

Sports

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Preview: Panthers, Lady Panthers prepare for Battle of the States

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The 19th Annual Battle of the States Christmas Tournament tips off on Thursday with both Union County teams participating for the 13th time.

The Union County Lady Panthers have never won the tournament but finished in second place last year. The Union County boys have won the tournament three times (2000, 2006, 2010), the most by any boys team, and will enter this season as one of the favorites with a 9-0 record.

The Lady Panthers enter with a 6-3 record with two losses to Towns County and one to White County.

"It's always a good tournament," Union County Head Coach David Tucker said. "The kids look forward to it and I look forward to it. It's going to be fun. We've just got to stay sharp. There isn't a team in the tournament that is sloppy so we'll have to bring it every night."

Both Union County squads will face Polk County, TN in the opening round. The Wild Kittens finished fourth in last season's tournament after falling in the first round to Towns County before defeating Hayesville, NC 52-43 and Hokes Bluff, AL 54-43.

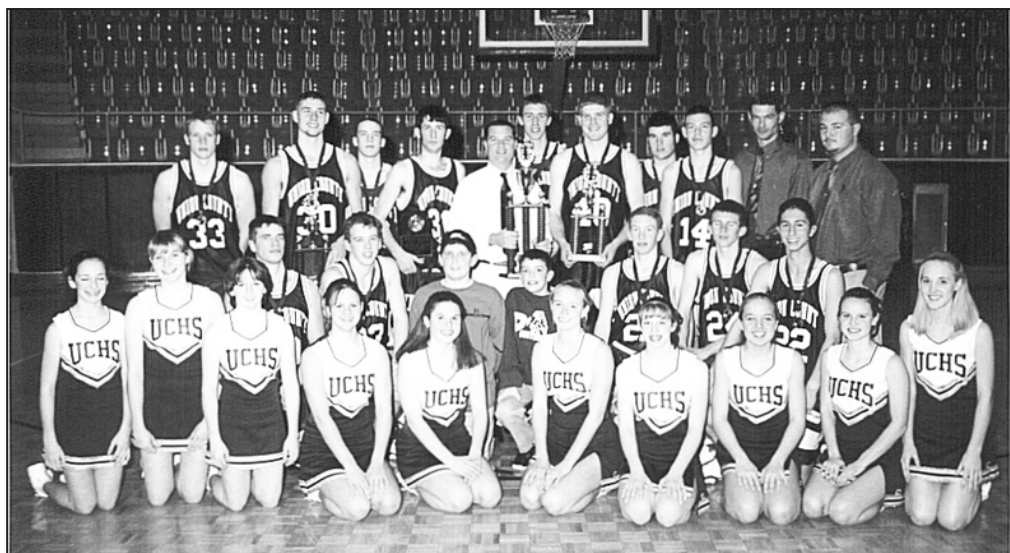
Here is a breakdown of each team in the 2012 Battle of the States Christmas Tournament, beginning with Union's first opponent - Polk County, TN, then continuing with the other two teams in Union's bracket - Murphy, NC and Towns County.

The other four teams participating are Dawson County, Hayesville, NC, Gordon Lee, Piedmont, AL (boys) and Hokes Bluff, AL (girls).

Polk County Lady Wild Kittens: This season, the Wild Kittens (2-8) have already participated in a Christmas Tournament at North Murray High School in Chatsworth. Polk County defeated Coahulla Creek 50-40 in the opening round. Coahulla Creek, a Class AAA school from Dalton is currently 0-7 on the season.

Polk then fell to North Murray 39-29 on Feb. Two.

Expect the Wild Kittens, led by the scoring of guards Em-



Union County's first BOTS Champion. In 2000, Union defeated Cherokee Co. AL, Andrews, NC, and Polk County, TN. Derek Stepp (back row, fourth from left) was named Tournament MVP. Brandon Dykes and Robert Kirksey were named to the All-Tournament Team.

ily Wilson and Rosa Haynes to provide some fierce competition during this year's edition of the B.O.T.S. Polk County has won the tournament a record five times but have lost in the first round the past two seasons and don't want to get bounced from championship contention on the first day in three consecutive seasons.

Gone from last year however is All-Tournament Team selection Maclain Yowarsky, along with Morgan Greer, Nattalie Miles, and Valerie Waldroup.

The Wild Kittens' first win of the season came on Thursday, Dec. 13th at Silverdale Baptist Academy in Chattanooga, TN by a 67-64. Wilson scored a team-high 32 points on four 3-pointers in the win. Haynes scored 12 points with 8 boards, while Rachel Epperson drained three 3-pointers.

Polk County has also dropped games to McMinn County, TN, 51-39, Tellico Plains, TN, 45-43, and Coach David Tucker's former school Walker Valley, TN.

"Polk County isn't afraid to schedule anyone," Coach Tucker said. "Most of their losses have come to larger schools."

Polk County Wildcats: The Polk County Boys (3-6), on the other hand, proved to be a tough out during the 2011 B.O.T.S. and finished in Fourth Place after falling to Dawson County 42-31 in the Consolation Game. The Wildcats gave eventual-champion Hayesville,

NC their closest contest of the tournament, 55-48 in the second round after routing host Towns County, 62-38 in the first round. The Wildcats did lose 6-4 Logan Brewer, 6-3 Jordan Brown, and 6-2 swing man Alex Akins from 2011-12 but do return two solid guards in three-year starter and leading scorer Evan Ball and Chandler Hutcheson.

