

# Sports

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## Panthers shutout in opener, host Fannin County on Friday

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**Ellijay** - The Panthers were blanked 33-0 at Gilmer on Friday, Aug. 23, suffering the program's first shutout in 12 years and its first scoreless season-opener since 1991.

Union County went three-and-out on its opening drive, and the offense never found its footing the rest of the way, generating only 108 yards (31 rushing) over four quarters.

Afterward, head coach Michael Perry made it clear the end result wasn't on freshman quarterback Kamden Kendrick.

"First of all, we did not lose that game because of Kamden Kendrick," he said. "It was ugly, but I was proud of how he played. We need to clean up a whole lot in all phases and continue to come to work, keep a good attitude and get better each and every day.

"I know our offensive line is much better than how they played Friday night. We've got to establish the running game and we've got to get better in our drop-back passing game. We're going to make some adjustments and I still think we have some good football players."

Meanwhile, the Panthers had no answer for Gilmer's rushing attack, allowing 264 yards on the ground while not forcing a Bobcats' punt until the final play of the third quarter.

Gilmer grabbed a 7-0 lead following a Union County punt and went 47 yards on 11 plays, converting two third downs and a fourth and goal from the eight.

Two of the Panthers' six first downs came on the ensuing drive, which eventually stalled at the Gilmer 40-yard line when Kendrick's deep ball was picked off on fourth and 6.

Starting from its own 31, Union moved the chains on a Bobcats' offsides penalty. Then, consecutive handoffs to Connor Schuknecht had the Panthers into Gilmer territory with a fresh set of downs.

Another give to



Senior OL/LB Kaden Combs lowers the boom on Gilmer's quarterback. According to Coach Perry, Combs was one of the bright spots in Union's loss at Gilmer. Photo/Todd Forrest

Schuknecht and a Kendrick keeper left Union facing third and 3 from the 37, but a 3-yard loss dropped the offense into fourth and 6 to end the first period.

Gilmer took over at the 10-yard line after the interception and traveled 90 yards on 18 plays, capping the drive with a 6-yard pitch around the left side.

The Panthers moved the chains moments later when Kendrick hit sophomore Chetley Cox on third and 6. Two more short completions to Cox had Union facing another third down but a screen pass to Schuknecht fell incomplete. A fourth-down penalty, followed by a botched snap on the punt, set up a short Gilmer scoring drive ahead of halftime.

"That was a big, pivotal moment in the game," Perry said. "We're going to do a quarterback punt but the snap rolled to [Kendrick]. He was able to pick it up but I still think he had time to kick it. There

wasn't a lot of time on the clock and it would have much easier going into halftime down [13-0 instead of 20-0]."

The Bobcats needed only five plays to travel 31 yards to claim a 20-0 halftime lead following a blocked point-after attempt.

Gilmer all but put things away by going 70 yards on eight plays to start the third, scoring via a 2-yard run set up by a 47-yard completion two plays earlier.

Union County benefited from a pass interference penalty later in the third but the drive stalled when the Panthers were flagged for a false start. A shanked punt handed the ball to the Bobcats inside the Union 40, and on the next play, they rounded out the scoring with a 37-yard touchdown run.

The Panthers' final play of the third ended on Kendrick's third interception and a Gilmer return to midfield. The defense forced its first punt of the night and Union started the

final frame inside its 4-yard line, where Kendrick found Tyler Parker for 10 yards on second down.

After the two teams swapped punts, the Panthers' longest play of the evening came during the final moments when Kendrick hooked up with Dominick Tarbert, and the junior receiver juked a couple of Bobcats before breaking loose on a 20-yard gain.

Tarbert led the team with 2 catches for 27 yards; Schuknecht ended with 20 yards rushing and caught two passes for 10 yards.

Cox had a team-high three grabs for 18 yards; freshman Haze Burnette caught one pass for 13 yards; Parker ended with 2 catches for 9 yards; sophomore Bentley Rich rushed twice for 4 yards; Kendrick had 7 yards on two carries.

Kendrick finished 10 for 17 through the air with 77 yards.

Defensively, Union sur-



Senior All-Region LB Ethan Lester was back on the field following offseason knee and wrist surgeries. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman QB Kamden Kendrick (17) and sophomore RB Bentley Rich (4) during the fourth quarter at Gilmer. Photo/Todd Forrest

rendered 6 yards per carry, allowing Gilmer to convert 8 of 10 third downs and 2 of 2 on fourth down.

"Kaden Combs played his butt off and Ethan Lester played very well on defense," Perry said. "We're going to continue to work. We're not going to quit. The season is far from over.

