

# Sports

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## Track: UCHS collects four top-four finishes at State

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**Columbus** - Union County recorded four top-four finishes at last weekend's Class AA State Championships behind the individual performance of senior Hunter Hartzog (800M), along with the boys' 4x400 and 4x800 squads, plus the girls' 4x400 team.

Clocking in at 1-minute, 59.53 seconds, Hartzog, who shaved two-tenths of a second off his preliminary time, crossed the finish line on the heels of third-place Grant Thompson of Pace Academy (1:59.27), and less than one second back of runner-up Buck Ledford of Banks County (1:58.72).

Model junior Simon Schabert took home the state title with a time of 1:56.30 to pull away from the three seniors rounding out the Class AA top four.

The girls' 4x800 team posted a time of 10:28.34 to finish 13 seconds back of third-place Bleckley County. First-place Pace Academy and runner-up Oglethorpe County distanced themselves from the pack, crossing the line at 9:44.81 and 9:47.96, respectively.

The guys' 4x800 squad clocked in at 8:18.33, less than a second behind region-rival



UCHS picked up six top 10s during last weekend's Class AA State Championships in Columbus. Union track will bid farewell to seniors Kanon Abercrombie, Allie Brey, Hana Gregory, Brady Guild, Hunter Hartzog, Hannah Long, Tyler McBride, Mia McCombs, Hayden Payne, Lexi Sisum, Daniel Snow and Trace Wright. Photos courtesy of Shannon Brey.

Banks County (8:17.62), who finished third. Region 6-AA took home the top-two spots with Lovett coming in second at 8:12.85, more than 10 seconds back of Pace Academy (8:02.75).

In the boys' 4x400 race, Union County's time of 3:30.27 put them less than 1.5 seconds back of third-place

Putnam County (3:28.99) and less than 4 seconds behind runner-up Pace Academy.

Woodville-Tompkins took home the gold medal with a time of 3:23.23.

Sophomore Zander Rotko placed seventh in the 400M race, clocking in at 51.58, almost a second slower than his prelim time of 50.76. Senior

Allie Brey finished ninth in the high jump, clearing 4-feet, 10 inches. Brey also placed 15th in the 800M prelims at 2:35.19.

Senior Hana Gregory was 11th in the 800M prelims at 2:32.81 and Ellie Adams placed 13th at 2:33.83.

Rounding out the girls' weekend was Linley Jones,



who came in 15th in the 300M hurdles, crossing the finish line at 50.22.

Kanon Abercrombie placed 12th in the prelims of the 110M Hurdles (16.93), and the 4x200 relay team came in 13th at 1:36.43.

The Union County boys placed 18th in the team standings with 17 points, one point

back of Fitzgerald and one ahead of Northeast Macon.

With 5 points, the Union girls finished tied with Josey and Toombs County for 27th -- one point behind Glenn Hills, Gordon Central and Jasper County (Monticello). Pepperell placed 30th with 4.5 points and Fannin County came in 31st with 4 points.

## Football: Perry pleased with spring results, loaded summer slate on deck

### Panthers to pick up intensity in June, prep for new-look Region 8-AA

By Todd Forrest  
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Noah Helton, David Heredia, Wilson Walker and incoming freshman Dominic Tarbert took home awards as Union County's top spring performers last week, wrapping up the 10-day practice session ahead of the 2022 football season.

After the first week of spring ball, second-year head coach Micheal Perry praised his team's intensity, which continued at a high level during week two.

"I liked the intensity both weeks, especially on Fridays," he said. "A lot of teams don't [practice on Fridays], but we do, and I've been very pleased with the intensity and attitude. We mainly kept hashing on the fundamentals, that was our main emphasis with everything [in week two], just like during the first week."

Additionally, keeping the 70-plus participants healthy remained a perpetual fixation for Perry and his staff, and despite a few pre-existing injuries that lingered into the spring, Union County escaped without any significant health concerns.

The Panthers will spend the next two weeks in the film room and weight room ahead of the summer's first 7-on-7 competition on Monday, June 6 at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

Union County will host 7-on-7 action every Thursday in June ahead of the mandatory July 4 dead week. Voluntary summer workouts continue throughout July until official practice begins in August.

