

UCMS brings home four golds at King of the Mountain; take third place

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
sports@nganews.com

Issac Tritt, Adrian Shaw, Brian Nelson, and Gabe Morris climbed to the top of the mountain and were crowned king in their respective weight classes at Towns County Middle School's 10th Annual King of the Mountain Wrestling Tournament.

Union County finished the two-day tournament in third place overall with 85 points, 13 points back of second place Lumpkin County. Far West Middle School (Robbinsville, NC) ran away from the nine-team field with 150 points. Towns County placed fourth with 69 points and Franklin County rounded out the Top five with 52 points.

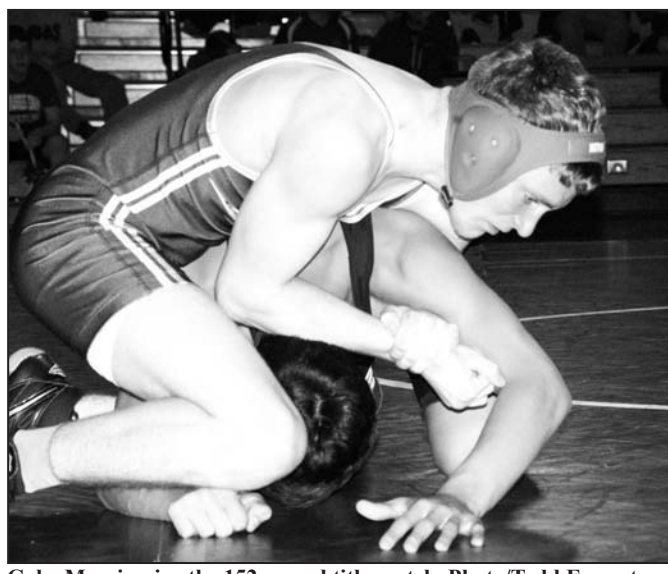
In the finals, Tritt, a seventh grader, took the center mat first for Union in the 112-pound weight division and claimed a pin with 6 seconds remaining in the third and decisive round.

The first 3 minutes were a stalemate with neither wrestler scoring a point, but Tritt surrendered 3 points in the second round, but dominated the final minute. With just a few seconds left, Tritt, who was already on the offensive, got the pin to pick up gold in dramatic fashion.

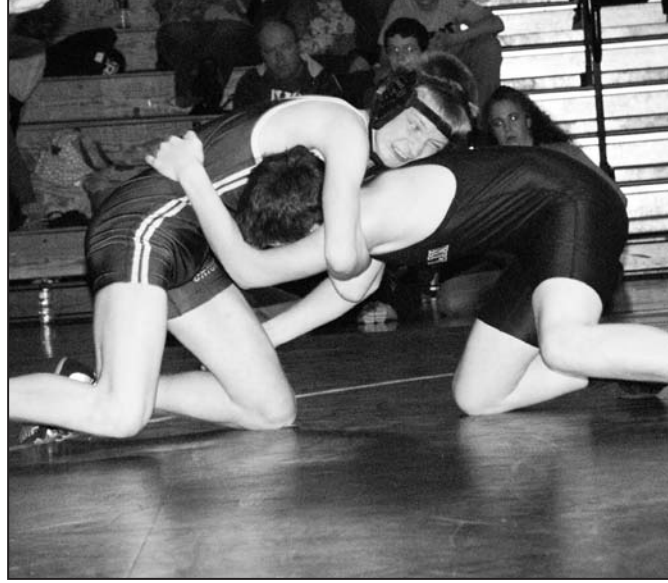
Eighth grader Adrian Shaw's match was over quickly with the 128-pound Panther wrestler scoring a quick pin in the first round, never allowing the opposition to take a breath before Shaw pinned his shoulders to the mat.

The same scenario played out for another Panther eighth grader, Brian Nelson in the 144-pound division. Nelson made quick work of his opponent scoring an early pin, heeding the words of Union County Wrestling Coach Michael Smith-Foot. Before the Championship round, Coach Smith-Foot told his grapplers not to settle for second place, and as soon as Nelson wrapped up his match early, Panther wrestling was 3-3-for-3 in the finals.

