

2012 Union County Sports: the year in review

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The year 2012 was a memorable one for Union County athletics. Two State Champions were crowned in 12&U Softball and Cross Country. It was business as usual for the Lady Panther basketball and softball teams as both returned to the State Playoffs. The Panther football team had a winning record, while defensive lineman Luther Jones made headlines locally and in Norman, Okla.

In January, Union County senior basketball star Becca Merritt became the sixth member of her family to join the 1,000 point club at Union County High School. Merritt joined Jack Lance, Jack Lance Jr., Kris Lance, Kenya Lance, and brother Seth Merritt.

Later, Merritt and her Lady Panther teammates ransacked Valhalla as Union County torched East Hall, the eventual Region 8-AA Champion, during a 13-for-16 three-point shooting performance against the Lady Vikings in Union's win. The loss was East Hall's only defeat at the hands of a public school during the 2011-12 season.

February saw the beginning of baseball and soccer season at Union County High. The baseball team opened with two early wins over Towns County, the girls soccer team opened the season at 4-1, while the boys got off to a slow start at 1-4.

February also marked the Union County Lady Panther basketball team's fourth trip to State in five years.

Things turned around for Union County boys soccer in March. After falling on Mar. 1st, Union County rattled off six straight wins, while the Lady Panther soccer team went 8-1 during March. The baseball squad went 8-4 in March, highlighted by a three-game sweep of Region 8-AA rival Fannin County.

Jim Hughes stepped down as Union County High School's Athletic Director in April and was replaced by an Athletic Committee headed by UCHS Principal Ed Rohrbaugh. Brian Allison, Mandy Hunter, and C.T. Hussion were appointed to the committee. Hussion also stepped down as head baseball coach, giving way to Assistant Coach Brandon Bradburn.

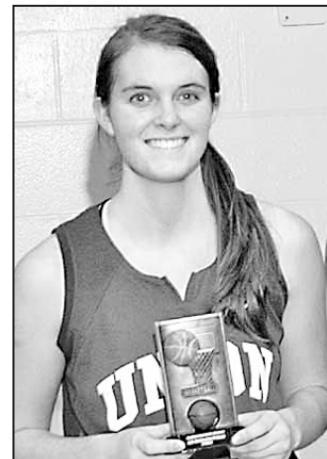
Callie Dyer and Angie Hughes were selected to play in the GACA All-Star Softball Game where they met Softball Gold Medalist Jennifer Mendoza in May. Later that month, Dyer chose to play softball at Young Harris as a walk-on and Luther Jones set a school record



Union County crowned two State Champions in 2012. Emma Garrison (left) and 12&U Softball (Right).



Luther Jones (left), Hannah Hughes (middle), and Becca Merritt (right) each had a big year in 2012.



by squatting 615 pounds.

With school being on summer break, the world of sports heated up in a hurry. After winning the District Tournament in June, the 12&U Softball Team returned from Chickamauga with a State Title in July. The 10&U baseball team brought back fourth place from Valdosta later that month.

Union County football opened its official practice in August and held its most successful 'Meet the Team' ever later in the month. Jones picked up M.V.P. honors at the National Underclassmen Camp at the University of Oklahoma and was named a Pre-Season All State selection by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. When football season did kick off, the Panthers picked up another win over rival Towns County.

Union County football had a new all-time winningest football coach in September. Head Coach Brian Allison passed Terry Rogers as Union County High School's all-time wins leader following a blow-out victory over Andrews, NC. The win over the Wildcats was significant since Coach Rogers' first coaching win came against Andrews on the same night that Allison played his first game in a Panther uniform.

Union County's first football team, the 1957 Panthers were honored before Union's 23-7 win over Fannin County, giving Union a 23-22 series lead

against its western rival.

The Middle School Lady Panther softball team picked up its second straight League Championship after thumping White County in the title game. The Lady Panthers have only lost one game over the past two seasons.

Union County Middle School Cross Country also picked up another League Championship. October was a busy month as the Lady Panthers softball team reached its third straight Region Championship Game and play in their fourth straight State Tournament. The football team ended a 10-year Homecoming Game losing streak with a 41-13 victory over Riverside Military Academy.

Cassidy Davis was named Homecoming Queen on a night that saw Evander Holyfield visit Blairsville for the first time. The former World Heavyweight Champion was in attendance watching his son Elijah play football for Riverside.