"We have a ways to go. Everybody knows it but we're going to attack things head on and do whatever it takes to get better everyday. We're not worrying about Friday's [Fannin] game. Right now, we're just focused on our next practice."

**Up next:** Union County will host rival Fannin County

at 7:30 p.m. The Rebels are fresh off a 28-7 upset of a banged up Rabun County squad. Fannin County defeated Gilmer 42-28 two weeks ago.

The Panthers have won two straight over Fannin and lead the all-time series 17-15. Union won last year's meeting in Blue Ridge 50-12. The Rebels' last win in Blairsville came in 2020 while Union County has won 8 of the last 10 meetings in Blairsville.

"Fannin is a good team -- much better than last year," Perry said. "But we're excited for our home opener and we're expecting a big crowd. It's a big rivalry. We know Fannin will be fired up after we beat them last year."

## XC: Hunter's 13th-place finish leads Union against deep field at Pickens

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**Jasper** - Junior Lola Hunter placed 13th out of more than 250 runners at last weekend's Pickens Preview race, crossing the finish line at 19 minutes, 48 seconds.

Northview's Lauren Skeens set the pace with a first-place time of 18:48.

Overall, Union County placed 26th of 35 with 697 points, falling in behind Fulton Science Academy (661) and Lanier (657) while edging Centennial (719), Chestatee (729) and The Walker School (729).

Walton, Wesleyan, Northview, Gainesville and Roswell took home the top five spots.

In the guys' race, Union County (752) came in 25th out of 37 teams, fending off White County (771), Killian (780) and Lanier (781). In front of the Panthers was 24th-place Northview with 634 points and 23rd-place Kennesaw Mountain with 557.

Walton, South Forsyth, North Gwinnett, Wesleyan and Etowah were the top five teams.

North Gwinnett's Haydn Hermansen placed first with a

time of 15:35.

Sophomore Oliver Hillman led all Union runners with a time of 18:32 and a 116th-place finish. Sophomore Noah James Payne was 162nd at 19:15; Cole Payne placed 171st with a time of 19:19; Andrew Nushtayev was 186 at 19:36; Ander Faulkner rounded out Union's top five in 213th with a time of 20:08.

Other Panther runners included Bryson Brooks in 217th at 20:11; John Tippens in 226th at 20:23; Logan Duckworth in 246th at 20:52 and Trey Hawley in 253rd at 21:11.

As for Union's girls, Macy Payne was 166th at 23:53; Katie Payne placed 194th with a time of 24:55; Lydia Wagner came in 199th at 25:08; Avery Hussion placed 201st at 25:27 and Kate Barrett came in 203rd with a time of 25:34.

Averie Tanner was 220th at 26:24; Jolie Schmitt was 226th at 27:04; Ava Irvin placed 235th at 28:22 and Abby Barrett was 242nd at 30:49.

Union County will host its annual Meeks Park race on Thursday, Aug. 29 at 4:30 p.m. vs Banks County, Lumpkin County, Towns County and others.



Union County Cross Country seniors Katie Payne, Logan Duckworth and Lydia Wagner. Photo/Todd Forrest



# Softball: Union picks up first Region 7-AA win vs. North Murray

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The Lady Panthers (5-7, 1-1) bounced back from its region-opening loss at Rockmart with a convincing 8-0 home victory over North Murray on Tuesday, Aug. 20, improving to 1-1 in 7-AA.

Last Thursday's trip to Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) was rescheduled for later in the year. Union County resumes region action on Tuesday when they host Sonoraville.

**Lady Panthers 8, North Murray 0 (6 innings)** - Sophomore ace Izzy Anthros extended her scoreless innings streak to 13, and junior Delaney Moses belted her team-leading second homer of the year during a 3-for-3 day as Union run-ruled the Mountaineers in Blairsville.

Meanwhile, Sloane Dyer continues to rake -- going 3 for 4 with 4 RBIs and a pair of doubles. The senior infielder has 14 RBIs and seven extra-base hits over the last eight games, nearly doubling her batting average from .222 to .432 during the hot stretch.