As Gabe Morris took the



Gabe Morris wins the 152-pound title match. Photo/Todd Forrest



Adrian Shaw dominated the 128-pound class. Photo/Todd Forrest

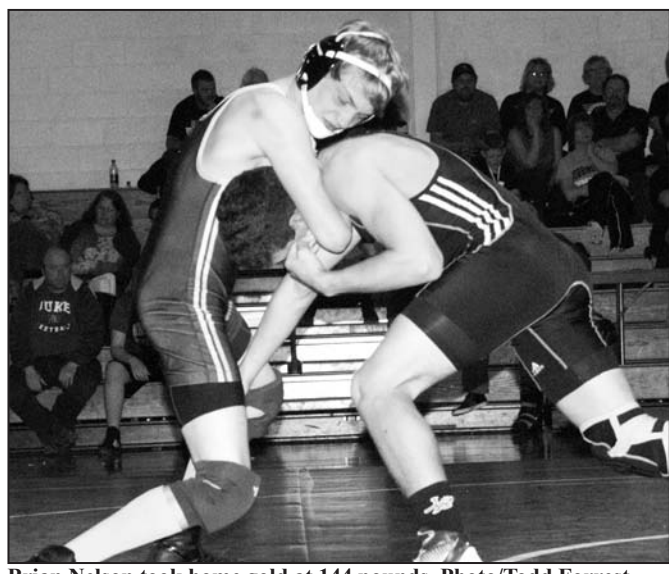
mat for Union's final match of the day, Coach Smith-Foot's squad proved that Panther wrestling wasn't going to settle for just being in the finals.

Morris, a 152-pound eighth grader made it 4-for-4 by taking control early with a 5-point first round, he added two more points in the second round for a 7-1 advantage entering the final 60 seconds. Morris could have played it conservative with a decisive lead but instead went for the jugular by finishing off the match in style by pinning Lumpkin's Kevin Harkins. Far West's Ian Wiggins was Morris' second victory after defeating

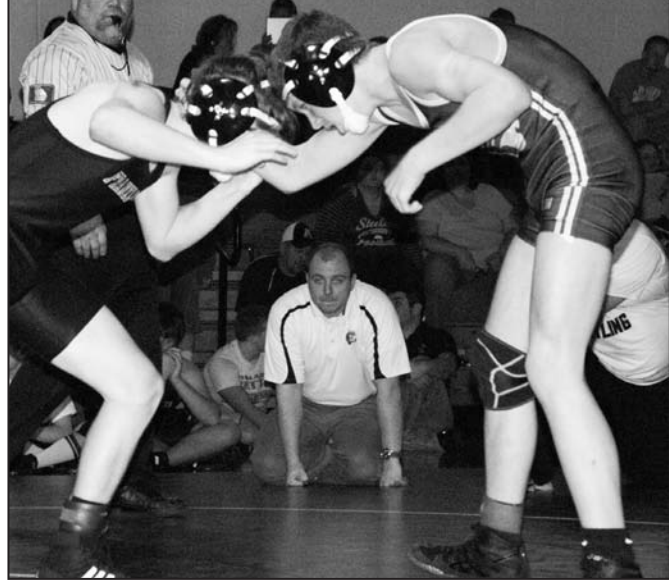
Lumpkin's Kaylie Seabolt in the opening round.

"I didn't know what to expect this year," Coach Smith-Foot said. "I knew with Robbinsville (Far West) coming in it would be a lot tougher. They have won several state titles. Lumpkin is always tough and so is Towns, so I just didn't know."

Tritt's journey to the mountaintop began with a win over E.W.C.'s Shawn Bruce. His next victim was Towns' Dawson Hogsed, Lumpkin's Aaron Daughtry fell to Tritt in the semi finals, and Franklin County's Bryce Esco went



Brian Nelson took home gold at 144 pounds. Photo/Todd Forrest



Issac Tritt scored a late pin to win the 112-pound class. Photo/Todd Forrest

down in the finals. Shaw was forced into an early 'play-in' match with Far West's Alex Bridges. After disposing of Bridges he took down Nick Vetrano from White County, Lumpkin's Dart Parker in the semis, and quickly put away Franklin County's Bryson Roberts to claim gold.