In November, Emma Garrison blistered the state course to bring home Union's second Cross Country State Championship and seventh overall. Garrison joined Larry Turner, Jamie Gibson, and Chris Jones as Union County High's first female state champion. Earlier in the month, Garrison and Jeremy Webb each picked up a Region Championship at the 8-AA Cross Country Meet at Oglethorpe County High

School.

Coach Tim Hunter took over his old post as Union County High School Soccer Coach following the resignation of Coach Howard McCombs earlier in the fall.

Three student athletes put pen to paper as Zach Odom committed to Young Harris College baseball, Hannah Hughes to North Georgia College softball, and Wes Aulet signed with Montreat College baseball. Hannah Hughes was also named the Region 8-AA Player of the Year after setting school records in walks, home runs, RBIs, and games played. She joins Amber Seeba (Highlands College) and Carly Adams (Truett-McConnell College) as the third member of the Lady Panther softball team to play at the next level.

Union County basketball also played host to the first annual Glenda Gooch Foundation Tip Off Tournament that saw both Union County squads pick up two wins.

In December, Union County's boys basketball team picked up its 29th and 30th consecutive win over Towns County during a 10-0 start. The Lady Panthers reached the Battle of the States Championship Game for the second straight year.

Despite playing with an injured shoulder, junior football star Luther Jones was named All-State after leading the state in tackles for a loss during the regular season.

Joe Collins

Tips from the Range

This simple game of golf that we play is a determination of accuracy.

If you are accurate, then your scores will be lower. We work really hard and practice ways to hit, pitch and putt the ball better and in turn we learn how to move the club properly. This is, and should be, a major priority when pursuing the game.

If your swing is solid then theoretically you should play better, but if your aim is bad, then it doesn't really matter how well you strike the ball. As the old Scotsman's caddy was quoted as saying after his boss hit a shot into the sand, "Aye man, ya hit that a good one but you're towards was off." What the caddy was actually saying in today's translation would be, "Your alignment was wrong boss." It doesn't matter if you hit it well if you don't line up your shots correctly. Alignment is very important.

Watch the pros very carefully next time you view a tournament or happen to be there in person. They really pay a lot of attention to correct alignment. The "Big Easy" checks his alignment almost every time by simply looking at his feet in comparison to his mid-section and then finally the shoulders. He wants all three to be aimed at the same point and not the feet in one direction and the shoulders pointing somewhere else. This

will cause you to cast the club and change the path of the club head.

It is hard to aim at a point far away so pick out an "intermediate" target that is only a couple of feet in front of your ball position. To do this you need to stand behind the ball and find a small target to represent your main target point. A blade of grass or spot on the ground that is directly in line with your aiming point but in front of your ball. By standing behind the ball you can see the target line that the ball should start on. Always align your body parallel to the target line. As you address the ball keep that spot and your target line in your peripheral vision until you have finished your alignment sequence and are ready to hit the ball. Now do a visual to see if you are aimed correctly by checking to make sure that you are square and pointed in the right direction. It is correct to be a little open to your target at address because the club path is inside on the downswing if you are swinging correctly.

Pay attention to your alignment and watch the ball striking get better. Our goal is to control the swing with our sub-conscious so that it is reactionary. Build your swing on good fundamentals but always remember that if you line up wrong the swing will be compromised and it will react to the false alignment. Poor alignment can sneak into your game at any time and cause all sorts of problems to your fundamentals and mechanics. Always take a little more time and make sure your "towards" is correct. Good luck and I will see you on the course!

Union Wrestling challenges the best of the best at Jefferson

By Todd Forrest
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Jefferson - Union County Wrestling went two rounds before being eliminated at the Area Duels Tournament.

The Panthers wrestled Jefferson, the No. 1 team in the state during the first round. Adam Williams, Chase Stancil, Chase Barnett, Tulsa Queen, and Sam Whitmer all had great matches against the Dragons.

"The one thing that impressed me about our young team was that they attacked Jefferson first," Coach Michael Smith-Foote said. "They have no fear and actually were looking to win instead of expecting to be beat. Several boys ran legs on their opponents, and many did not get turned in the first period."

During the second round, Union faced Westside-Augusta and fell 54-30. The entire team wrestled well but gave Westside 18 points because Union did not have a full team.

