Lovett seem like the probable round-one

landing spots for 8-AA's No. 3 and 4 seeds.

Meanwhile, the top-seeded Lady Panthers soccer team will host Therrell in the first round of the Class AA State Tournament at 6 p.m. on Thursday, April 14.

The sixth-ranked and top-seeded Union County men will host Elite Scholars Academy on Friday, April 15 at 5:30 p.m.

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Golf: Four Panthers break 46 vs. Murphy; Union hosts Gilmer on Tuesday



L-R: Sofia McNabb and Braedon Gay during a recent match at Old Union Golf Course. The Union County men suffered a 10-stroke loss to Murphy in windy conditions on March 31. Four golfers recorded scores in the 40s, led by a 45 from both Jett Busbee and Turner West. Huston West and Gay each shot a 46 and Locke Thomas fired a 50. Union County golf will host Gilmer on Tuesday, April 12 at Butternut Creek. Photos/Todd Forrest

UCHS Winter Sports Senior Night: Swimming and Basketball Cheer

Senior Night photos by Todd Forrest



Senior swimmer Cassie Flowers with family



Senior swimmer Michael Leird with family



Senior swimmer Preston Perren with family



Senior swimmer Rachel Reid with family



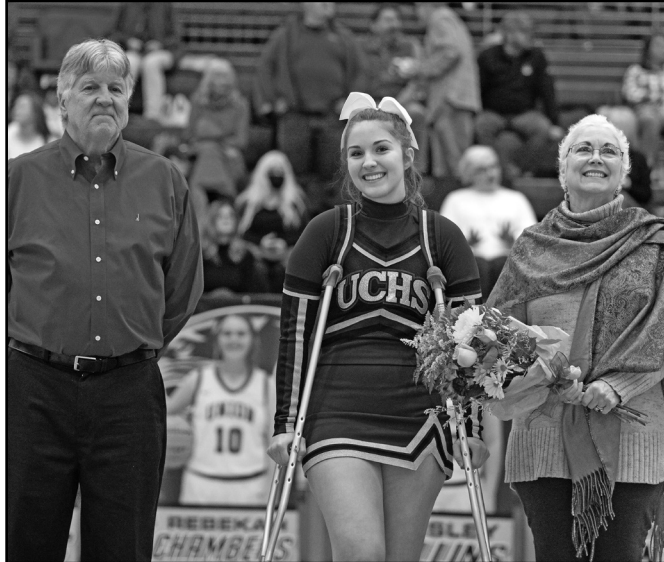
Senior swimmer Hunter White with family



Senior cheerleader Jaiden Anderson with family



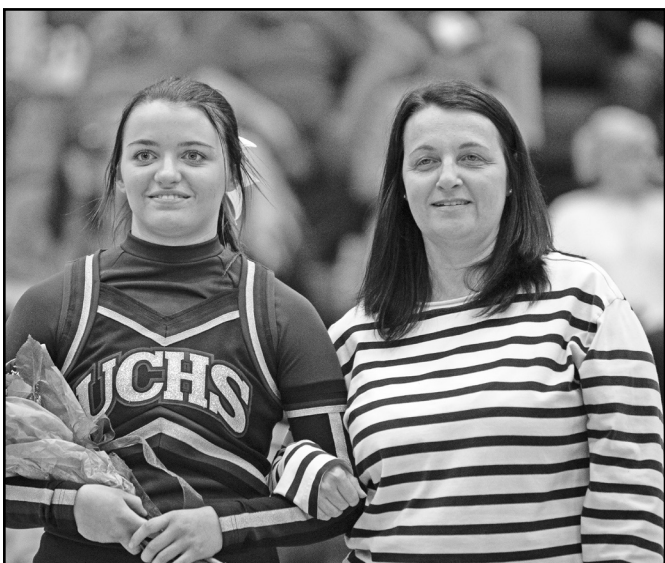
Senior cheerleader Niya Cobb with family



Senior cheerleader Savannah Evans with family



Senior cheerleader Grace Ganas with family



Senior cheerleader Emily Pollin with family



Senior Cheerleader Tori Tracy with family



UC Wrestling seniors: Brady Guild, Kanon Abercrombie, Landon Clark and Sean Phillips (with coach Justin Byers) were recognized at a separate ceremony earlier in the winter. Photo/Todd Forrest