

# Union wrestling places fourth at Area Tournament

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**Tiger** - Union County wrestling had their best team showing at Area during their short history last week at Rabun County when they took home fourth place after entering the tournament ranked fifth.

The Panthers fell to Riverside Military Academy in the first round by a score of 30-48.

In round two, Union took down the host Rabun County Wildcats, 48-29. Last year, Rabun placed fourth so the Panthers victory over the Wildcats allowed Union to steal their spot from a year ago.

In the third round Union squared off with wrestling power Greater Atlanta Christian and took care of business, 46-36.

The Spartans placed second last year to Social Circle.

In the final round, with third place on the line, the Panthers met up with Riverside once again, who edged Union for third place.

According to Union County Wrestling Coach Michael Smith-Foot, each year Union County has been either the first or second team eliminated from the team tournament.

"This was a huge step in the right direction this year," Coach Smith-Foot said. "What is most impressive about this feat is that it was accomplished with eight freshmen, four sophomores, and two juniors in the line-up."

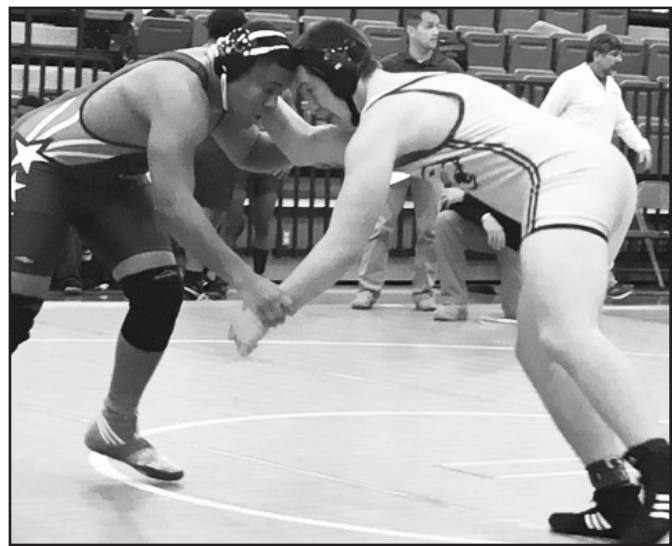
Social Circle went on to win the tournament and private school Wesleyan placed second.

Union has wrestled Wesleyan twice this season with both losses coming by 15 points or less.

This week, Union has their final home match on Tuesday



Union County wrestling against Greater Atlanta Christian at the Area Tournament (left). Union County in action vs Riverside Military Academy at the Area Tournament (right).



Union County Wrestling places two at the Amicalola Classic.



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Union County vs Rabun County at the Amicalola Classic.

against Dawson County, Murphy, and Rabun Gap.

Next week, the Panthers go to Hayesville to wrestle with Swain County. That weekend Union wrestle in their last tournament at Pickens County before Traditional Area, Sectionals, and State.

"We are hoping to finish in the top four at this area as well and hopefully send eight to ten wrestlers to Sectionals, and at least four to State this year," Coach Smith-Foot added.

Prior to the Area Tournament, Union finished fourth at the Amicalola Classic.

The Panthers fell to Wesleyan but defeated Rabun, both Area foes.

Union's dual record on the year is 6-10 with most of those losses coming by narrow margins.

Entering the Area Tournament, freshman Alex Barrett had

a 21-4 record at 106 pounds. Sophomore Brendan Mason was 21-2 at 113 pounds.

Freshman Tyree Mackie held a 17-3 record at 126 pounds. Freshman Isaac Tritt was 12-6 at 138 pound. Sophomore Grizzly Breedlove was 20-7 at 182 pounds.

Junior Zach Payton held a 14-5 record at 220 pounds. Sophomore Josh Silvers was sporting a 10-5 record at 285 pounds, but only weighs 218.

Most of the team was winning records, but these are the most impressive records.