**The 2022 Schedule**  
Region 8-AA received a makeover during last winter's Georgia High School Association (GHSA) reclassification



Union's defense applies pressure in the backfield during spring pass-blitzing drills. Photo/Todd Forrest

The most notable changes saw Rabun County and Elbert County drop down to Class A, while Riverside Military Academy (alongside Class A-Private's Lakeview Academy) withdrew from the GHSA to join the Georgia Independent Athletic Association (GISA).

As for Rabun County, the departure of the eight-time defending region champion hasn't resulted in an overflow of jubilation across 8-AA, because taking their place is Class A-Private powerhouse, Fellowship Christian.

Athens Academy, a Sweet 16 program in Class A-Private from a year ago also makes the jump to 8-AA. Furthermore, past 8-AA members East Jackson and Providence are back in the region for the first time in more than a decade.

The Panthers will take the field on Aug. 12 for a scrimmage contest vs. Chestatee. The season officially gets underway on Aug. 19 when Union County hosts the two-time defending Region 7-AA Champion, Fannin County.

Union County welcomes Lumpkin County to Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Aug. 26 before hitting the road on Sept. 2 to renew its rivalry with Towns County in the Panthers' first visit to Hiwassee since their 45-7 victory in 2018.

Following a road trip to Armuchee (Rome) and a home contest vs. West Hall, Union County will take consecutive bye weeks ahead of the Region 8-AA opener at Banks County on Oct. 7.

The Sept. 9 trip to Rome will mark the Panthers' first meeting with Armuchee, while

their Sept. 16 matchup will end a 31-year break between Union County and West Hall. The Panthers are 0-2 all-time vs. the Spartans, suffering a 24-3 home loss in 1991 and a 54-0 loss in Oakwood a year earlier.

After attempting to win their seventh straight over Banks County, the Panthers host region newcomer Providence Christian on Oct. 14. Both the Leopards and the Storm finished 2-8 overall in 2021, so a 2-0 start in 8-AA this fall seems very doable for the Panthers.

East Jackson comes to Blairsville on Oct. 21, fresh off a 3-7 campaign in 2021 that saw the Eagles defeat Banks County, 28-0, but fall to 41-34 to Gilmer. The Panthers are 2-1 all-time vs. East Jackson, picking up road wins in 2008 and 2010 to bookend a 2009 home loss.

Union County meets Ath-



Rising-senior Wilson Walker is one of the frontrunners to take over the placekicking and punting duties for outgoing all-region senior Tyler Robbins. Photo/Todd Forrest

ens Academy for the first time since 1995 when they travel to the Classic City on Oct. 28. Athens Academy, who won all four previous meetings with the Panthers, went 8-4 a year ago, en route to a Sweet 16 berth in Class A-Private. The Spartans opened the year ranked fourth but slipped to 10th following consecutive one-sided losses to No. 8 Wesleyan and No. 3 Prince Avenue.

Athens Academy graduated its only all-state selection, 6-3, 275-pound defensive lineman Johnerio Holt, who signed with Samford in January.

The regular season concludes when region-favorite Fellowship Christian comes to town on Nov. 3. The Paladins, who climbed as high as No. 3 in the Class A-Private rankings, advanced to the final four a year ago, falling 38-28 to eventual

runner-up Prince Avenue.

Fellowship Christian graduated Region Player of the Year and Class AA Defensive Player of the Year, Josh Cole (RB/LB). Also departing is all-state linebacker Garrett Wagner, who saw action in the backfield as well, rushing for 10 touchdowns over his final two seasons.

Returning for the Roswell school is rising-senior all-state selections Josh Albee (DL), Caleb McMickle (QB) and Hudson Pizza (OL).

McMickle, a 6-2, 190-pound quarterback has received offers from Houston, Mercer, Samford and William & Mary.

His favorite target, Josh Milhollin, returns after hauling in 55 catches for 934 yards and six scores, while earning an all-state nod as a sophomore last fall.

# Getting to know incoming volleyball coach Megan Brown

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UCHS volleyball's sixth season gets underway in August with newcomer Megan Brown replacing outgoing coach Anna Chapman as the fourth head coach in program history.