Coach Smith-Foote says that his team is still looking for wrestlers that weigh 105, 120, and 170 pounds for next year.

"Hopefully several

eight and ninth graders will fill these spots next year," he said. "We had very special performances from Keith Brewer, Orlando Lara, Jon Floyd, Dylan Byers, and Alyssa Sinkler."

"One of the things we have been looking for the whole year was a team leader," he added. "We as coaches did not want to pick one we wanted someone to step up and take it themselves. What we found this weekend is that we have three leaders: Chase Barnett, Jon Floyd, and Chase Stancil."

Union County has home matches on Tuesday and Friday, and will host matches every Tuesday during the month of January.

"Please come out and support our newest athletes in the county," Coach Smith-Foote said. "We are also looking for future state champions now. If you have a son over the age of five and you think they maybe interested in wrestling, let us start training now. We offer training and matches every Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. every week of the year at no cost. Contact (us) or check out our Facebook page for information, pictures, videos, and training at 'Union County Wrestling' on Facebook."

Woody Gap Falcons host four at 'The Nest'

By Joe Collins
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Suches - The Falcons' Nest was busy Friday night as the Woody Gap Falcons middle school and high school played hard but fell in all four games.

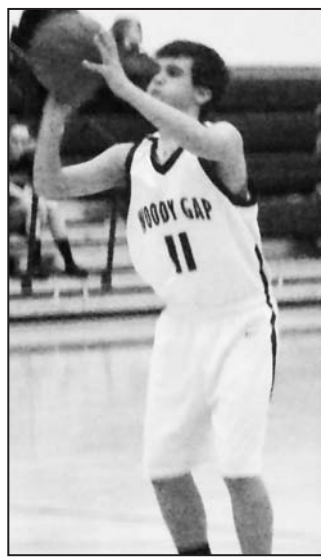
The excitement ran high as the teams hit the hardwood and the effort was there but fate was not as the middle school girls lost 18-10 and the boys lost a close one in overtime 37-32. The battle continued as the high school teams got underway but the results were the same as the girls fell 39-30 and the boys came up short 46-35.

The Middle School girls hit the floor first starting at 4 p.m. and got things warmed up despite the cold temperatures outside. They hustled, fought hard and made a good showing but faced a solid defense that held them to 10 points as the offense missed several chances to score inside the key. Hannah Skipper led the team in scoring with 4 points while Heather Sorrells, Eliza Wilkins and Kianna Martin all had two points each. Brooklyn Dockery rounded out the effort but the girls were out matched on this night 18-10.

The Middle School boys followed with a strong game that ended in a 29-29 tie but had a lot of excitement. They trailed 25-20 with 2:32 left in the game when Easton Wood smelled blood and took his game to the next level with some very aggressive defense. He stole the ball and hit Devin Martin for the assist. Martin drew the foul and went to the line for a three-point play and left the Falcons trailing by three. Joseph Corbin had a strong defensive play with .30 left in the game to save a score and Wood followed with another steal and a strong move to the hoop to



Amber Gooch



Konner Sosebee

tie the game at 29-29 with .05 left. The crowd got loud as the Falcons held strong and ended the game in a tie.

The following three-minute overtime started with the Falcons scoring first. Alex Carroll had a good move in the lane that scored two points and drew a foul. He hit the bonus and the home team now led 32-29 with 2:45 remaining in overtime. An opposing three-point goal tied the game with one minute left on the clock and the final seconds went in favor of the visitors who won 37-32. It was a good effort by the whole team but especially for Wood who scored 22 points with 3 assists and 11 rebounds. Carroll had 7 points and 4 boards, Corbin had 2 points and Zeb Harkin finished with 1 point. Austin Clark added to the mix with a strong defensive effort but the guys fell short 37-32.

The high school girls hit the floor next and jumped on the visitors early leading 5-0 with 1:32 left in the first quarter and took a 5-4 lead into the second quarter. The Lady Falcons were out scored by 5 points in the second and trailed at the half 16-12. They came

out aggressive in the second half but the shots would not fall and they trailed 28-16 starting the final quarter. Senior Amber Gooch got her team rolling in the fourth and put on an impressive effort with 7 steals and two assist ending the game with 22 points, 12 boards and 11 steals. Sophomore Shelby Tumlin added 6 points and 3 rebounds while Staci Clark finished the game with 2 points and 3 boards. It was an impressive effort for the lady Falcons and they should hold their heads high. "I am very proud of our girls. They never gave up and played hard to the end. The final quarter got aggressive and we held our own but it just wasn't enough," said Head Coach Glenn Kough.