"We are in the phase of the season were maintaining weight is very important and polishing our movements in wrestling is a big deal too," Coach Smith-Foot said. "The one thing we need to improve on is losing without getting pinned. Most of our dual losses would have been wins if we would have lost by points instead of pin. That is frustrating as a coach."

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Down 67-57 with 4:47 to play, a Baenninger jumper sparked a 9-0 Panthers' run.

At the 4:17 mark, Baenninger nailed a trey and 22 seconds later, drove into the paint for two more.

A layup by Crawford Colwell, off a feed from brother Candler Colwell, at the 3:27 mark brought Union within a point at 67-66 - capping off the run.

The Wildcats made it a 69-66 game with 3:09 to play and the Panthers would turn it over on the ensuing possession, but no harm was done as the defense made a stop.

"I've always told the guys that when you make stops and pick your energy up on defense, you make buckets," Coach Jones said. "I don't know why that is, but when you play great defense, you have great offense. But down 10, we had to make a stop, and make buckets. They were killing us with that one play, and after 3.8 quarters we decided to stop them."

Baenninger, who finished with 13 points in the final frame and 21 in the second half, evened the score at 69-all with a three from the left wing at the 1:57 mark.

With 1:13 remaining, Baenninger went 1-for-2 at the foul line to give Union its first lead since it was 19-16 in the second quarter.

Rabun would retake the lead at 71-70 with a pair from the charity stripe with 39 seconds left.

Ten seconds later, Crawford Colwell attacked the basket for two and the foul. The sophomore connected at the line to give Union a 73-71 advantage.

Baenninger scored six of his team's 11 points in the first quarter as the Wildcats led 14-11 after one.

With 1:14 left in the first half, Rabun began to pull away at 29-22 but an



Patrick Baggett

8-2 Panthers' run to close the half made it a 31-30 game at the break.

Baenninger accounted for the game's final six points of the second quarter with a pair of treys in the final 23 seconds.

The first trey made it a 31-27 game with just over 20 seconds left, and his second came with 5 seconds left, just as he did in the second half, to bring the Panthers within a point.

Baenninger's 35 and Crawford Colwell's 25 combined for 60 of Union's season-high 77 points.

Baggett's three treys gave him 9 points, Shook added 6 points, and Candler Colwell finished with 2 points.

**Panthers 64  
Washington Wilkes 51**

**Washington** - Baenninger followed up his 35-point game with a 26-point performance in a win at Washington Wilkes on Saturday afternoon.

Baenninger scored 15 of his game-high 26 during the second half as the Panthers pulled away from a 32-27 advantage at the break.

Union outscored the Tigers 19-10 in the third quarter as they opened up a 51-37 lead entering the fourth.

Baggett connected from downtown in each quarter for a career-high 12 points. As a team, the Panthers hit seven treys.

Shook finished with 7 points on 3-of-4 shooting at the line. Senior Matthew Rich scored five with three coming on a first quarter trey.

Seniors Andrew Brown and Lance Rich added 4 points each. Senior Joseph Mancuso added 2 points.

Candler and Crawford Colwell both finished with 2 points.

Union led 15-14 after one quarter with five different Panthers reaching the scoring column.

**Panthers 30  
Riverside 41**

**Gainesville** - In a battle between the top two teams in the 8-AA standings, Union came out ice-cold and found themselves behind 10-5 after one and 21-8 at the break.

Shook scored all 7 Panther points in the third quarter as the Eagles extended their lead to 31-15 entering the fourth.

Union would match its scoring output for the first three quarters with 15 in the fourth but it wasn't enough to catch Riverside.

Baenninger scored five of his team-high 13 in the fourth and Shook scored four of his 11 in the final frame.

Candler Colwell hit a fourth quarter trey for a total of 3 points, junior Parker McCombs added 2 points, and Crawford Colwell scored 1 point.



