

Sports

See the Sports Section at nganews.com

Cale Winkler staying home, joins Young Harris College cheer squad



Union County cheerleader Cale Winkler (seated-center) is joined by family members after signing his scholarship offer to Young Harris College on Wednesday, May 12 at the UCHS library. Photo/Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Outgoing Union County senior Cale Winkler is headed to the Enchanted Valley this fall as a member of the Young Harris College cheer team.

“Many people only dream of an opportunity like this, to go to college and do something that you love,” Union County athletic director Mandy Hunter said to the gathering of Winkler’s family and friends at the UCHS library. “He’s spent many hours in and out of the gym, flipping up and down the football field. You name it, he’s doing it. We’re super proud he’s able to attend a great school and continue doing what he loves to do.”

UCHS assistant cheer coach Kim Starling joined the squad during the 2019-20 school year and has quickly noticed Winkler’s improvement in all aspects of the sport. “I’ve had the opportunity

to watch Cale over the last two years, and just as a cheerleader in general, the growth that we’ve seen [has been remarkable],” she said. “He had the tumbling skills, he didn’t need help with that, but he’s become a phenomenal cheerleader. We’re super excited to see him at Young Harris. He’s local so we’ll still be able to go and see him. We’re super proud of him.”

Having grown up next door to the college, YHC seemed like a natural fit, but Winkler didn’t envision a future in cheerleading until he began participating in gymnastics.

“I used to live behind Young Harris so I drove by the school every day, but it wasn’t until I got into gymnastics that I heard about their cheerleading program, and the rest is history,” Winkler said. “I love [getting to stay in a small community] and that’s what drew me in [to YHC]. I’m going to miss my friends a lot,” he continued. “Having to start back

from square one is going to be a challenge. But my dad still owns the house behind Young Harris College so I hope that I can rent it.

Winkler will major in sports medicine with dreams of someday coaching gymnastics. But as a college freshman, he simply wants to hone his craft and contribute to the cheer program’s success.

“My goals for year one are to make match or competition status for the NCA, which is the National Cheerleader Association,” he said. “From there, I just want to progress in my skills and get to Level 8.

“I have to thank my mom for encouraging me every step of the way, even if it wasn’t in something conventional,” he added.

Prior to the COVID shutdowns, Young Harris reached nationals eight straight years, earning a silver bid six times. The large coed cheer team finished second at the 2019 championship.



Top: Cale Winkler makes his college plans official in front of family members on May 12. Bottom: Friends and teammates join Winkler to celebrate his special day. Photos/Todd Forrest

Football: Noah Underwood reuniting with high school teammate at Berry



Noah Underwood (seated-center) excelled on the gridiron and with the track and field team at Union County. On May 12 at the UCHS library, family members joined Underwood as he signed a football scholarship to Berry College, where he joins UCHS Class of 2020 defensive standout John Mancuso. Photo/Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Union County football Class of 2021 two-way standout Noah Underwood will continue his football career at Berry College, joining former UCHS teammate John Mancuso.

According to Underwood, Berry reached out in February following a tip from Mancuso, who signed with the Vikings last spring. Approximately two months later, a campus visit sealed the deal.

“John Mancuso actually put me in touch with Berry and they reached out to me,” Underwood said. “From there we just started talking, and I really liked their campus and the programs they offer, and that’s what led to my final decision. The campus is the largest in the world, it’s beautiful and there is a dairy farm on the campus. Everything about it is very nice.

“The fact that John is down there is what got me looking into Berry, to begin with. When I went to the campus, I got to meet a lot of the other players and they were all really nice, and that got me really excited about going there. Academically, 97% of their graduates have a job before they leave college and that’s something that really stood out.”

Underwood cracked the Union defensive two-deep as a sophomore in 2018, recording 40 tackles, three resulting in a loss, and one interception. A year later, the junior linebacker began gaining recognition beyond the borders of Union

County when he played an integral role in the program’s first 10-win campaign.

During the Panthers’ first and only postseason victory, coming in the first round of the 2019 Class AA State Tournament, Underwood provided the spark that pushed Union County ahead when he blocked a South Atlanta punt during the second quarter, resulting in a go-ahead safety.

Leading for the first time at 9-7, the Panthers took the ensuing free-kick and marched into field goal range, setting up a 44-yard kick from Mason McCombs to extend the margin to 12-7 at the break.

Union would go on to win the game 19-15 and Underwood finished the season with a career-high 88 tackles. He also ended 2019 with a team-best four sacks - another career-high - while hauling in his second varsity interception.

Underwood established himself as a two-way threat in 2020 by recording a team-high four touchdown catches from the H-back position. He finished third on the Panthers with 24 receptions, resulting in 281 yards - second-most on the team.

Once again, Underwood saved his best performance for the postseason, leading Union County with career-highs of seven grabs and 88 yards, despite spending much of his day matched up with Heard County’s four-star linebacker and Florida-commit Chief Borders.

Defensively, Underwood tallied four solo stops, five assisted tackles and matched a team-high with two tackles for

loss in a 31-28 defeat.

Underwood expects to begin his college career as a tight end, despite spending most of high school chasing down and shedding blocks from guys manning that position.