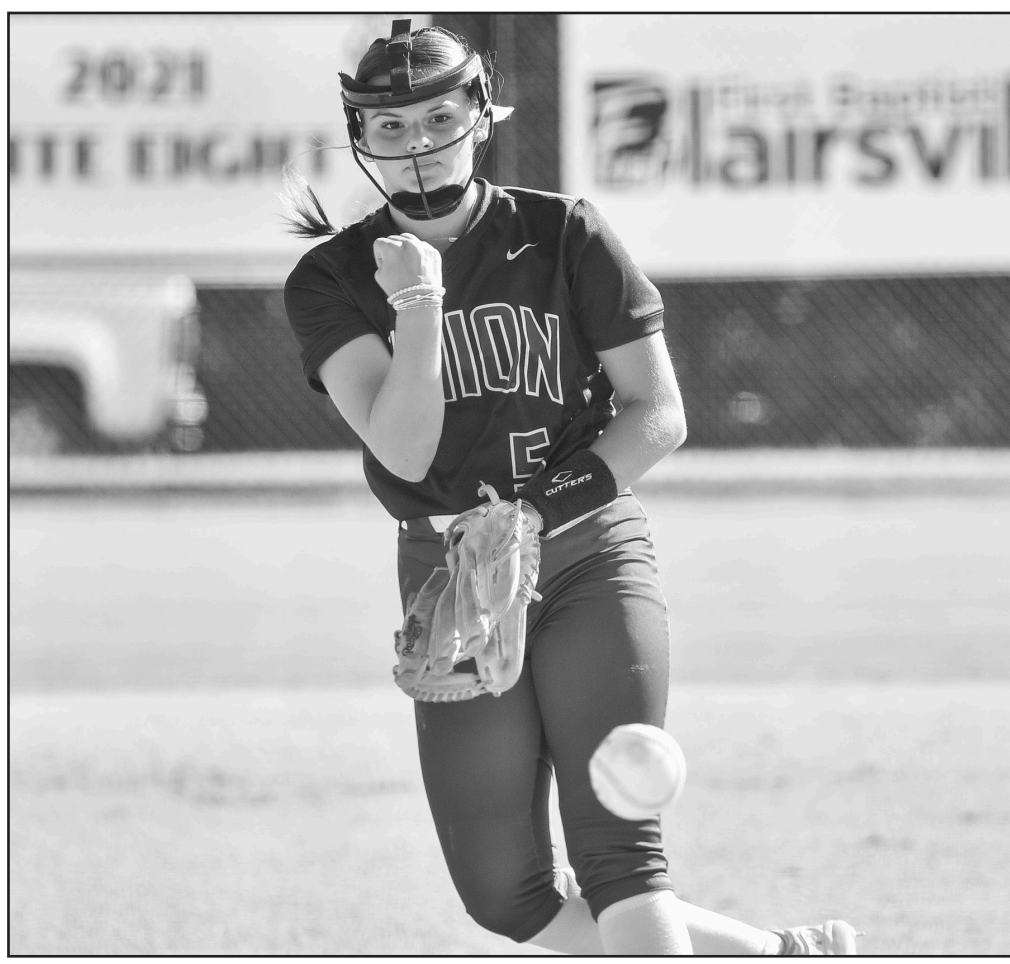
Dyer sparked the Union offense with a 2-run double in the first, scoring Anthros and senior Jordane Mullanack.

Moses' big fly made it 3-0 in the second after Anthros worked around a leadoff single and a two-out walk in the top half of the frame.

A double by freshman Addison Whitener opened the third, eventually coming around to score via a North Murray error.

Still leading 4-0, Union County ended the contest with a crooked number (all coming with two outs) in the sixth, beginning with Moses' leadoff double.

Anthros' sacrifice fly



Sophomore pitcher Izzy Anthros is currently sitting at 13 consecutive scoreless innings as Union County has won two of its last three contests. Photo/Todd Forrest

built a 5-0 advantage, then a Whitener single and an error off the bat of Mullanack loaded the bags for Dyer's 2-run double. Senior Lily Helton, who finished 3 for 3, kept the inning alive with a base hit and freshman Lexi Davenport walked, allowing Mikala Souther's infield single to end the game at 8-0.

Whitener scored twice during a 2-for-3 performance; Anthros finished 1 for 3 with an RBI; Mullanack stole a bag and scored 2 runs while going 1 for 4 at the dish; Souther ended her day 1 for 3 with an RBI; Peyton Grisham added a sacrifice bunt while finishing 0

for 1; Davenport walked in her only plate appearance.

Anthros fanned nine Mountaineers and allowed 3 hits over 6 innings in the circle.

Union County hosts Sonoraville (8-4, 3-0) at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, then it's off to Ringgold (1-7, 0-3) for another 5:30 p.m. region start on Thursday, Aug. 29.

Union County and LFO will make up last week's contest on Sept. 30.

The Lady Panthers sit 22nd among public schools in the GHSA's Class AA power rankings with Tuesday's opponent, Sonoraville, currently at seventh.



Junior Delaney Moses launches her team-leading second homer of 2024 to centerfield during the win over North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest



The Union County dugout cheers on their teammates vs. North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Volleyball: Panthers' win streak ends at six -- third best in program history

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Union County (7-3) extended its winning streak to six games, the program's longest since 2021, with victories over Andrews, North Carolina and Stephens County last week.