Brown takes over a Union County volleyball program coming off back-to-back Class AA final four appearances, but with a deep and experienced senior class in tow for 2022-23, expectations will be even higher for the two-time Area champions.

Brown, a California native, graduated from Napa High School before attending Cal Poly (California Polytechnic State University).

She later transferred cross-country to Boone, NC, graduating from Appalachian State. Later, she earned a master's from Kennesaw State and a specialist degree from Piedmont.

A mother of three, Brown coached volleyball for three seasons at Marietta High School then spent a year coaching high school volleyball in Japan. Upon returning stateside, she took some time off from coaching to start a family but continued teaching, most recently at a Woodstock elementary school.

Along with her coaching duties at UCHS, Brown plans to teach math at Union County Middle School.

On Monday, the *North Georgia News* spoke with Brown, who is in Blairsville this week for team tryouts.

**NGN:** Living your whole life out west, what made you transfer to Appalachian State?



Megan Brown (far right) with her husband and three kids that range from sixth to 10th grade.

**MB:** Having been born and raised in California, I just wanted to experience something different and try something new. We had friends [in the area], so we had visited a few times and I always loved the area.

**NGN:** Speaking of different experiences, what was it like coaching in Japan? Do you speak Japanese?

**MB:** I don't. I learned a little but the school I was at was an international school, so a lot of students had lived [in other countries]. The girls I coached had experience living abroad but volleyball was our common language. I definitely learned how to adjust and it gave me a different respect and outlook on the game. I learned a lot from [the students] and they learned a lot from me. It was just a very neat experience living over there.

**NGN:** After taking some time off from coaching, what inspired you to get back into it? And what was it about Union

County that caught your attention?

**MB:** I've always wanted to get back into coaching. I have a love for coaching and teaching. My kids are always my No. 1 priority but my youngest [child] is about to start middle school, so now that they've gotten older, I have [more time to devote to coaching].

We have always loved Blairsville and I've always hoped to get up here. We've had a place here for about four years and I've always kept an eye open for any positions [at Union County]. When I saw there was a coaching and teaching position open, everything kind of fell perfectly into place. We're just beginning the transition, but everyone has been so welcoming. These last few weeks have been very exciting for me and my family. I've met the [team] and the staff, and everyone has been great, so I'm looking forward [to working] in a smaller

county. I think it's going to be a great experience for me and my family.

**NGN:** What is something you want your volleyball teams to be known for? Their trademark?

**MB:** I encourage excellence in academics, athletics and personal development. [I hope to] foster leadership skills, discipline, time management and really, just life skills that will help them on and off the court. I'm very big into teamwork, bonding and creating a family atmosphere.

I believe in building relationships with the girls and teaching them skills that will last well beyond their years on the volleyball court. We'll grow together, we'll celebrate together, overcome obstacles together, but in the end, it's about teaching skills that will help them past high school.

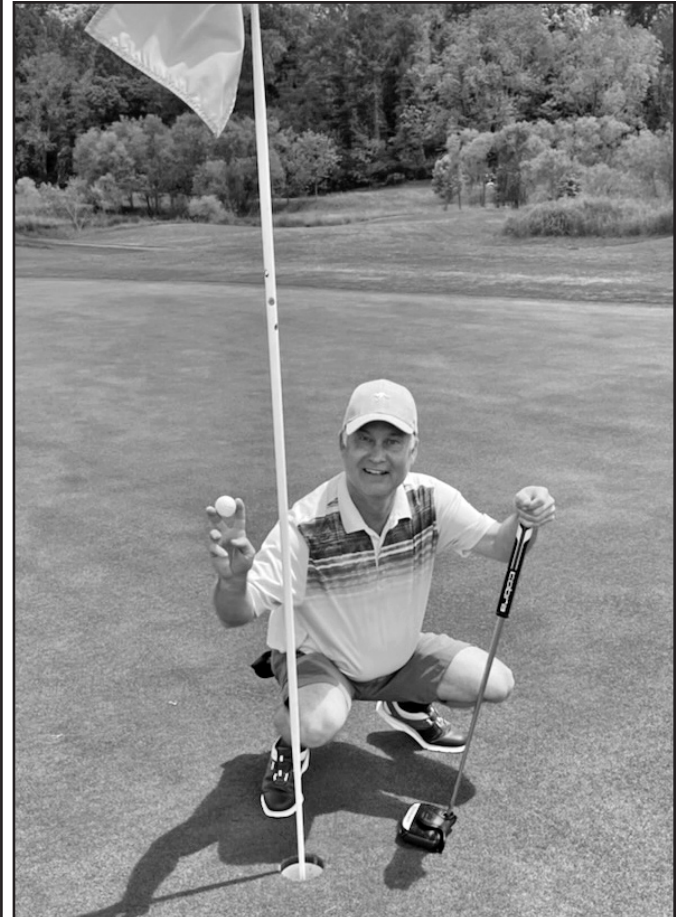
**NGN:** What do you know about this team and the Union County volleyball program? Of course, the last two years we've reached the final four but eventually ran into the same team both times.