“I’ll need to learn the position itself, but they run a similar offense to Union County and I’m excited to learn as much as possible,” he said.

Underwood says he’ll miss the camaraderie of high school football more than anything else. And as an exercise science major, he maintains that his ultimate plan is to coach strength and conditioning in his hometown after graduation.

“I’ll mostly miss my teammates,” he said. “I’ll also miss playing high school football, in general. It’s one of the best things that ever happened to me in my life, I’m going to miss everything about it, but I’m thankful for the opportunity to continue playing football in college. Someday I hope to come back here to Union County as a coach; it doesn’t matter if it’s at the middle school or high school level.

“I want to thank God for allowing me to do this and blessing me with the ability; my parents for always sticking with me and my friends and church family for always supporting me.”

Berry is fresh off its fifth-straight Southern Athletic Association (SAA) title, finishing as the only undefeated (4-0) team in league play.

The Vikings edged Hendrix 21-20 in the SAA title game on March 15 after holding a 21-7 halftime advantage.



Surrounded by his high school football, strength and track coaches, Underwood confirms his commitment to Berry College as two proud parents look on. Photo/Todd Forrest

Youth wrestling success leaves UCHS program envisioning a promising future



Pictured L-R: Eli Flowers, Kevin Kilpatrick, Laden Bell and Paxon Legatt. The Union County Class of 2027 (rising seventh graders) featured four representatives at the 2021 Georgia Freestyle and Greco Wrestling State Championships. Kilpatrick placed first in both the freestyle and Greco competitions in the 12 and under age group, 98-pound weight class. Competing at 110 pounds in the 14U division, Legatt took home first in the Greco competition and placed second in the freestyle. Flowers came in first in Greco and second in freestyle while participating the 71-pound weight class of the 14U age group. Bell turned in a fourth-place finish in the 82-pound division of the 12U age group. "We are going to be world-beaters if these guys stick together," said UCHS assistant wrestling coach Michael Smith-Foot. Photo/submitted

Primary Panther Challenge winners



Union County Primary School physical education teacher Chris Robbins recognizes three girls and three boys as the Primary Panther Challenge's top three competitors earlier this month. The challenge's top three girls are (L-R) Gianna Tercero - third place; Paisley Stamper - second; Taylor Patton - first. The top three boys are (L-R) Sawyer Fox - first; Parker Dillinger - second; Chase Gray - third. All second grade students may participate in the challenge. Each student is practiced and then timed on the 'basic' course. The fastest boy and girl in each second grade class are practiced and timed on the 'extreme' course. Prizes are awarded to the top-three boys and girls.

Chambers, UNG softball tabbed fourth seed in NCAA Championship Bracket

Dahlonega - Blairville's Laken Chambers and the second-ranked University of North Georgia softball team, fresh off winning the Southeast Regional crown, was tabbed as the fourth seed in the NCAA Division II Softball Championship bracket Sunday and will take on No. 24 Biola at 3:30 p.m. EDT Thursday afternoon.

Biola comes into the tournament at 22-14 and champions of the West Regional in their first ever appearance in

the NCAA Tournament. Out of the PacWest Conference, the Eagles defeated top-seeded Concordia to punch their ticket to Denver.

The winner of Thursday afternoon's game will take on either No. 1 Augustana or No. 9 Valdosta State Friday afternoon after they were named the first and eighth seeds in the tournament, respectively. The two losers will play in an elimination game Friday evening.

On the other side of the

bracket, Saint Anselm was the No. 2 seed, Grand Valley State the No. 3, West Texas A&M the No. 6 and West Chester the No. 7 seed.

Live coverage links as well as ticket information will be announced in the coming days.

Chambers is 14-0 in the circle this spring with a 0.60 ERA in 19 appearances. Opponents are hitting just .198 against the junior right-hander over 82 1/3 innings.



The University of North Georgia celebrates a recent win. Photo/UNG Athletics

Pickleball Tournament at Young Harris College



There was a great pickleball tournament last weekend held at Young Harris College tennis complex. Their first PB tournament. Some of our local Towns County players won medals including Tresha McClure and Andrew Cobb who won Silver in 3.5 Mixed

Doubles. Results: Mixed Doubles 3.5 - 17+, 35+, 50+: Gold: Gwen Fry and Mike Bruce. Silver: Tresha McClure and Andrew Cobb. (Top photo) Gold: Keith Moss - Michael Shook (left). Silver: Brad Doss - Marvin Soskin in

Men's Doubles 3.0. (Middle photo) Dana Carroll and Chase Carroll (left) took Gold in the Mixed Doubles 3.0 bracket. Charlene Penland and Keith Moss took Silver. (Bottom photo)

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month



NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) raises awareness about mental health. Educating the public and advocating for policy changes that support people with mental illness and their families. NAMI's message is "You are Not Alone."

Avita Community Partners of NorthEast Georgia is also a resource in our area for individuals and their families who are experiencing the dis-

abling effects of mental illness. Their goal is to assist in the development of safe, stable and meaningful lives for all.

Contact Information: NAMI Helpline 800-950-6264 or text "NAMI" to 741741; AVITA Crisis Line 800-715-4225 Available 24/7; National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK or 800-662-HELP.