White County's Chris Arrowood and fellow Panther teammate Megan Hayes couldn't keep Nelson from winning it all. Lumpkin's Aiden White was unable to put up much of a fight against Nelson in the title match.

Union's four-gold per-

formance at the King of the Mountain finals was a remarkable performance for the Middle School's Wrestling Program after a roller coaster year. The Panthers rose to as high as No. 2 in the Area before hitting a lull in December. However, the King of the Mountain could be the springboard that Union needs to get back on track in 2014.

Tyree Mackey placed third for Union in the 92-pound weight class with a 3-1 record. Tyler Camp also placed third for the Panthers in the 285-pound division by defeating Towns County's Daniel Crowder.

"We've been up and down all year but worked hard over the Christmas break and we really wanted to place high," Coach Smith-Foot said. "Most of our guys are first or second year wrestlers or seventh graders."

In the 72-pound class, Enoch Bruce finished in the Top five, Ben Howard reached the consolation quarterfinals at 84 pounds, but unfortunately, Union forfeited its 98-pound match. Jacob Martin picked up two wins at 105 pounds, Brandon Mickens scored a win at 112 pounds, Josh Fletcher competed in two matches in the 120-pound division, and Logan Henderson picked up a win, also in the 120-pound class. Alex Youngblood was fifth at 128-pounds. Evan Browning placed fifth at 136 pounds, Michael Raper also saw action at 136 pounds. James Fagin saw action at 144 pounds, Hunter Norton reached the consolation quarters at 160 pounds, Devin White was fourth at 170 pounds with two wins, and Dawson Crowley finished fifth at 195 pounds with two wins.

Union County picked up fourth and fifth in the 205-division as Grizzley Breedlove (fourth) and Jenn Watson (fifth) recorded two wins each.

Union wrestling will return to Hiwassee on Saturday for a meet involving youth, middle school, and high school wrestlers at 4 p.m. The meet will allow Union County wrestling to continue maturing as a program, and being invited to these types of events proves that Coach Smith-Foot and company are continuing to move the program forward.

"That will be really cool and we're looking forward to that meet, then we have a meet with Hayesville, and after that we'll start to focus on high school - the Area and State," Coach Smith-Foot said. "We still don't have a full team at the high school so I am excited about these eighth graders moving up next year. We desperately need two people per weight class."

NASCAR 2014

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Tony Stewart speaks his mind

Tony Stewart met with members of the media during testing at Daytona last week to discuss his health and the preparedness of Stewart-Haas Racing for 2014.

"We're still on schedule to be clear (cleared medically to race) the day before the Shoot-out, so we'll be down here for two days hanging out and watching our teams run," said Stewart who is recuperating from a broken leg.

"I feel pretty good. I still have a little ways to go, but we've got four weeks to get ready the rest of the way. Even when we get here in February, it's not going to be 100 percent. Physically I'm not going to feel 100 percent, but I'll be able to do my job 100 percent, so that's the main thing. I don't mind it taking a little longer for the physical side to heal, as long as I can drive a race car when I need to when I get back.

"I've never had an injury like this so I don't have anything to compare it to. I kind of base everything on a week-to-week deal, and on Sunday I kind of evaluate where I was the Sunday before and go from there. It's been kind of a challenge, I guess, from that standpoint. The physical side of it is an obvious deal. It's getting everything healed back up and going through rehab and doing everything we're supposed to do. But just not knowing exactly what I'm supposed to feel like, if something hurts why is it hurting. I've not had those experiences before. The therapist gets his phone -- I think he sets it on his nightstand at night because I call him at night and ask him a lot of questions. But having those guys around, it kind of takes the psychological side and kind of puts a lot of that at ease.

"It's still a question mark of what's it actually going to feel like when we get in the race car and try to drive wide open for lap after lap."