However, they then dropped consecutive matches to Tallulah Falls and Dawson County but bounced back with a 2-0 win over West Hall on Thursday, August 22.

The Panthers resumed action on Monday, August 26 by hosting Rabun Gap. They will travel to Banks County on Tuesday to face the Leopards and Habersham Central, then return home on Thursday to meet Hiwassee Dam, NC.

**Panthers 3, Andrews, NC 0 (25-18, 25-13, 25-17)**

The Union County Panthers defeated the Andrews Wildcats in straight sets on Monday, Aug. 19.

The Panthers took an early lead of 7-2 in the first set and maintained their advantage throughout the match. Senior Lily Brookshire recorded 10 kills, while senior Katelyn Brown contributed 8 kills, 4 aces and a team-high 17 digs. Junior Reese Jones provided 14 assists, and Sofia Foster and Mady Adams each added one block.

**Set One:** Brookshire, Brown and Jones had Union firing on all cylinders during a 4-0 spurt to begin the night's action. After senior Mallory Rouse made it 7-2, Andrews started chipping away, but the Panthers responded with another 7-2 stretch sparked by Mady Adams, resulting in a 15-7 advantage.

Andrews rallied to within two at 17-15 but Union County answered with an 8-2 stretch to finish the set.

Sophomore Payton Murphy chipped in an ace during Union's second 7-2 run.

**Set Two:** The Panthers ran away with the second round following a tight 11-7 start. Ten of the next 12 points went to Union, highlighted by a Foster block and an ace by freshman Samantha Combs.

Up 20-10, Union County leaned on Brookshire, Foster and freshman Emry Sosensky down the stretch, taking four of the last five points.

**Set Three:** During the finale, Union faced deficits of 6-2 and 8-7 but pushed ahead 12-9 courtesy of Brown and two Andrews service errors. But the Wildcats had one spurt left as they knotted the score at 14-14 when Jones delivered two kills during a 5-0 stretch that moved Union ahead to stay.

Jones finished with 5 kills, 5 digs and 3 aces; Brookshire had 8 digs; Rouse deliv-



Junior Mady Adams (L), senior Lily Brookshire and junior Reese Jones (12) celebrate Union County's 3-0 win over Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Charlei Robinson gets airborne in front of the Union County student section, parents and fans during last week's home win over Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest

ered 3 kills and 2 aces; Foster and Adams added 2 kills each; senior Charlei Robinson finished with 2 aces and 5 digs.

**Union County 2, Stephens County 1 - (25-23, 18-25, 15-13)**: Union County won its sixth straight match during a victory at Stephens County.

Brown, Jones and Rouse each notched a team-high 5 kills, while Rouse and Jones' 3 aces led the Panthers.

Foster logged a career-high 4 blocks in the win, while Brown (12) and Jones (10) combined for 22 digs. Jones finished with 9 assists and Brown recorded eight.

Other Panthers picking up kills were Brookshire (3), Foster (2), Robinson (1) and Adams (1). Aces belonged to Brown (2), Combs (1) and Murphy (1).

Robinson and Brookshire contributed 8 digs each; Robinson chipped in an assist.

**Union County 1, Tallulah Falls 2 (25-20, 17-25, 11-15)** - Union County couldn't hold on after a first-set win during its second contest at Stephens County on Tuesday, Aug. 20.

Brown, Jones and Rouse finished with 5 kills. Jones and Rouse had 3 aces each. Foster blocked 4 shots for the second straight game. Brown had 13 digs, Jones had nine, Robinson had eight and Brookshire ended with seven.

Jones had 9 assists and Brown finished with eight.

Additional kills went to Brookshire (3), Foster (2), Adams (1) and Robinson (1). In the aces department, Brown had two and Murphy had one.

Murphy added 2 digs; Combs, Murphy, Robinson and Rouse all picked up one assist.

On Thursday, Union County left Dawson County with a split, falling 2-0 (25-21, 25-10) to the Tigers and defeating West Hall 2-0 (25-5, 25-15).

No stats were available for those matches.

The six-game winning streak matched the third longest in the program's eight-year history. The top two streaks came during Union's final four seasons of 2020 and 2021.

The 2020 team won 10 in a row - a streak that ended with a loss at Pace Academy in the Class AA Final Four.

The 2021 Panthers won seven consecutive midseason games, then tallied six straight later in the year, once again



Sophomore Payton Murphy records an ace during the victory vs. Andrews, NC. Photo/Todd Forrest



Freshman Samantha Combs has been a pleasant surprise and continues to earn more playing time as the season progresses. Photo/Todd Forrest

ending in the final four. The 2020 team also won a five-game winning streak in year one un-

der head coach Megan Brown. The 2020 team also won five in a row during a September stretch.



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