

Sports

See the Sports Section at nghanews.com

Lady Panthers overpower Darlington; will host Sweet 16

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nghanews.com

With the winds at their back during the second half, the Union County Lady Panthers roared to life with four goals in less than 10 minutes to blow open a scoreless tie.

The 8-AA Region Champion Lady Panthers would then cruise to a 7-0 victory in the first round of the Class AA State Tournament.

Despite firing shot after shot at the Darlington goal, Union was unable to get on the board during the game's first 40 minutes. But when the Lady Panthers emerged from the locker room following the intermission, they meant business.

"During the second half we calmed down and played fantastic," Union Head Coach Tim Hunter said.

Only 97 seconds removed from halftime, Rachel Vester struck for Union's first goal.

One minute and 17 seconds later, Layne Baenninger scored to give the Lady Panthers a 2-0 lead in the game's 43rd minute.

Union's third goal came in the 47th minute when sophomore Braedyn Robbins scored off an assist from Baenninger and sophomore Joanna Irvin.

Irvin would add a goal to her statistics in the 51st minute when she gave the Lady Panthers a 4-0 advantage.

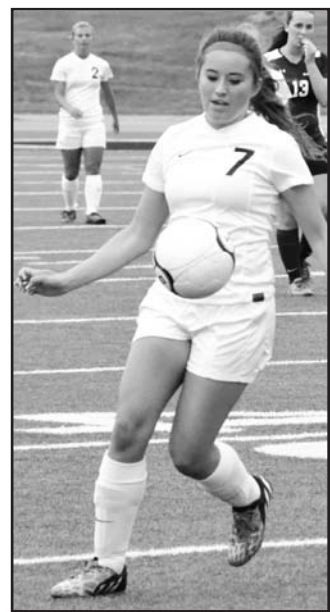
Freshman Layne Baenninger fired a shot past the Darlington keeper in the 58th minute to extend the Union lead to 5-0.

Vester added her second goal of the evening four minutes later.

The final goal came with just under 10 minutes to play



Left: freshman Brenna Innis battles with a Lady Tiger during the first half of Union's shutout victory Center: freshman Layne Baenninger shoots and scores during the second half to make it a 5-0 game. Right: junior Alyssa Arnold advances the ball upfield. Photos/Todd Forrest



when Robbins connected from about 25 yards away on a shot that cleared the keeper's fingertips for her second goal and the team's seventh.

Later that evening Lady Panthers learned that their second round opponent will be Thomasville, the No. 3 seed from Region 1-AA.

The Lady Bulldogs (5-11) will be making the trip to the mountains from the Florida line, where Thomasville sits 34 miles north of Tallahassee, Fla.

"Thomasville's record is misleading because of the size of the schools they've played," Coach Hunter said. "They were also missing one of their best players early in the season but she is back."

Thomasville earned a spot in the Sweet 16 following a 4-2 upset of a 10-win Long County squad - the No. 2 seed from Region 2-AA.

The Lady Panthers will



Left: Coach Hunter greets Camryn Carter as she gets a well deserved break during the final minutes. Right: sophomore Joanna Irvin battles with a Lady Tiger during the first half. Photos/Todd Forrest

continue to suit up without the services of leading scorer Maddy Morlock, but Coach Hunter was proud of the way his team handled

the adversity. "I thought the girls responded, knowing they were going to be shorthanded."



Carter finished with 3 assists, Baenninger, and Irvin had two each. Spaulding, Robbins, Vester, Garrison, and Innis had

one assist each. Game time vs Thomasville is Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

Panthers take two-of-three from Model; advance to Sweet 16

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nghanews.com

The Panthers are on their way to the Sweet 16 but getting there was a roller coaster ride.

After falling behind 3-0 to Model in the first game, Union battled back with three runs in the bottom of the sixth for a 5-4 victory.

In Game Two, with ace Joseph Mancuso on the mound, the Panthers built what seemed like an insurmountable 8-2 lead. But the Blue Devils got a run in the third and three in the fourth to cut the Union advantage to 8-6 while removing Mancuso from the mound after 96 pitches.

Entering the bottom of the sixth, Coach Bradburn turned to junior Lance Rich who allowed five runs, off three hits and two walks to a desperate Model team that was fighting to keep its season alive.

Senior Hunter Hughes relieved Rich and didn't fare much better, giving up four hits and two runs.

When the smoke cleared, Union trailed 13-8 going into the seventh and went on to drop Game Two 13-10.

In the third and deciding



Left: senior Jake Sisum homered twice during the series. Right: junior Josh Daniel picked up both Union wins on the mound. Photos/Todd Forrest

game, Coach Bradburn went back to Daniel, who had thrown 115 pitches the day before in the Panthers' Game One victory.