In addition to his leg healing, Stewart has to worry about his own team, three other Cup teams, two new drivers, and a new shop under construction.

When asked what to expect from the other teams, Stewart replied: "I think every week we for sure have three guys that can go out and win the race, and I think the fourth driver, Danica Patrick has got potential to be more consistent this year. I think she's got three teammates that are going to be behind her 100 percent.

"You know, I think we can win a lot of races. I think realistically we could get three cars in the Chase. It wouldn't surprise

me at all. I'd almost be a little disappointed if three of the cars don't make the Chase. It's not that we're discounting Danica, but it's still a work in progress. She's still learning.

"This year I think will be a big year for her. I think having that first full season under her belt now and being able to go to every place twice and get the feeling of what a Cup weekend is like, I think all the news wore off of that this year and I think she knows more what to expect and it's more a matter of focusing on the things that she can be better at. I think all four of us have the potential to do better than all four of us did last year. But for sure I feel like we've got three cars that can win races and make the Chase right now."

Meanwhile Las Vegas odds makers have posted Jimmie Johnson as a 6-3 favorite to win this year's Daytona 500.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. is 10-1, despite not having won a restrictor-plate race since 2004, when he won the Daytona 500 and the fall Talladega race. Since winning those two events, a span of 20 races, no driver has a better average.

Earnhardt will have a new crew chief in 2015.

Steve Letarte, Earnhardt's current crew chief will relinquish his job at year's end to accept a new position as a television analyst with NBC Sports Network, beginning in 2015.

Letarte has served as crew chief for Earnhardt since 2011, with one win, 24 Top-5 and 54 Top-10 finishes in 106 starts. Earnhardt finished fifth in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series championship standings last season, despite failing to win a race. He recorded Top-5 finishes in five of the final eight races and is expected to challenge for the 2014 title.

NASCAR MAY SLOW DOWN RACING

During a session last week on Motor Racing Network's "NASCAR Live" show, Brian France spent an hour taking questions from fans.

Three main questions he answered involved, better competition on the track, earlier race start times and the current points system.

France said that if slowing the cars meant better racing, he would be all for it.

"We are very committed to getting rule packages that create more side-by-side racing," he said. "That's the hallmark of what we do. That's what we wake up every morning trying to do. I'm confident that we'll make the racing, which is already very



Tony Stewart, September, 2013
Furnished by NASCAR

good - and, by the way, statistically better than it ever was - but the standards are higher and we're going to meet those standards and create the best racing in the world, that's our job."

France said there have been discussions with the TV networks about later start times.

"If anything, we're trying to go a little bit later," France said. "We're, obviously, trying to get more prime-time events and be in the widest possible audience that's available on television, although I certainly understand that creates some hardships as well with people trying to get back home from the track."

On the subject of points, France said, "We're working on the (race) format of the future, maybe it's a little bit different, maybe it's more than a little. We also, I would tell you, we are not satisfied that we have the exact balance we want with winning, consistency, points, running for a championship.

"We think we can make some tweaks to continue to incentivize risk-taking and racing hard. We're looking at that. We'll undoubtedly be coming with things that put the incentive on winning races and competing at the highest level."

Racing Trivia Question: Which family member was the crew chief/engine builder for Richard Petty?

Last Week's Question: When was the inaugural year for the NASCAR Truck Series? **Answer:** The series was formed in 1995. Mike Skinner won the first race, which was held, Feb. 15, 1995 at Phoenix.

Note: There was a series called "Winter Heat" that aired during the winter months on TNN between November and January during the 1994-1995 winters and ran through the 1998-1999 winter. The races were held at the 3/8 mile Tucson Raceway Park in Tucson, Arizona.

TNN originally broadcast those races before ESPN took over. There were six to eight races per winter. The first season of "Winter Heat" featured the brand new Craftsman Super Truck Series, the Winston West Series and the NASCAR Featherlite South-west Tour.

