

Sports

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Sweet 16: Lady Panthers drop two extra inning contests at SE Bulloch

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Statesboro - The Union County Lady Panthers' season came to a close at Southeast Bulloch on Wednesday where Union dropped a pair of extra inning contests to deny them a second consecutive trip to Columbus.

The Lady Yellow Jackets, the reigning Region 3-AAA Champions, prevailed 9-8 in eight innings in the first game and 6-3 in nine innings to clinch their spot in the Elite 8.

However, it was 16 Lady Panthers' fielding errors during the two games that ultimately resulted in their downfall.

While Head Coach Jessica Stewart's lineup was able to produce 12 runs in two games, putting up a goose egg in the extra base hits department during the series prevented UCHS from overcoming their woes in the field.

Through four innings of the first game, all Union could muster was a RBI single by Jillian Lawn, driving in senior Lydia Arrowood, who also singled.

In the fifth, the Lady Panthers offense would re-discover some of the magic that they generated during their first round trip Lovett as they dropped six runs on SE Bulloch, all coming with two outs.

Senior Kendra Tanner opened the scoring surge with a base hit and a stolen base, allowing Arrowood to drive her in with a single to center.

Senior Laken Chambers and Lawn each followed with



Union County Softball seniors Lydia Arrowood (far left), Kendra Tanner (middle left), Laken Chambers (middle right) and Lilian Daniel (far right) leave UCHS with many individual and team records.

a walk to load the bases for Aladriel Arnold, who tied the game with a 2-run single to left.

Freshman Mary Wischmeyer scored Lawn with an RBI single, then a Maddie Sutton grounder to short was mishandled, scoring Arnold, and Wischmeyer came around on an error by the catcher.

When the dust settled, Union held a 7-4 advantage with nine outs between them and a game one victory.

Unfortunately, an error to lead off the bottom half of the fifth was followed by a single and a walk to load the bases.

Chambers fanned the next hitter to get the first out but three consecutive singles tied the game at 7-7. With the bags

still full, Chambers escaped the inning by inducing a pop up and a grounder to shortstop Braden Poteete.

Union wasted a scoring opportunity in the seventh when a pair of one-out singles resulted in no runs.

Chambers retired the Lady Jackets in-order during the bottom of the seventh.

For those unfamiliar with softball, when a high school fast pitch softball game goes extra innings, each team begins their at bat with a runner on second base. The runner is the player that made the final out of the team's prior at bat.

This rule will play a significant role later in the day. Ellie Garrison grounded out the seventh inning,

so she opened Union's half of the eighth on second base.

Sutton immediately sacrificed her to third but a pop up left the Lady Panthers with a runner on third and two down.

A shallow pop fly by Tanner was misjudged and the error allowed Garrison to score the go-ahead run.

Union would be unable to tack on an insurance run and Chambers entered the bottom of the eighth with her team clinging to an 8-7 lead.

A lead off single put runners at the corners before another fielding error knotted the score at 8-8.

A bunt single loaded the bases then an infield error allowed the winning run to score.

Arrowood finished 2-for-5 with 2 runs and an RBI, Arnold went 2-for-4 with a run and 2 RBIs, while Wischmeyer also turned in a 2-for-4 performance with a run and an RBI.

Skylar Ludlum scored a run as Chambers' courtesy runner in the fifth inning.

As for Union's pitcher, Chambers struck out seven in 7-plus innings of work. She yielded 11 hits, 2 earned runs, and walked one.

The second game saw the Lady Panthers fall behind once again when SE Bulloch scored one in the second and the fourth, sandwiched around a Lawn RBI single in the third.

Trailing 2-1 entering the seventh inning, Union dodged a major bullet when the Lady

Jackets loaded the bases with nobody out.

On the verge of putting the Lady Panthers away for good, Lawn got the first out when Poteete went home for the force out on a grounder to short.

After Sutton snagged a shallow flop-single to right, she cut down a runner at the plate and Wischmeyer applied the tag and fired to second for the third out to escape the inning unscathed.

Needing a run to keep the game, and the season alive, Arrowood reached on an error to open the bottom half of the seventh.

She later advanced to second on a passed ball, allowing Lawn to tie the game with a base hit up-the-middle.

Union was unable to tack on the winning run - sending game two into extras.

In the eighth, the Lady Jackets placed the wrong base runner on second, resulting in an out. The out came after a 15-minute delay that saw the umpires check the rule book and the SE Bulloch Athletic Director come onto the field to plead the case for the Lady Jackets.

The correct call was eventually made and Lawn mowed down the next hitter and induced a fly out to Sutton to end the inning.

Still tied entering the bottom of the eighth, Union was one run away from forcing a game three on Thursday.

With Wischmeyer taking her place in scoring position, the Lady Panthers were unable to put the bat on the ball as SE

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Union County Middle School football wraps up 2016 with playoff victory

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The Middle School Panthers wrapped up the season with a dominating 41-14 playoff victory over Lumpkin.

"Our defense played a solid game only giving up two scores," Byers said. "Colton Marlow, Aaron Helton, Day, and Riley Thomas all had big plays in key situations. Over all the entire defense played really well and has been a solid backbone of the team all year.

"Mason McCombs did a great job kicking the ball on extra points and kickoff.

"Seeing these young men play like we knew they could all year makes for a great end of a season, but also makes you wish that we had a few more games. I could not be prouder of them and the way they finished to season."