Left to right: the foursome of Chase Shook, Lawson Baenninger, Crawford Colwell, and Patrick Baggett hit it up on the defensive end. These four players provided 75 of Union's 77 points (97 percent) in the win over Rabun County. Photo/Todd Forrest

## NASCAR 2016

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

### Wood Brothers To Race Full Schedule

Can the Wood Brothers reclaim some of their former glory?

It's been six years since the Wood Brothers, NASCAR's oldest team, has been able to run a full Sprint Cup season. Since 2009, they have had to content themselves with running only 14-20 races per year, due to lack of sponsorship.

That will change this year as the team has secured a full season sponsorship and young Ryan Blaney as their driver.

"We are beyond excited to make this announcement about going back to full time competition," said Eddie Wood, team co-owner. "It has been something we've worked toward since 2009 when we started running limited schedules."

"I have to thank Ford, our technical alliance partners Team Penske and Roush Yates Engines, as well as everyone at Motorcraft, for working with us to make this day possible. It'll be fun to see just how good Ryan Blaney, and our team can be over a full season."

The last time the Wood Brothers won was in 2011 when Trevor Bayne took the Daytona 500. Now that they have a technical alliance with Team Penske, they should be in contention for top-five and top-10 finishes throughout the season and could even find themselves back in victory lane once again.

Blaney is one of the favorites in the 2016 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Rookie of the Year race and if Blaney and the Wood Brothers can live up to their potential, the 22-year old could bring home Rookie of the Year honors as well.

"This is every driver's dream come true, getting a chance to run in the NASCAR Sprint Cup," said Blaney. "I'm really looking forward to running with this historic team and hopefully get them their 99th and 100th wins sooner rather than later."

Crew chief will be Jeremy Bullins. He returns to the Wood Brothers organization following a successful three-year tenure with Team Penske's No. 22 NASCAR Nationwide Series team that produced 21 wins and two consecutive NASCAR Nationwide Series Owners' Championships.

Bullins first worked with the Wood Brothers in 1999 on the Pro Cup and Late Model cars driven by Jon Wood. In 2000, Bullins became race engineer for the iconic No. 21 Ford in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series, a position he held until June of 2002. Bullins moved on to work with ST Motorsports, Robert Yates Racing and Richard Childress Racing, where he helped drivers Kevin Harvick and Clint Bowyer claim a total of nine Sprint Cup Series victories as a race engineer.

A native of Walnut Cove, NC, Bullins joined Team Penske in 2012 to serve as the crew chief for the No. 22 car in the Nationwide Series, earning three wins in his first full season at the helm. In 2013, Bullins led the team to 12 wins with four different drivers and the team's first Nationwide Series Owners' Championship. The No. 22 Ford team won the Owners' Title again this season behind six series victories. In total, Bullins earned 21 wins, 14 poles, 57 top-five and 79 top-10 finishes in 99 starts with the No. 22 Team Penske Nationwide Series program.

"This is a great opportunity for me at this point in my career to

move to a great organization with a solid driver, while still getting the chance to work with the people that I've come to know and respect at Team Penske," said Bullins. "Everyone in the sport knows about the Wood Brothers and recognizes that No. 21. To get a chance to work for Eddie and Len and the entire organization and to have Ryan behind the wheel, is pretty much everything I could have asked for."

The team was formed in 1950 by Glen and Leonard Wood, hence the "Wood Brothers".

Some of NASCAR's greatest drivers sat behind the wheel of the No. 21 during the 1960s, including Curtis Turner, Marvin Panch, Fireball Roberts, Parnelli Jones, Tiny Lund, Junior Johnson, Speedy Thompson, Fred Lorenzen, and Cale Yarborough.

In 1972, David Pearson was hired to be the full-time driver of the No. 21 car. This choice would pave the way for one of the most successful strings of victory in motorsports history. In only seven years, the team entered 143 races and amassed a staggering 46 wins and 51 poles. Their race winnings surpassed \$1.3 million during this period with Pearson as the driver. Pearson continued driving the car from 1972 to 1979.