You may e-mail any questions to the Racing Reporter at: hodges@race500.com. NTJJan15,CSJae

Let's walk for a great cause

Candace Renee Lopez, is raising money for the National Eating Disorder Association at a fundraising Walk to be held at 490 Meeks Park Road, Blairsville, GA on Saturday, February 1, 2014. Check in time: 9 AM; Walk start time: 9:30 AM; Walk end time: 11 AM. The Walk Fundraising Goal is \$5,000, please contact Candace Renee Lopez for more information at candacelopez285@yahoo.com. Teeshirts will be available for \$10 on the Square on Saturday January 25, 2014.

Contact Candace if you would like to pre-order.

Walk as much as you want in those two hours. Remember this is a casual walk, not a race, do what makes you feel comfortable. Along with the attractions of the park, there will be different fun activities such as corn hole and a silent action for some great items.

It's literally a walk in the park. Let's get together as a community, have fun, and help save a life.

Did you know... eating

disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness in America; up to 24 million people of all ages and genders suffer from an eating disorder (anorexia, bulimia and binge eating disorder) in the U.S.

"I, Candace Renee Lopez, have suffered this illness since the age of 10." Please come Walk to support this life altering cause.

Go to <http://candace85.wix.com/nedacandacelopez> for further information.

NJan15,Z14/CA

Georgia Lifetime Sportsman's License Contest

It's another sporting opportunity of a lifetime!

Georgians have the chance to win the right to hunt and fish for free for life statewide.

The next edition of the Lifetime License Contest sponsored by the Georgia Natural Resources Foundation began Jan. 6, 2014.

Visitors to the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/WildlifeResources-DivisionGADNR) can enter through Jan. 22, 2014 in a drawing for an adult lifetime sportsman license (ages 16 and older) or a youth lifetime license (younger than 16).

"The first contest was a huge success, and we're hoping for similar success in the

second edition of this contest," said Natural Resources Foundation chairman Glen Wilkins.

"More than 4,000 participants entered the first contest, and we are hoping to see even more participation this time. We're very excited to continue collaborating on these types of projects with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in our efforts to continue fostering and expanding Georgia's great hunting and fishing traditions."

The contest starts Jan. 6. Participants can fill out an entry form on the Wildlife Resources Facebook page.

Only those who have been Georgia residents for at least 12 months immediately prior to Jan. 31, 2014 are eli-

gible.

The drawing will be held at the division's annual Weekend for Wildlife event Jan. 31-Feb. 1, 2014.

Adult sportsman licenses are for ages 16-64; the youth/infant licenses are for 15 and younger.

Lifetime licenses (www.georgiawildlife.com/Lifetime-License) include hunting, big game, wildlife management area, alligator, Georgia waterfowl conservation, salt and freshwater fishing and mountain trout licenses.

Georgia residents 65 and older are already eligible for free lifetime sportsman licenses.

Contest details are at www.facebook.com/WildlifeResourcesDivisionGADNR.

IN NEXT WEEK'S NGN...

Union County's swim team builds momentum after picking up first place at the Murphy Invitational. Union's swimmers also took part in the Indian Invitational hosted by Lumpkin County.

Union County wrestling visits Towns County again for not only high school wrestling, but the middle school and youth wrestlers will be taking part as well. The action begins at 4 p.m. for this must-see event.

Things begin to heat up for Union County basketball as both teams dive deeper into their Region 8-AA schedule.

The Panthers visit Riverside Military Academy on Tuesday where they suffered a shocking upset last season.

On Friday, both Union squads will travel to Social Circle as the Panthers hope to be riding a four game win streak after Riverside. The Lady Panthers will use a week of practice and a tune-up game vs Social Circle to prep for next week's critical Region 8-AA showdown at Rabun County.

Just like last year, only the first game counts toward the Region standings. On the girls side, the regular season Region champ is guaranteed a berth in State.

Daddy Daughter Dance

WHEN: February 1, 2014

WHERE: North Georgia Technical College

COST: \$50.00 per couple - \$10 for each additional Daughter

Dinner is included and Limo rides are available on a first come first serve basis.

Tickets are available at the Union County Recreation Office at 310 Wellborn St.
For any questions call (706) 439-6074