

# First-half struggles hound Panthers in weekend losses at Towns, Stephens

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Union County dropped a pair of road games over the weekend, 58-28 at 10th-ranked Towns County and 78-57 at Class AAA Stephens County.

In their two losses combined, the Panthers were outscored 33-8 in the first quarter and 73-30 in the first two frames.

After winter weather canceled last Tuesday's home contest with Gilmer, the Panthers returned to action for the first time since Nov. 24 when they visited Towns County on Friday.

**Panthers 28, Towns County 58** - Falling behind 14-2 after one and 30-5 late in the second, Union County's Friday visit to Hiwassee was all but over by halftime.

Trailing 33-10 at the break, the Panthers played Towns to an 11-11 tie in the third before getting doubled up (14-7) in the fourth.

Juniors Lake Hughes, Caleb John and sophomore Eli Underwood led Union County with 6 points each.

Austin Taylor and Landon Kight added 3 points apiece while Landon Cox and Keyton Chitwood scored two each.

Unlike the previous two outings, where Towns County's transfers outscored its locals (37-26 vs Union and 47-40 vs Tallulah Falls), the Indians' home-grown talent did most of the heavy-lifting behind 24 points from Aidan Berrong and



Daniel Snow scores on a reverse layup during the Panthers' Nov. 24 meeting vs. Towns County. Photo/Todd Forreest

10 from fellow senior Kolby Moss.

**Panthers 57, Stephens County 78** - At Stephens County, the Panthers trailed 19-6 after one and 40-20 at the break during a 78-57 loss on Saturday.

Union tried making things interesting during the third and early stages of the fourth but were never able to seriously threaten.

The Panthers scored 23 points in the third, pulling within 15. Kight (8 points), Hughes (6 points on two treys) and John led the charge, combining for 14 points

Kight finished with a career-high 18 points - all coming in the second and third quarters as the Panthers attempted to climb out of an early hole.

John scored nine, Underwood had eight and Hughes



Junior Landon Kight led the Panthers with 18 points at Stephens County - a career high and the most by a Union County player during the young 2020-21 season. Photo/Todd Forreest

added seven. Senior Kaston Hemphill returned from the gridiron to score 6 second-half points. Juniors Daniel Snow and Cox chipped in five and four, respectively.

On Tuesday, Union County will host Tallulah Falls (3-2), who lost 88-71 at Towns County last week. White County (3-4) will visit UCHS on Thursday coming off a 43-39 loss at

South Forsyth. The Warriors own double-digit victories over East Jackson and Chestatee and a 53-52 win over Banks County, where White County allowed a 12-point lead to evaporate in the fourth quarter.

Union County will visit Fannin County on Saturday. The Rebels have been without their football players and are 1-2 on the year. The lone victory was a 60-53 win over Copper

Basin, TN. Although, Fannin County did lose a 57-54 contest to Pickens, who defeated the Panthers by double-digits in last month's scrimmage.

Tuesday's meeting with Tallulah Falls will tip following the 6 p.m. girls contest. The White County girls game will get underway at 5 p.m.; the Fannin girls game begins at 4 p.m. in Blue Ridge.

## Union swimmers riding early-season hot streak

**Clarksville** - The Union County High School and Middle School Panthers swim team kept up their Saturday routine of breaking records and setting new ones at the Jingle Jam Swim Meet on Dec. 5.

The action-packed day consisted of 28 top-10 times in 13 different events.

"There were several UCS athletes shining bright, but perhaps the brightest was junior Hannah Sheffield, who qualified for State and set a school record with her performance in the women's 50 Freestyle with her time of 26.07," Union County coach Kelly Helton said. "Hannah also set the school record with her time of 2:27.89 in the 200 IM event.



Hannah Sheffield  
"Hannah is a dedicated swimmer and student-athlete that gives 110% effort in all she does. We are so proud of

Hannah and all of our swimmers for how they represent our schools and community."

Other notable moments from Saturday's meet included a first place finish by Lily Helton in the 50-yard Freestyle, a first place finish by Grace Cook in the 100-yard Freestyle and a first place finish by Andrew Nushtayev in the 50-yard Breaststroke.

Another first-place performance belonged to the middle school girls' team in the 200 Medley Relay, giving the UCMS girls a first overall at the event.

The Panther Swimmers will be practicing hard this week as they gear up for the Winter Snow Meet in Clarksville on Dec. 12.

