

Sports

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Fussell builds on foundation laid by recent UCHS volleyball success

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Union County senior Morgan Fussell has played an integral role in the rise of UCHS volleyball in recent years, and now she's investing in the future of the program by providing some much-needed training to middle school girls considering the sport in ninth grade.

Without a volleyball program at Union County Middle School, Fussell developed a soft spot in her heart for athletes continually forced to try out as freshmen with little or no experience. And when the UCHS work-based learning program opened a door at the Union County Commissioner's office last spring, Fussell and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris immediately went to work on bringing the hardwood hypothesis to fruition.

"Commissioner Paris asked if I would be interested in starting a youth volleyball program," Fussell said. "So I got it started, did all the flyers and advertising at the middle school and all these girls just started showing up."

Meeting at the new recreation department gymnasium twice a week during the spring, Fussell spent most of her sessions offering the newcomers an introduction to the sport, but as she continually witnessed their growth and development, she began providing more advanced training that continued throughout the summer.

"Their improvement just speaks for itself, said Fussell, pointing at the girls, who all remained at the gym after practice to continue honing their skills. "The first day, they couldn't even pass the ball and now they're peppering with each other and playing games and they just love [volleyball]. It's just amazing how far they've come."

Fussell elaborated on the freshmen shortcomings that she's observed over the years, and how far the ninth graders find themselves behind the 8-ball when trying out for the high school squad.

"One of the things I



UCHS senior Morgan Fussell and the middle school volleyball players that she's practiced with throughout the spring and summer following last Friday's session at the Union County Recreation Department Sports Center gymnasium. Photo/Todd Forrest

see most at the high school is, when the girls come in for tryouts, most of them have never even touched a volleyball before because we don't have a middle school team," she said. "A lot of the girls end up getting cut from the JV team because they've never played volleyball before, and it's just so sad [and upsetting]. But when they asked me to start this volleyball program through the rec department, I was so ecstatic. Because now when these girls go into tryouts, they at least know some things and are familiar with the sport. And that is usually the difference between making the JV team or getting cut. They obviously need more instruction, but just based on the short time that I've had them, I believe they are almost ready to try out for, and possibly make the high school team."

While Fussell is assist-

ing middle schoolers in realizing their love for a new sport, they've also helped her discover a newfound passion for coaching.

"I definitely love coaching and it's something that I definitely would want to do in the future, but I'm just going to focus on getting through college first," she said with a laugh. "But I love coaching. These girls have left me speechless in how far they've come and how hard they've worked. I'm just so thankful that I was allowed to coach them, and I hope that I'm allowed to continue this program next summer before I go off to college. Because until we get a volleyball program at the middle school, this is the only way they can learn the fundamentals."

As for Fussell and her UCHS teammates, the Panthers begin their Area title

defense later this month, and Fussell believes the program's recent success has contributed to the sport's popularity among Blairsville's youngsters.

"I think we've made an impact on the younger girls, or I hope we have," Fussell said when asked about the influence she and her team-

mates have on young ladies in the community. "If nothing else, I hope these girls come watch our matches just to see the skills they've learned put to use. But I think the longer we keep winning [at the high school level], the more girls will want to come out and watch and be a part of the pro-

gram. And hopefully, it will lead to Union County starting a middle school program."

UCHS opens its 2021 campaign with a JV match at North Oconee on Saturday, Aug. 14. Varsity action gets underway at home on Tuesday, Aug. 17.

2021 UCHS Panther Volleyball Schedule

8-14-2021	JV Spiketacular @ North Oconee	Times TBA
8-17-2021	@ Home - Varsity Only	5:00 Union vs Murray 6:00 Murray vs Lumpkin 7:00 Union vs Lumpkin
8-19-2021	@ HOME	5:00 JV vs Dawson 6:00 Varsity vs Dawson
8-24-2021	@ Chestatee - JV + Varsity	6:00 vs Oconee 7:00 vs Chestatee
8-26-2021	@ Dawson - JV + Varsity	5:00 vs Dawson 6:00 vs Hab. Central
8-28-2021	Coal Mtn. Classic - Varsity Tournament	Times TBA
8-30-2021	@ HOME	5:00 JV vs Gilmer 6:00 Varsity vs Gilmer
9-1-2021	@ Banks - JV + Varsity	5:00 vs Banks 6:00 vs Stephens
9-2-2021	@ HOME	5:00 JV vs Fannin 6:00 Varsity vs Fannin
9-9-2021	@ Washington-Wilkes - Varsity	5:00 vs WW 6:00 vs Rabun
9-14-2021	@ Fannin - JV + Varsity	6:00 vs Gordon Lee 7:00 vs Fannin
9-16-2021	@ Oglethorpe - JV + Varsity	4:00 JV vs Oglethorpe 5:00 V vs Oglethorpe 6:00 V vs Commerce
9-23-2021	@ Lake Oconee Academy - Varsity	5:00 vs LOA 6:00 vs Elbert
9-28-2021	@ HOME - Varsity	5:00 vs Putnam 7:00 vs Banks
9-29-2021	@ Gilmer - JV + Varsity	6:00 vs Calhoun 7:00 vs Gilmer



Morgan Fussell (center) instructs two middle schoolers on the fundamentals of serving during a practice session at the UCRD Sports Center on Friday, July 30. Photo/Todd Forrest

Softball: Lady Panthers host Midnight Madness; season begins Thursday

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

It's seems like yesterday when Union County soccer walked off the field following a May playoff loss to Lovett, marking the final spring sporting event at UCHS.