The varsity boys finished up the night as they took to the planks and got aggressive early drawing first blood with 4:54 left in the first as Sophomore Konner Sosebee hit one of two foul shots. They hit the boards with a vengeance in the first quarter and dominated the defensive paint early but were cold on the offensive end. Sophomores Dakota Etheridge, Eli Gooch and Sosebee led the

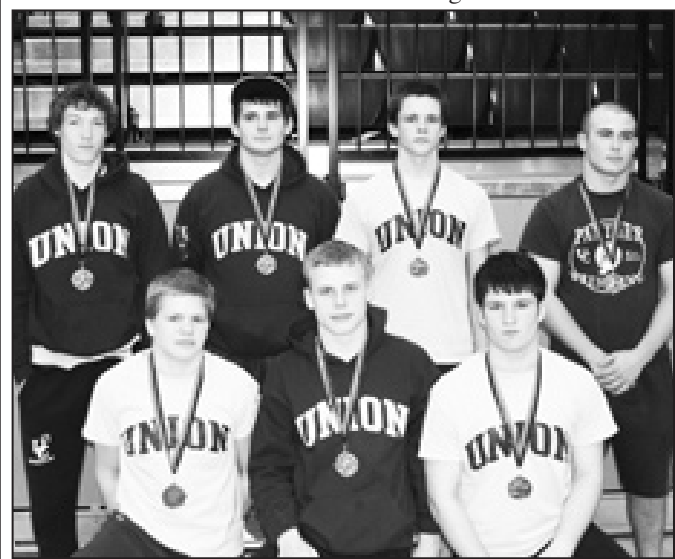
offense early and the Falcons led 10-9 with .49 left in the first. A turnover and a fast break led to a 13-10 deficit for the Falcons as the second quarter got underway and the momentum shifted to the opposing team who led at halftime 26-19.

The second half started with the Falcons bringing the ball in but the offense was still cold and the hoop basically remained closed despite a solid defensive struggle in the third quarter that found WG trailing 33-27 to start the fourth. The guys played hard and the defense was in their opponents face but the offense was just not hitting the shots to keep up and they were out scored in the fourth 13-7. Gooch scored 8 points and had 9 rebounds in an impressive effort, Etheridge also had 8 points with 7 rebounds and two assists and Sosebee had 8 points and 6 boards while going 3/5 from the line. Junior Casey McKim was impressive with 6 points and two assists while Junior Logan Wood added two points and 4 rebounds. "We played well considering we have had very little practice during the Christmas break. We can be proud of how we played and I am very pleased with tonight's effort," said Kough.

The Falcons have a good program this year and the athletes are playing some good ball. It is a credit to how good they are when you consider their total enrollment for high school is only 25 students. They play an old time small school type basketball and it is very exciting to watch.

Make plans now to go and see the final game of the season at home on Jan. 18 starting at 4 p.m.

They need your support and you will not be disappointed with the action. Go Falcons!



Union County Panther wrestling medal winners at the Arrowhead Classic Tournament at Stephens County. On Dec. 29th Union traveled to Toccoa. At the meet, Union had its first high school wrestler place at a tournament. The Panthers picked up one first place, two second places, one third place, and three fourth place finishes. The Panther wrestling squads will host a match every Tuesday for the rest of the month before Area Tournaments begin in February.

Cheerleader for the day

Macon - On Saturday, Dec. 8th, Morgan McCombs, a Mercer basketball cheerleader, and her 9 year-old cousin, Mia McCombs cheered together as the Bears faced Alabama A&M.

Morgan, a Junior, Psychology Major at Mercer University is the daughter of Byron and Diane McCombs. Morgan invited Mia to attend the cheerleading clinic along with 80 other young girls who participated.

Mia, the daughter of Howard and Donna McCombs, had the opportunity to perform with the Mercer cheerleaders during the game as well as display some of her gymnastic skills as part of their halftime routine.

Morgan and Mia enjoyed a great evening together cheering the Mercer Bears on to victory.



Morgan and Mia McCombs