Daniel had scoring runs of 50 and 70 yards, Hemphill threw for three touchdowns, including a 92-yard strike to



UCMS offense vs Pickens earlier in the year. Photo/Todd Forrest

Carson Walker. Day had a pair of scoring grabs with one going for 53 yards and the other for 26 yards. He also added a 53-yard touchdown run.

According to Head Coach Justin Byers, the team's 4-4 record is a bit deceptive.

"This year has been a strange year and I do not feel that our record is a true reflection of who we are and how good we are as a ball team," he said. "We have played really hard this year and have been in every ball game, but have come up short in a few of those



UCMS defense swarms a Pickens County ball carrier during a game earlier this season. Photo/Todd Forrest

games." After struggling to open the season, the UCMS Panthers senior wide out Cooper Earls - both where they came away with a

decisive 21-0 victory. "At Dawson we played the best game we have so far this season," Byers said. "Our defense had a great showing and

managed to shut out the Tigers. We scored our first touchdown on a pick-six from outside

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Panthers travel to Fannin County on Friday with playoff spot on the line

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The last three times Union and Fannin have met on the gridiron, the average score has been 36-27, in favor of the Panthers.

However, the last three times Union went on the road to Fannin County, the average score has been 38-31, in favor of the Rebels.

Another shootout is almost guaranteed when the two rivals clash on Senior Night in Blue Ridge this Friday.

The Panthers will be playing for a spot in the postseason for the fourth straight year. Meanwhile, the Rebels will be looking to salvage a lost 2016 campaign, and what better way to put the sting of three consecutive blowout losses in the rearview, than by ending a three-game skid to your rival.

If there is any truth to the saying, "misery loves company" the Rebels would also love to deliver a severe blow to Union's playoff hopes and keep the Panthers at home, along with themselves, when the State Tournament kicks off in just over two weeks.

The two teams are also vying for the King of the Mountain Jug that has resided in Blairsville since 2014.

While this season has been disappointing for the Rebels, snatching the jug from UCHS, would at the very least, give them something to show for 2016.

"(Fannin) is always a difficult place to play," Union Head Coach Brian Allison said. "(Last year) We didn't play very well on



Cole Wright and the high-powered Union County offense look to reach the postseason for the fourth straight year with the Panthers' third consecutive victory over Fannin County on Friday, but it will have to come on the Rebels' Senior Night. Photo/Todd Forrest

offense in the early going, and it forced us to comeback and pull it off late. We don't want to get into that situation again.

"I'm certain their seniors will be excited and ready to play. It's always tough to face a team on Senior Night because it's such an emotional game. But it's going to be quite the challenge, just like it always is over there. We've got to take care of the football and just play the way we're capable of playing."

Fannin County is coming off a 63-37 loss to Lumpkin County where the Rebels allowed

50-plus points and 400-plus yards of total offense for the third straight game. During their three-game slide, Fannin's defense has surrendered a whopping 56 points-per-game. In their four region contests this season, Fannin is allowing 49 points-per-game and is ranked last in Region 7-AAA in scoring defense, while giving up 327 rushing yards and 470 total yards in region-play.

The Panthers on the other hand, are tops in Region 7-AAA in total offense at 401-yards-per-game, third in rushing offense (231 yards-per-game), and third

in scoring offense, while averaging 45 points-per in their six wins.

The Panthers are fifth in the region in scoring defense - giving up 42 points-per in Region 7-AAA games, while Fannin is coming off a 37-point scoring performance at Lumpkin.

The Rebels feature plenty of talent on the offensive side of the ball with senior quarterback Brad Davis and his favorite target, senior wide out Cooper Earls - both three year starters in Head Coach Jim Pavao's spread offense.

Davis threw for 346 yards at Lumpkin County last week and

he currently leads the region with 1,768 passing yards.

"Their quarterback is a very good football player and we can't let him sit in the pocket and have it easy," Allison said.

Earls has missed the last two games with a knee injury, but in his six games prior, he caught 42 passes for 776 yards and 7 scores. He remains uncertain for this Friday but sources believe he's going to give it a go for Senior Night.

At Lumpkin, senior Jacob Reece was Davis' favorite target with 10 grabs for 140 yards and a score.

Sophomore running back Hunter Gray had a breakout performance in Dahlonega with a career-high 139 yards and 2 TDs on 21 carries. For the season, he leads the Rebels with 5 rushing TDs.

Despite the top passing offense in 7-AAA, Fannin's rushing attack is last in Region 7-AAA at 132 yards-per-game. Although, they have trailed by multiple touchdowns during the second half of each of their region games and were forced to abandon the run.

Defensively, the Rebels brought in Coach Pavao and his highly touted 3-4 scheme from Gainesville High in 2014, where the Rebels opened the season at 3-1 during in his first year at the helm.

Unfortunately for Fannin County, Pavao's defensive prowess has not translated into much on-field success over the past two-and-one-half seasons.

In the loss to Lumpkin, the Rebels were torched by the region's No. 1 rushing attack, allowing 601 yards on the ground with four Indian ball carriers topping 100 yards. But Fannin was already trending in the wrong direction before that debacle. In the three games prior to Lumpkin, the Rebels were surrendering 235 yards-per-game on the ground.

When the two teams finally suit up on Friday night for a rivalry game, with playoff implications, and the dynamic of Fannin's Senior Night at play, you can throw stats out the window.

One thing that you can count on Friday night: the punters won't see much action.

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