Now, less than three months later, fall sports have arrived at Union County High School.

The Lady Panthers open the 2021 campaign Thursday with a JV/Varsity doubleheader vs. Lumpkin County at 4 p.m. Two days later, Union County will entertain Commerce and Dawson County at 12 p.m. on Saturday Aug. 7, beginning with a Union vs. Dawson matchup. After the Tigers meet the Tigers at 2 p.m., the Lady Panthers wrap up the day's action with a 4 p.m. contest with Commerce.

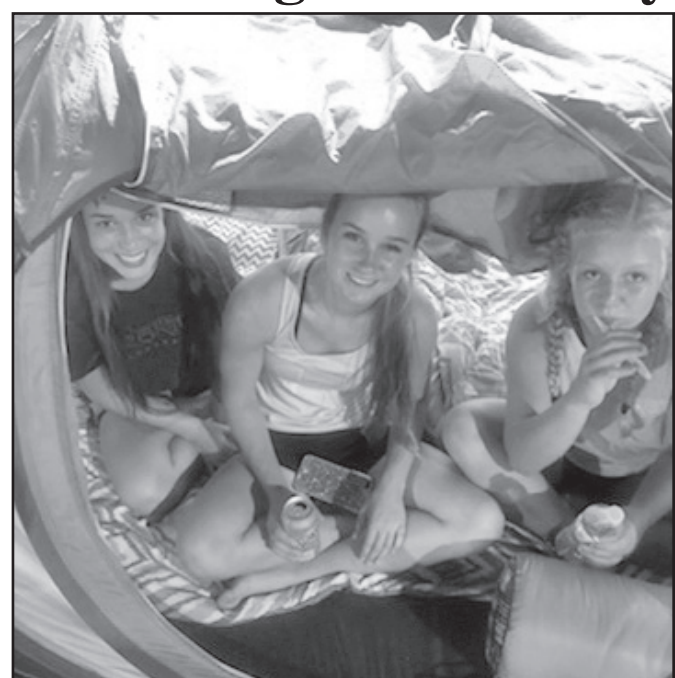
Last week saw the conclusion of summer league play with Union County dropping both outings (Franklin County and Jefferson) on Tuesday evening, leading head coach Stephen Mitchell to characterize the losses as one of Union's most disappointing performances of the summer.

"Outside of practice, that was probably our worst game-day of the summer," he said. "We struggled in a lot of different areas. But I think our main problem was just a lack of focus, and that's what [the coaching staff] has been preaching since. The season is here and it's time to go, and if you don't show up [mentally], anyone can beat you."

On Thursday, the Lady Panthers took part in another team-building exercise at Western Carolina Pacesetters in An-



(Clockwise) Participants in the parents vs. players softball game. Union County softball players watch a movie and camp on the field at UCHS. Photos/UC Softball



draws, North Carolina, where the girls climbed a 60-foot tower. A day later, the softball team hosted its Midnight Madness festivities, starting with a 6 p.m. cookout followed by a parents vs. players softball game.

The team remained on the field at dark to watch the movie *Remember the Titans*. Afterward, they held the Helmet Ceremony to affirm their commitment to a team-first attitude.

According to Mitchell, the Helmet Ceremony allows the players to dedicate themselves to the program's goals and standards.

The Lady Panthers participated in a brief midnight practice before settling into their tents and sleeping bags for the night.

"It was late and everyone was tired so we didn't practice too hard," Mitchell said. "This

week will begin the normal 3:30 practices since the teachers are back in school."

Thursday marks the opening day of Union County's 2021 season with a home contest vs. Lumpkin County. Regarding this week's pitching rotation, Mitchell said his squad will adopt an "all hands on deck" outlook due to the heat and playing three games in two days.

"We'll have Tori (Tracy) and Sierra (Burnette) lined up and ready to go," he said. "Then we'll have Ila Bragg and Sloane Dyer available if we need them - so it's all hands on deck."

Following three years of Trinity Queen as the clear-cut ace, Mitchell admits he still hasn't settled on a No. 1 pitcher, but hopes one of his four options rises to the occasion during the early non-region contests.

"As good as our pitchers

have looked [during the summer], we're going to have to figure out what they do well and how they handle the stress of a full game."

Along with the questions in the circle, Mitchell still has yet to settle on his starting lineup. According to the Union skipper, two spots remain undetermined, including the catcher position.

"Both [Emily Byers and Jaycee Seabolt] bring a unique skill set and we're just going to have to find out, not only who is the best player, but who works best with the pitching staff, as well as the rest of the team."

