

Sports

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Purple Swarm dominates in 21-0 shutout of North Murray

By Todd Forrest
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The Union County defense clamped down on Class AA's leading rusher, junior quarterback Hudson Hulett (178 ypg), and North Murray's high-powered rushing attack to deliver the program's first shutout in four years during a 21-0 Homecoming victory on Friday, Sept. 20.

The Mountaineers came in averaging nearly 250 yards on the ground but were limited to 165 yards of total offense and 150 yards rushing. As for Hulett, he finished with 41 yards on 12 carries but a third-quarter injury cut his night short.

"We knew coming in that [Hulett] was their offense," head coach Michael Perry said. "They wanted to turn [Hulett] loose but our defense did a really good job."

Prior to Friday, North Murray had not been shutout since 2011 (144 games) and had only went scoreless in a region game once in program history.

After the game, senior linebacker Ethan Lester, who led the Panthers with 16 tackles, 3 TFL and 2 sacks, talked about the defense's performance.

"We say over and over, 'everyone has an assignment, all 11 players, just do your assignment,'" he said. "We play as a team and we win as a team. It's as simple as that."

After giving up 75 points in the first two games, Union County has held its last three opponents to 32.

"We've been playing much better," Lester said. "We worked hard as a team and we've grown in our chemistry. I think it's shown in the way the entire team has been playing better overall."



Senior Ethan Lester's 16 tackles, 3 TFL and 2 sacks led the Union County defense to its first shutout since 2020 and the first at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium since Homecoming 2019. Photo/Todd Forrest

Offensively, the Panthers O-line controlled the trenches, helping senior running back Connor Schuknecht rush for a career-high 183 yards on 23 carries. Meanwhile, freshman quarterback Kamden Kendrick, piggy-backing off the ground game, completed a pair of touchdown passes to senior Maddox Young, who added a fourth-quarter rushing score that put the game out of reach.

Young's first score came early in the second quarter via a 28-yard seam route up the left hash for a 6-0 halftime lead. Kendrick and Young

hooked up again at the 8:54 mark of the third, this time on a fourth-and-4 corner route from the 12-yard line.

Union capped off its scoring with 7:32 remaining when Young took the handoff and found paydirt from the 1-yard line, a touchdown instigated by Schuknecht's 36-yard carry on the previous play.

Kendrick, who turned in an efficient 7-for-13, 138-yard performance, completed 7 of his final 10 attempts after starting the game 0 for 3 with an interception on his first throw of the night. But the defense turned away the Mountaineers, who took over at the Union County 34.

As was the case all night, the Panthers held Hulett in check, coming up with a fourth-and-7 stop at the 20 when sophomore Jaxon Totherow jumped on a mis-handled shotgun snap in the backfield.

After penalties knee-capped the ensuing Union possession, resulting in a punt, the defense stepped up again, this time sophomore Easton Shumaker corralled Hulett 2 yards short of the sticks on fourth and 3 at the Panthers' 17.

Union County took over at the 16 and went 84 yards on six plays, beginning with four straight carries (three by Schuknecht, one by Bentley Rich) out to the 39. From there, Kendrick completed his first pass of the game, a 34-yard over-the-shoulder grab by junior Tyler Parker down the far sideline. One play later, he hit Young for 28 yards and a score.

The Union defense forced a punt from its own 40 when Ethan Lester rushed Hulett into a third-down incompletion, and later, with time winding down in the first half, the Mountaineers got to Kendrick on fourth down near midfield sending the Panthers into the locker room up 6-0.

The Union defense set the tone by forcing a fumble on North Murray's opening drive of the half. On third and 13 from the Mountaineer 38, Lester met the North Murray fullback in the hole, jarring loose the football that was

eventually recovered by Darin Patterson.

Moments later, Schuknecht blasted his way up the middle, moving Union into the red zone courtesy of a 19-yard gain. Then, on fourth and 4 at the 12, Kendrick found Young on a perfectly placed throw to the back corner of the endzone.