## NASCAR 2020

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

### Corey Lajoie Joins Spire Motorsports

Corey LaJoie has signed a multi-year deal to drive the No. 7 Chevrolet for Spire Motorsports full-time in 2021.

LaJoie, 29, completed his fourth Cup season this past year. He ran 32 races in 2017 for BK Racing, drove in 23 events in 2018 for TriStar Motorsports and had spent the past two seasons at Go Fas Racing, running a full schedule.

"The next chapter of my racing career provides me with a unique opportunity to play a key role in working with a motivated leadership group to build a competitive NASCAR Cup Series team from the ground up," said LaJoie. "I'm thankful to work directly with Spire Motorsports and all of our partners as we build on the proud and competitive tradition associated with the No. 7. We expect to be a force in the garage for years to come."

His best finish in 129 career Cup starts is sixth in the 2019 July Daytona race. He finished a season-best eighth in the Daytona 500 this past year.

"I've never wanted to not do it from the time I was 7 years old and my dad started to make me build my own race cars," LaJoie, son of two-time Xfinity champion Randy LaJoie, said.

"He wanted to make my path hard enough all the way through the times where he knew opportunities were going to dry up and even when you're not in the best cars. The resilience that you have to learn, it breaks you down to the foundation of why you want to do it. If your foundation is based off of, well because my dad hired some good people and I won a lot of go-kart races, that ain't what's going to keep you going. It's the fire, the feeling you did this with your buddies or your team and it's because you were the better man that day."

LaJoie's results do not stand out, but one has to factor the teams he was with and the financial challenges they faced. He's pondered whether it would be better to run with a more competitive team in the Xfinity Series and go for wins vs. running in the pack in Cup. Each time he thinks running Cup is better.

"The guys that I race around any given Sunday, they run 24th to 28th and are guys that are capable of winning Xfinity races," LaJoie continued. "I'm learning the same tricks of the trade, how to move around, car control on Sunday that I would be on Saturday."

"There's times, sometimes a string of six, seven weeks in a row you're wondering what in the hell am I doing, do I know how to drive a race car? But then you've just got to go back to those times where you didn't have the best car and you had to move around and you had to find different areas to get after it and you remember that feeling of accomplishment you had and that was kind of what kept my flame going of not giving up."

**ALLMENDINGER RETURNS TO FULL-TIME RACING**  
AJ Allmendinger will be returning to full-time competition with Kaulig Racing for the 2021 Xfinity Series season.

Allmendinger, who retired from full-time racing in 2018, joined Kaulig Racing's Xfinity lineup in 2019, where he made



LaJoie At Charlotte In 2020

five starts, earning a win at the Charlotte Motor Speedway ROVAL and two top-five finishes. In 2020, Allmendinger piloted the No. 16 Chevrolet for 11 races, and recorded two wins, his first-ever on an oval at Atlanta Motor Speedway, as well as a back-to-back win at the Charlotte ROVAL.

"As a part time driver for Kaulig Racing in the Xfinity series, I have really enjoyed working with all the women and men in the organization these past two years," said Allmendinger. "The love of showing up to NASCAR races has returned for me, and I truly have enjoyed myself on and off the race track."

Kaulig Racing recently announced the return of 2020 Championship 4 contender, Justin Haley, as well as the addition of Jeb Burton to its stable, who will contend for the 2021 NXS Championship alongside Allmendinger.

### LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

In light of all the problems associated with the current troubles and the covid-19 virus, we have decided to forgo the weekly racing joke, and share a piece of timeless folklore that was told to me by my grandfather, John Hartley Hodges. It was related to him by his father, John Allen Hodges, who served as a bugler in the U. S. Cavalry during the War Between The States. This tale, like most folklore, is designed to encourage common sense.

It's about trouble, and probably has its origins in West Africa.

One day long ago, Alligator was floating in his home creek thinking how satisfying life is. In those days, he's dressed up in a white suit good enough for Sunday. He lives in the water with all the fish he can eat, so he never has to work for a living, and he never, ever has met up with trouble.

"Good morning, Alligator. How are you today," asks Brer Rabbit, as he stopped to pass the time of day.

After a few sociabilities, Brer Rabbit mentions all his troubles.

"Trouble. What's that, Rabbit. I ain't never seen trouble."

"You ain't seen trouble? Great Peace. I can show you trouble, Alligator."