The 2021 season kicks off Thursday with the JV at 4 p.m., followed by the varsity contest around 6 p.m.

"We're super excited to get started and we hope everyone will come and check us out," Mitchell added,



2021 Softball Schedule

August 5	Lumpkin County	4 pm
August 7	Dawson County	12 pm
August 7	Commerce	4 pm
August 9	@ Lumpkin County	6 pm
August 10	White County	6 pm
August 12	@ White County	6 pm
August 13	@ Pepperell*	4 pm
August 13	@ SE Whitfield*	6 pm
August 16	@ Dawson County	6:30 pm
August 19	@ Commerce	4:30 pm
August 26	Fannin County	5 pm
August 27	@ Chapel Hill*	6 pm
August 27	@ Johnson County*	8 pm
August 28	@ Bulloch Academy*	9 am
August 28	@ ECI*	11 am
August 30	Madison County	6:30 pm
Sept. 7	@ Madison County	6:30 pm
Sept. 9	@ Banks County	5:30 pm
Sept. 14	Elbert County	5:30 pm
Sept. 15	@Fannin County	5 pm
Sept. 16	Rabun County	5:30 pm
Sept. 21	Banks County	5:30 pm
Sept. 23	@ Elbert County	TBA
Sept. 28	@ Rabun County	5:30 pm

* Denotes midseason tournament

Benton MacKaye Trail Association upcoming hikes

The following hikes are sponsored by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. The current social distancing and health rules are used by hike Leaders.

August 9 (Monday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 7 mile hike from Coker Creek Falls in Tennessee to TN68, about 7 moderate miles. Rick and Brenda Harris, 423-253-6358. harrisri@aol.com. Note: Joint BMTA and Cherokee Hiking Club event.

Monday thru Thursday, August 9-12, - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors two hikes as part of Campground/Day hikes event at Lake Conasauga in the Cohutta Mountains: Grassy Mountain Tower and Lake shore trail and Chestnut Lead Trail or part of Upper Conasauga trail; moderate to strenuous hikes. Hike Leader Mike Pilvinsky. hikeleaderMP@bmtamail.org; Must register by Friday, August 6.

August 14 (Saturday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a work day trail on Georgia section of trail. Volunteers Youth groups to Seniors welcomed. For more information contact Bob Cowdrick GA-MaintDirector@bmtamail.org NT(Aug4,Z4)CA

Local Racing report: Tri County

By Blake Lynch
North Georgia News
Racing Reporter

Brasstown, NC - Records fell when Tri-County Race Track hosted the Schaeffer's Spring National on July 22.

Since 2015, David Payne owned the track record for the fastest lap time. Tuesday night, Jensen Ford broke the mark with a lap time of 12.161 seconds.

Modified Hobby: No. 44 Bobby Elkins took home the win, followed by No. 88 Ricky Smith. Coming in third was No. 27 Mike Davidson. No. X14 Jacob Hamburg was fourth. No. 91 Brawley

Steelwell came in fifth.

Pony: No. 4m Marty King took home another win. Second was No.2 Tweedy Chinn. Third was 01W Phil Wood. No. 11 Jamie Cross came in fourth.

Street Stock: No. 7 Lynn Burchfield took home another win. No. 44 Chuck Sims was second. No. 73 C.B. McKinnon was third. No. 12 Stewart Warmwater was fourth. No.01 Jacob Lynch was fifth.

FWD: No. 4 Shannon Jones took the checkered flag for the win. No. J-3 Josh Deese was second. The 192R of Robby Lynch was third. No. 74 Dakota Worley was fourth. The No 401

of Brent Lynch was fifth.

SLM: The No.1C of Kenny Collins was the winner, followed by 4T of Donald McIntosh. The No. 2 of Cody Overton was third. No. X15 Shawn Chastain was fourth. No. 8 David Payne was fifth.

602 Beginner: It was another win for the No. 117 of Dylan Beaver, followed by No. 22 of Tucker Anderson. Third was No. 100 of Copper Twigg. No. 4 of Mark Ledford was fourth. Fifth went to the No. 55 of Brad Sosebee.

August 6 marks the next race. The gates open at 5 p.m. and racing starts at 7 p.m.



Union County Recreation Department closes Meeks Park pool early

The Union County Recreation Department must close Meeks Park pool early this season. Like everyone else we are experiencing a staff shortage and a pool chemical shortage. Most of our staff are in high school or will be attending college in August.

The pool will be open Monday, 7/26-7/30, 12pm-6pm and must close Saturday 7/31 due to the Georgia Mountain Moonshine CruizIn. The pool will be open 8/1-8/8 and will then close to the public for the season.

Those who purchased a season pass and seeking a refund (\$15.40) for those 10 days, please contact the Union County Recreation Department at 706-439-6074.

Learn to play Pickleball

Free Beginners Classes every Thursday at 6 p.m. (weather permitting).

All equipment is provided and there is no need to sign-up... just come. Courts are located on Chase Drive behind the Health Department.

For more information contact: blairsvillepickleball@gmail.com. N (Aug4,Z1)CA