The ensuing Mountaineers' possession saw a scary moment for Hulett as his head bounced off the turf on the Union sideline after getting pushed out of bounds by Kaden Combs. The clearly groggy Hulett was helped off the field, where his backup fumbled two plays later when Alan Godinez came up with the strip and Sir Zion Thompson came out of the pile with the football.

The Panthers stalled after four plays and Hulett returned to lead the North Murray offense. On the second play of the series, the quarterback kept it himself and was met by Shumaker after a short gain. Once again, Hulett was unable to return to his feet after the hit, halting the game for 7 minutes as Hulett left on a stretcher with what looked like a second head injury.

As medical staff tended to Hulett, the Rev. Jerry Helton led the stadium in prayer.

When action resumed, North Murray, playing for their injured teammate, moved the ball inside the Union 3-yard line until an errant shotgun snap ended in disaster, resulting in a 19-yard loss and an eventual turnover on downs.

The Panthers took over at the 12-yard line early in the fourth and put together a drive that finished off the visitors. Union County's game-clinching series covered 88 yards on 9 plays, headlined by Schuknecht's 36-yard jaunt and Young's 1-yard score.

Sophomore Chetley Cox hit Rich in the endzone for 2 points on a fake PAT, bringing the final tally to 21-0.

Young finished with 3 catches for 65 yards and 2 TDs; Parker had a 34-yard reception, freshman Jax Dillinger caught one ball for 15 yards; Cox added an 8-yard



Senior back Connor Schuknecht had a career-high 183 yards rushing in the win over North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior Maddox Young dives across the goal line for the first of his 3 TDs on the evening. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Alan Godinez (75) and senior Kaden Combs (54) celebrate the win over North Murray. Photo/Todd Forrest

grab; freshman Mikey Davis had one reception for 5 yards.

Rich rushed 7 times for 15 yards and Young had one carry for a 1-yard TD.

Freshman Micah Wallace matched Lester with a team-high 16 tackles; Combs finished with 14 tackles and a TFL; Patterson had 13 tackles; sophomore Brandon Lynch had 11 tackles; Godinez made 7 stops; sophomore Kevin Kilpatrick recorded six.

Shumaker and Thompson had 4 tackles each. Gunner Franklin, Daniel McPhee, Braden Plott and Totherow all finished with 3 stops.

Up next: The Panthers (2-3, 2-1) can even their record at 3-3 and take a major step toward locking up a post-season berth when they visit Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) on Friday in another

region contest at 7:30 p.m. The Warriors are 1-3 overall and 0-2 in 7-AA with losses to Ringgold (41-27) and North Murray (21-7).

"We'll take a look at them on film but they're a team we can beat," Lester said. "Like I said, it's all about all about 11 guys on the field doing their job. If we do that, we win."

Coach Perry discussed the LFO matchup, praising the improvement they've shown over the season.

"They've gotten better as the season has progressed - big time," he said. "They are very athletic but I think we are the more physical team."

"We have to play smart and if we can get [our record] to 3-3 that would be a big deal [after starting 0-2]."

Softball: Union drops two more in region play

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Union County (7-13, 3-7) suffered a pair of losses last week, extending their losing skid to five games and dropping to seventh place in Region 7-AA.

On Tuesday, Sept. 17, the Lady Panthers were blanked 7-0 at North Murray, and then the bats stayed cold in a 2-1 home loss to Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO) on Thursday.

Union County visits Sonorville on Tuesday, Sept. 24, and hosts Ringgold on Thursday, Sept. 27. Both games start at 5:30 p.m.

Lady Panthers 0, North Murray 7 - Union County scattered six hits but couldn't crack the scoring column as North Murray had nine hits and stole five bags.

Sophomore Izzy Anthros went 2 for 4 at the plate and went 4 1/3 in the circle, giving up 7 hits, 7 earned runs, 2 walks and striking out six. Senior Reese Kelly worked the final 1 2/3 innings, allowing 2 hits and a walk.