**MB:** I think we have a lot of talent and I think it's great that we're creating a middle school program. That will really help the high school in years to come. Having a middle school program in place is extremely important to building that foundation for the high school.

**NGN:** Anything else you want to let the community know about yourself?

**MB:** I'm super excited to bring the family to Union County. I can't wait to start teaching and coaching and we're just really excited to begin a new chapter up here.

# Jay Burks registers hole-in-one



Congratulations to Jay Burks on his hole-in-one at Blairsville's Old Union Golf Course. Burks' ace came May 13 on the 154-yard Par-3 sixth hole.

## Next week: Coaching news, State golf, scholarships, All-Region teams

Next week's *North Georgia News* will continue its ongoing series on Union County's latest coaching hires.

In addition to the coaching changes for the 2022-23 school year, two more UCHS student-athletes, Rebecca Chambers and Caleb John, will continue their athletic careers after inking college scholarships.

The final GHSA State

Champions were crowned on Tuesday following the State golf matches. The results from Union County's two rounds in Warner Robins will be included in next week's newspaper.

In other news, UCHS spring sports collected an assortment of All-Region individual accolades, and Union County softball said goodbye to its coach.

# A Senior Moment: Class of 2022 dominates UCHS Ulympics



The seniors won the Class of the Year (COY) trophy, taking first place in academics, athletics, GPA and school spirit. The seniors and sophomores tied for first in discipline; the freshman won attendance. Photos/Todd Forrest



The seniors and juniors square off in Friday's Spike Ball championship. Photo/Todd Forrest



In the last event before crowning the COY, the seniors and juniors meet in the tug-of-war finals. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Blairsville's Joe Mancuso invited to Colts mini camp

Richmond, Va – University of Richmond quarterback Joe Mancuso will continue his football journey as he was invited to participate in a NFL mini camp with the Indianapolis Colts. Mini camp is an opportunity for selected players to take part in team camps with the hope of signing a contract to attend preseason camp in the fall.

Mancuso finished his Spider career fifth all-time in Spider history with 7,046 yards of total offense. He ranks fifth all-time with 5,508 yards passing while adding 1,538 yards rushing. He completed 429 passes in his career, throwing for 39 touchdowns while also rushing for 19 and adding one receiving touchdown. He is the first player in program history to throw for 5,500 yards and rush for over 1,500 yards.

Mancuso played in 44 career games, making 26 starts in his career. He made nine starts in 2021, completing 136-of-231 for 1,677 yards and 14 touchdowns. He also added 315 yards rushing on 69 attempts and four scores, helping the Spiders to a 6-5 overall



A 2016 graduate of UCHS, Richmond quarterback Joe Mancuso during a September 2021 game at Virginia Tech. Photo/Todd Forrest

Mancuso's top season came in 2019, completing 164-of-259 for 2,128 yards and 13 touchdowns. He was also the Spiders' leading rusher that season, going for 647 yards on 136 carries and a team and

best for a quarterback 10 rushing touchdowns. Mancuso joins fellow Spiders Tyler Dressler (Jets & Steelers) and Jonathan Johnson (Commanders) with mini camp invites this year.

## LADY PANTHERS

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