"I'd like that Brer Rabbit. I'd surely like to see how trouble stands."

Next morning Alligator puts on his best Sunday suit, takes his hat and starts to leave his house. Miz Alligator asks where he is going.

"I'm going to meet Brer Rabbit so he can show me how trouble stands."

"Well, if you're going to see trouble, so am I."

They begin to argue and pretty soon, all 14 of the alligator children hear them and come sliding down the river bank into the room.

They make such a racket that in order to save his ears, Alligator roars, "Quiet, all right. All of you can come."

They get out to the broom sage field, and here comes Brer Rabbit. He tells them to stand in the middle of the field and he will go get trouble and bring it to them.

Brer Rabbit runs to the far edge of the field and cuts a piece of dry broom sage and puts fire on it. Then he runs round and round the field till the fire completely engulfs the alligator family.

Miz Alligator sees the red fire and smoke and says, "I think that's the trouble Brer Rabbit is bringing to show us."

All the baby alligators jump up and down and say, "Ain't trouble pretty, Ma. Ain't trouble pretty."

Soon the hot fire gets close, the smoke gets bad, and all the alligators take out for the other side of the field, but they meet fire there, also.

They turn around to the other side. More fire.

Finally, they all shut their eyes, put their heads low to the ground and burst through the fire and never stop until splash, they all make it back to the creek.

After they take off their dirty suits, they sit around and talk about it.

"It's all Brer Rabbit's fault," said Alligator.

But even as the words come out of his mouth, Alligator knows in his heart that's not rightly so. He's the one that asked to see trouble.

**Racing Trivia Question:** How many Cup Series races did Kyle Busch win in 2020?

**Last Week's Question:** Which Cup Series team will Kyle Larson be driving for in 2021? Answer: He will drive the No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet.

Gerald Hodges is a syndicated NASCAR writer and author. His books may be viewed and ordered online at Amazon.com. You may contact him by e-mail at: hodges@race500.com.

## Wrestling home opener Friday vs. White



Senior Turner Cone and the Union County wrestling program will lace 'em up for Friday's home-opener when they host a 4 p.m. tri-match with Towns County and White County. Before Friday's home opener, Union County pays a visit to Towns County at 4 p.m. Tuesday. Next week, Union County hits the road but will remain nearby with visits to Lumpkin County and Gilmer. The Panthers' final match before the holidays will be Dec. 22 at Johnson-Gainesville. All Union home matches are at The Pit. Photo/Todd Forreest

## Local Racing Report: Tri-County

By Blake Lynch  
Racing Reporter  
North Georgia News

**Brasstown, NC** - Tri-County Racetrack hosted its season finale this past weekend with a full racing program, plus Super Late Modules.

Here are the top five from each class:

**Modified Street** - Coming in first was No.88 Ricky Smith. Coming in second was No.37 Michael Barnett. Coming in third was No.44 Bobby Elkins. In fourth was No.23 Charles Devine Jr.. Placing fifth was No.27 Mike Davidson.

**Pony** - Coming in first was No.47 JJ Garrett. Coming

in second was No.00 Adam Brooks. In third was No.01 Shannon Jones. Coming in fourth was No.16 Phil Wood. Coming in fifth was No.3 Allen Cantrell.

**Street Stock** - Coming in first was No.12 Roger Beaver. Placing second was No.44 Chuck Sims. Coming in third was No.J69 Jim Weller. Coming in fourth was No.91 Clint Watkins. Coming in fifth was No. 33 Brady Hunt.

**Beginner 602** - Coming in first was No.22 Tucker Anderson. Coming in second was No.44 Jay Lynch. Taking home third was No.100 Cooper Twigg.

**Crate** - Coming in first was No.9 Brian Kinnersley. Finishing second was No.7

Jason Deal. Coming in third was No.14 Sylvan Schutte. Coming in fourth was No.12 Drew Deaver. In fifth was No.17 Brett Shook.

**Super Late Modules** - Coming in first was No.8 David Payne. Coming in second was No.x15 Shawn Chastain. Placing third was No.55 Kip Chochran. Finishing in fourth was No.38 Jamie Oliver. Coming in fifth was No.102 Stephen Segars.

**FWD** - Coming in first was No.2BB John Burnett. Coming in second was No.101 Brent Lynch. Coming third was No.10 Blake Lynch. Coming in fourth was No.7 Dustin Hooper. In fifth place was No.401 Brandon Lynch.