Freshman Addison Whitener doubled and walked during a 1 for 2 day; senior Sloane Dyer finished 1 for 3 with a triple; senior Mikala Souther ended her day 1 for 3; sophomore Jules Dyer went 1 for 3; senior Jordane Mullanack was hit by a pitch.

North Murray scored four in the third, one in the fourth and two in the fifth.

Anthros and Whitener reached to lead off the game



Izzy Anthros provided four of Union County's 10 hits last week and took a tough-luck loss in the circle while allowing one earned run and striking out 13 during a 10-inning loss to LFO. Photo/Todd Forrest

but Sloane Dyer lined into a double play at first base. Union County began the third with two hits until a caught stealing, a groundout and a flyout ended the threat.

The Lady Panthers had second and third with one out in the fourth but a lineout and a strikeout kept Union off the board.

Lady Panthers 1, LFO 2 (10 innings) - Union County got one in the first but didn't score again as LFO pushed across one in the fourth and 10th innings.

Anthros provided two of her team's four hits during a 2 for 4 day. She also tossed

all 10 innings (147 pitches) in the circle, allowing one earned run, 7 hits, 3 walks while striking out 13.

Whitener went 1 for 4 with a double and senior Lily Helton finished 1 for 3 with an RBI.

Whitener came around on Helton's groundout following her one-out double in the first. LFO answered with a two-out double to even the score in the fourth.

Anthros opened the sixth with an opposite-field single and advanced to third on a throwing error. With one away, courtesy runner Ayla Jamison

tried tagging up on Sloane Dyer's fly ball to center but was cut down at home to keep the game deadlocked.

Helton started the seventh with a base hit but pinch runner Delaney Moses was left stranded at first.

Both squads left two runners aboard in the eighth and never threatened in the ninth. The 10th began with the automatic runner at second base and LFO used a two-out double to grab the lead.

Union County was retired 1-2-3 in the bottom half courtesy of two strikeouts and a groundout.

Volleyball: Union's road trip to Ringgold ends in two losses

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Ringgold - The Panthers (12-13) fell to 0-4 in Region 7-AA with last Tuesday's straight-set losses to Ringgold and Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe (LFO).

Union County visits Murray County on Tuesday, Sept. 24 to face the Indians and North Murray at 5 p.m.

Panthers 0, Ringgold 2 (13-25, 5-25) - Senior Katelyn Brown had 3 kills as Ringgold made quick work of Union County last week.

Junior Mady Adams had 2 kills; seniors Lily Brookshire, Charlei Robinson and Mallory Rouse added one kill each.

Brookshire had Union's only ace; Robinson had 10 digs; Brown led Union County with 4 assists.

Panthers 0, LFO 2 (18-25, 19-25) - Union County put up a better fight in the second match but came up short in last Tuesday's finale.

Brown had 5 kills; junior Reese Jones, Robinson and Rouse had 2 apiece; Brookshire chipped in one.

Jones had 3 aces; freshman Samantha Combs had two; Brown, Robinson and Rouse and freshman Emry Sosensky added one.

Rouse recorded 2 blocks and Robinson had one. Jones and Robinson both picked up 6 digs with Jones finishing with 4 assists.



Union County senior Lily Brookshire. Photo/Todd Forrest

UCHS Homecoming 2024-25

Senior Leah Cox is Union County's Homecoming Queen for the 2024-25 school year after taking home the crown on Friday night at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