In Game Three, Daniel threw 111 pitches - leading his team to a 6-5 win and into the Sweet 16.

The junior right-hander allowed 10 hits and 5 runs over 7 innings, while walking 3 and

fanning four. Five of those hits came in the seventh inning as the Blue Devils rallied for three runs after entering the final frame down 6-2.

The Panthers took advantage of 3 Model errors to go along with 7 walks.

The Blue Devils would out-hit Union 10-4 but couldn't outdo the home team in the runs



Hughes finished the third game 2-for-4 with a run and an RBI.

Daniel went 1-for-2 with a pair of walks and a run. Senior catcher Chase Barnett had Union's only extra base hit of the game with a second inning double.

In Game One, Model

jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the top of the second but Jackson Burks tripled and scored to get the Panthers on the board in the bottom half of the second.

In the fifth inning, Andrew Brown was hit by a pitch and Barnett reached on an error, putting two aboard for senior Robert Prunier, who came through with an RBI single,

making it a 3-2 game.

The Blue Devils got that run back in the top of the sixth but senior Jake Sisum homered to leadoff the bottom of the sixth and bring Union back within a run.

Burks, Rich, and Tyler Odom followed with singles, and with two outs, Prunier brought home two on a Model error to put the Panthers on top at 5-4.

In Game Two, Sisum went deep for the second time in the series, while Rich went 2-for-4 with a double and an RBI. Hughes finished 2-for-5 with an RBI, Daniel was 1-for-2 with 2 RBIs, and Burks went 1-for-3 with a double.

Mancuso worked five innings, giving up 6 runs, 4 were earned, with 10 hits and 3 walks, while striking out six.

The Panthers travel to Fitzgerald for a doubleheader on Wednesday with the first pitch scheduled for 4:30 p.m. If needed, the third game would be played Thursday at 4:30 p.m.

The Purple Hurricanes (19-6) are the reigning champs from Region 1-AA and roughed up Long County in the first round by a combined two-game score of 26-4.

Panthers too much for outmanned and outclassed Armuchee

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nghanews.com

The Georgia High School Association officiating crew for the Class AA first round game between the Armuchee Indians and the Union County Panthers, definitely earned every penny that night.

The Panthers (9-1-1) defended their home turf and advanced to the Sweet 16 with a 4-0 victory.

In a game that was chippy from the get-go, Union County remained focused on the task at hand - earning a spot in the Sweet 16. And as Union's lead grew, the Armuchee tempers became shorter.

"There is a difference between playing physical and playing dirty," Union Head Coach Tim Hunter said. "If you watch the Oglethorpe game, that was a physical game. However, there was nothing to get upset about. It was just kids playing hard for the ball, but this (the Armuchee game) kind of crossed the line."

Sophomore Sam Seiler got the Panthers on the board in the game's sixth minute when he scored off a feed from



Left: senior John Spaulding advances the ball upfield. Center: seniors Phillip Jennings and Brett Dietz. Right: senior Alex Mancillas during Armuchee win. Photos/Todd Forrest

senior Brett Dietz. Just over 7 minutes later, senior Kyle Hamby converted a penalty kick to give the Panthers a 2-0 advantage that held up for the remainder of the half.

Less than 9 minutes into the second half, Dietz scored with a header off a corner kick from senior Alex Mancillas.

Sophomore Parker Mc-

Combs capped off the scoring late in the game with a goal that made it 4-0.

Hamby and Baenninger were credited with the assist on the McCombs goal.

"I thought our guys passed extraordinarily well," Coach Hunter said. "That was big for us. We were moving the ball all over the field and they had a hard time covering



us when we did that."

Up next for the Panthers is a trip to Thomasville on Wednesday for a 5:30 meeting between the Panthers and the 16-2 Thomasville Bulldogs, who are the last public school to win the State Championship.

"The Thomasville boys are traditionally a super-strong team," Coach Hunter said.

Thirteen of Thomasville's wins are by shutout. Their two losses came to Greater Atlanta Christian by a score of 6-0 and to a 15-2 Cairo squad from Class AAAA by a score of 4-0.

The Bulldogs finished 6-0 in Region 1-AA so the majority of their wins came against schools from larger classifications. They are also



coming off a 10-0 rout of Bryan County in the first round of the State Tournament.

The Panthers bus will be leaving at 8:15 a.m. for the 350 mile trip to Thomasville.

If the Panthers can pick up a win on Wednesday, they would host the Elite 8 game vs the winner of Monticello and Lovett.