In 1976, with Pearson still driving, the Wood Brothers won the coveted "Triple-Crown" of NASCAR racing; by winning the legendary Daytona 500, the World 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway, and the Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway.

Neil Bonnett and the Wood Brothers team had a successful relationship. It lasted only three and a half seasons and 83 races, but included 9 victories and over \$700,000 in winnings.

As time marched on through the 1970s and 1980s, many of the cutting-edge innovations pioneered by the team were discovered or were outright copied by other different teams. Thus, the Woods' competitive edge had been dulled by other teams taking advantage of the Wood innovations and therefore, the Wood Brothers were trying for a rebirth for the fabled NASCAR No. 21 Ford.

Kyle Petty would find victory in their second season together at Richmond International Raceway in Richmond, Virginia. In 1987 the team won the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte.

During the 1990s, they won with drivers Dale Jarrett, Michael Waltrip, and Elliott Sadler.

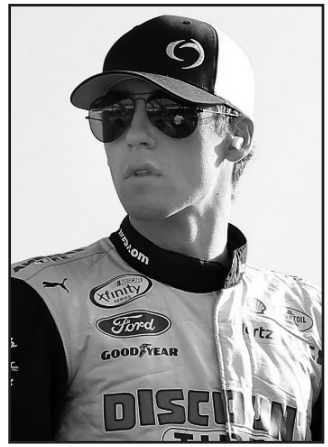
They merged with Tad and Jodi Geschickler's JTG Racing in 2006 to increase their competitiveness and bring about sponsorship, but separated for the 2008 season.

Since then they have only been able to run partial schedules each year. With young Blaney behind the wheel, a working alliance with Penske, and better funding, maybe a new generation can find victory lane and help reclaim some of their former glory.

**McREYNOLDS TALKS ABOUT NEW RULE CHANGES**

Larry McReynolds gives his take on the new NASCAR rules that will be in effect during the 2016 racing season.

"This will be the year of the low downforce package in NASCAR's Sprint Cup Series, and it remains to be seen exactly



Ryan Blaney

what they will mean for various teams," McReynolds said. "Every time there is a rules change in NASCAR it helps some drivers while conversely hurting others. You've always heard me say that no matter what rule changes they make, no matter what car they run, no matter what points system or Chase format NASCAR selects -- regardless of any of that -- the cream is always going to rise to the top.

"Any rules changes is not going to take a team that is consistently running 25th and make them a contender for wins. In the same breath it's not going to take a team that is a contending team and all of sudden you find them simply struggling to finish in the top-15 every week.

"It just doesn't work that way. The best drivers and best crew chiefs are going to find their way to the front no matter what is in front of them.

"Fans might remember that NASCAR had the teams race this low downforce package last year on two occasions. Joe Gibbs Racing won both of those races at Kentucky and at Darlington. I still maintain it's going to the same cast of characters, no matter what the rules package is, that will rise to the top.

"It's still going to be Kevin Harvick, Kurt Busch, his brother Kyle Busch and the Jimmie Johnson's of the world up front, contending for the wins and the championship. The good thing as we head into the 2016 season is that all the teams have two races under their belt running this package. They also know that this is the rules package they will run every single race weekend, except for the four restrictor-plate races at Daytona and Talladega.

"I can promise you that the front-running teams will have their arms around this package and it will be the same cast of characters up front when it is all said and done."

While the NASCAR off season has not come to an end, it is getting close. Several teams will conduct tire tests this week at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Goodyear is expecting to build softer tires with the adoption of the lower downforce rules package for the 2016 Sprint Cup season. Greg Stucker, the director of race tire sales for the NASCAR supplier, said tires will be tuned to each track with a goal of increasing grip.

**Racing Trivia Question:**

What is the date of this year's Daytona 500?

**Last Week's Question:**

Who was the first NASCAR champion? Answer: It was Red Byron.

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