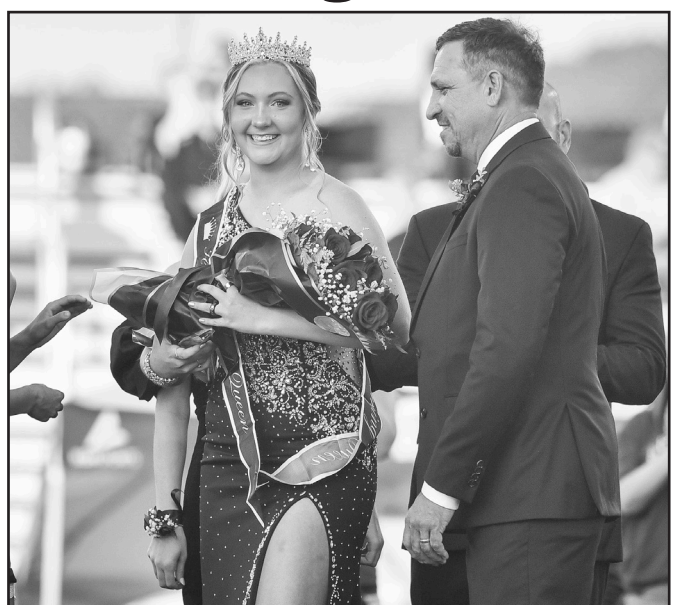
Following her coronation, Cox, who serves as drum major for the UCHS band, quickly departed the field to lead the band in the team fight song as the Panthers took the field.

Once she had a break from her band duties, Cox took a moment to talk to the *North Georgia News*.

"This means a lot to me, to know my classmates voted for me, it really does," she said. "There are no words to explain it. It just means so much to me."

Cox, who was a member of the court in 2023, discussed what it's been like after learning about her nomination.

"It's definitely a little nerve-racking, I'm not going to



Senior Leah Cox is your 2024-25 Union County High School Homecoming Queen. Photos by Todd Forrest

lie" she said. Especially since its senior year so you know you have a good chance at winning. So I was really nervous standing out there on the field.

"I just want to thank God for giving me this opportunity, my friends for voting for me and my family for coming out to support me."

UCMS V-ball claims program's first league title



Union County middle school finished with a 15-3 (10-2) record and won the league title earlier this month. Next week's *North Georgia News* will feature full story and interview with UCMS coach George Miller.

Volleyball: Trinity rallies past MACA

Morganton - The Lady Lions faced Trinity Academy for the second time on Friday, Sept. 13th.

Trinity had previously beaten MACA Lions in three matches at the beginning of the season. However, three weeks later, MACA started the night strong, winning the first two matches and dominating Trinity.

One standout player was Mercy Lee, a senior who played the Libero position, and played key role in the team's outstanding performance.

The entire team played with confidence and executed well, with strong performances from Austin Beal, Sara Bittel, and Hannah Corley, as well as Maggie Hooper, a junior who excelled on both defense and offense.

Soraya Wasit, the team captain, and Mercy Lee were all over the court. It was truly impressive to see these young athletes perform so well. How-



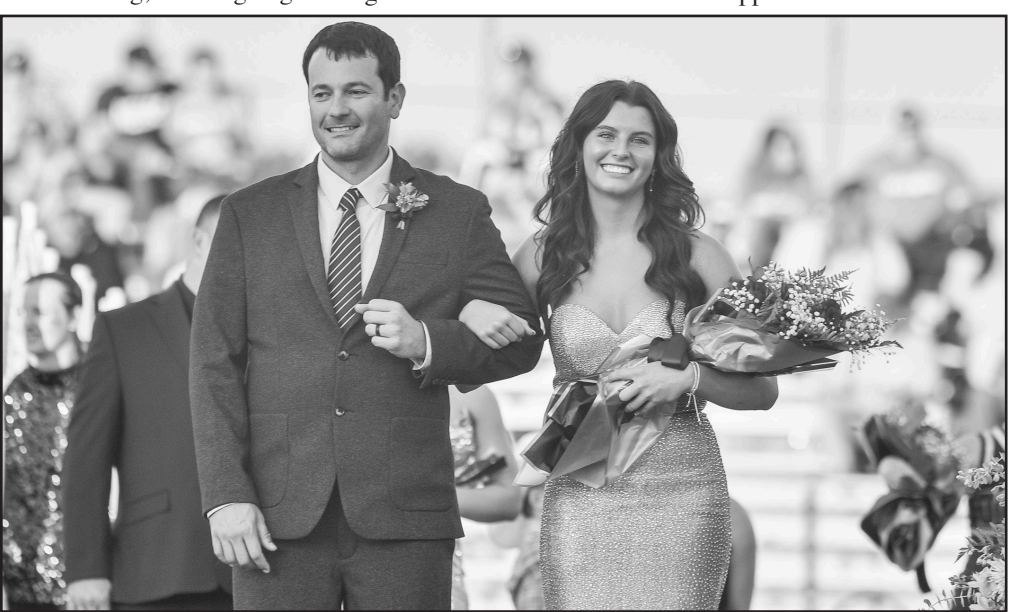
Mountain Area Christian Academy (MACA) in action during its Sept. 13 meeting with Trinity.

ever, the momentum suddenly shifted, and Trinity raised their level of play to come back and win three straight matches.

The disappointment was visible in the eyes of the Lady Lions. In the world of sports,

one must either take disappointment and move forward or risk moving backward.

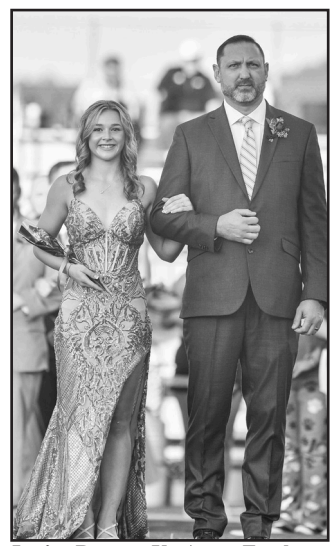
The Lady Lions will use this moment as motivation to keep moving forward. Go Lions!



UCHS Homecoming First runner-Up Sloane Dyer.



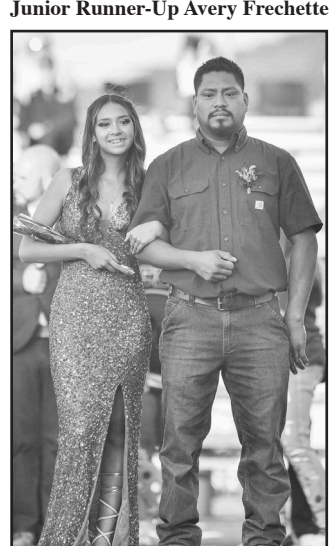
Second Runner-Up Giovanna Salazar



Junior Runner-Up Avery Frechette



Sophomore Runner-Up Elli Harper



Freshman Runner-Up Gabriella Perez

XC: Hunter and Hillman pace Union to a pair of top-three finishes

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Junior Lola Hunter took home silver at Stephens County's Reservation Run on Thursday, Sept. 19, guiding Union County to a second-place team finish.

Hunter finished the race in 21 minutes, crossing the line 23 seconds back of White County's Carly Black and 68 seconds ahead of third-place Megan Hightower of Franklin County.

White County took home first with 24 points, Union had 48 and Franklin was a distant third with 87.

In the boys' race, sophomore Oliver Hillman placed sixth at 18:57 as Union County placed third with 63 points, three behind second-place Franklin County and 12 back of first-place Hart County.

White County (73) and West Hall (133) placed fourth and fifth, respectively.

Andrew Nushtayev placed 12th at 19:54, freshman Cole Brown was 13th with a time of 19:56, Bryson



Oliver Hillman and the Union men logged their second top-three finish of the season at Stephens County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Brooks finished 14th at 20:01 and Noah James Payne rounded out Union's top five with an 18th-place showing at 20:32.

Other runners included Ander Faulkner in 22nd at 21:02, Trey Hawley was 23rd with a time of 21:16.

In the girls' race, freshman Macy Payne was seventh at 25:11, Lydia Wagner was 12th at 26:09, Averie Tanner placed 14th at 26:29 and Avery Hussion came in 15th with a

time of 26:51. Kate Barrett finished 17th at 27:25 and Katie Payne was 19th at 28:00.

Rounding out the top five teams were Hart County (100) and West Hall (107).

Union County will take part in the NGXCL 3 Wildwood Run in Dalton on Tuesday, Sept. 23 against 23 schools from Georgia and Tennessee. Union will face seven Region 7-AA squads in Dalton.