Polk County led by Ball, is also competing in the North Murray Christmas Tournament and knocked off Sonora 46-30 last Wednesday evening in Chatsworth and lost on Thursday to Gilmer County 48-44.

The Sonora Phoenix are a 2-8 team from Class AAA and have lost twice to Gimer County by 16 and 18 points. The Phoenix also fell to Battle of the States participant, Gordon Lee, 59-56.

Pickens County lost to Fannin County 54-36, while Gilmer defeated Fannin 50-40 and 55-41. Union County defeated Fannin County 60-32 in late November.

Polk County also knocked off Silverdale, 54-52. Ball scored 17 points on four treys. Cody Groomer scored 12, while Devin Weber grabbed 7 rebounds.

Polk's first win of the year came in a 47-29 home victory over Tellico Plains, TN.

Murphy Lady Bulldogs: Murphy lost three 6-footers, Katrina Evans, Jackie Parks, and Jordan Lovingood, from last year's squad that finished in Eighth Place in the Battle of the States. The Lady Bulldogs

played Union County twice last season, losing 57-48 and 62-48. This season, Murphy fell at Rabun County, 69-39. Rabun County currently sits at 6-4 on the year with losses to East Hall (51-43), Walhalla, SC (51-37), Elbert County (52-37), and Franklin, NC (42-34).

During Murphy's loss to Rabun, the Lady Bulldog guards had a difficult time dealing with Rabun's ferocious pressure defense.

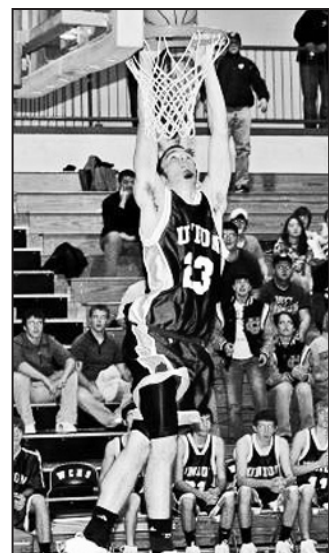
"The Murphy girls looked very young and inexperienced, yet handled themselves well at times," said Rabun County Head Girls Basketball Coach Dee Dee Dillard. "After losing a talented senior class it will take them some time to regroup but they will be because they are very well coached."

Murphy is led by the inside-outside duo of Kendra Henry and Hannah Carson and picked up a 53-43 victory at Swain County last Tuesday.

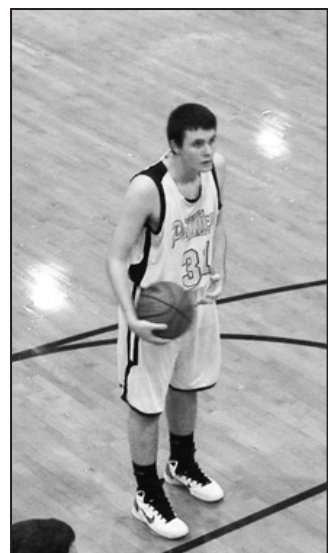
Murphy fell 76-40 to Robbinsville, NC. The Robbinsville Ladies currently sport a 6-1 record that includes a 47-43 win over Hiwassee Dam, NC and a 58-50 victory over Hayesville, NC. Hiwassee Dam has lost a close one to Union County and twice been routed by Towns County.

Carson, a sophomore is averaging 11.5 points and 9.3 rebounds a game to lead the effort, while Henry is averaging nine points and Hannah Setser is at 6.5 points and 5.3 rebounds.

Murphy Bulldogs: The Bulldogs have been limited in



Corey Garrett was named MVP in Union's second BOTS Championship in 2006.



Seth Merritt was the MVP of Union County's last BOTS title in 2010.

the early stages of the season due to the football team reaching its second consecutive State Final. During Murphy's 0-4 start, they have fallen 81-29 to Swain County - who also reached the football State Finals, and to a solid Robbinsville, NC team 71-33.

Robbinsville defeated Hiwassee Dam 64-37 on Dec. 11th while suffering its only loss to Hayesville, 64-54 on Dec. 4th. Hayesville demolished Towns County, while Hiwassee Dam fell to Union by 44 points and split its two meetings with Towns.

Murphy fell 88-42 to Hayesville last week thanks to a 35-5 Yellow Jacket run in the second half.

The Bulldogs appeared to have a "solid post game and decent team speed," according to one local observer who attended Murphy's 71-40 loss at Rabun County last week. The Bulldogs lost four seniors from last year's team, including do-it-all guard Seth Curtis, but featured a handful of underclassmen in the rotation.

Players to watch are senior guard DeMarcus Hobson (11 points-a-game) and senior post Trevor Crouch (13.5 points a game).

Towns County Lady Indians: After losing 2,860 career points to graduation and college basketball careers in the persons of Gabby Arencibia to North Georgia College and State University, Ali Bleckley to Oglethorpe University, and Lindsay Patton to Point Uni-

versity, it has been business as usual for the Towns County Lady Indians. They compiled a 98-22 record with three region championships and four trips to the State Tournament included during the four years for these seniors with the team's record actually being 126-26 for the last five years back to their State Final Four finish in 2008.

The Lady Indians are off to a 9-0 start through Tuesday, averaging 64 points-per-game compared to 39 for their opponents. Their three closest games have been at fellow Battle of the States participant Hayesville where they won 65-57 and in two games against Hiwassee Dam, NC. They defeated the Lady Eagles in North Carolina 65-51 and then 72-63 on their home court in a game they led 58-32 near the end of the third quarter only to see the Lady Eagles play great basketball in mounting a rousing comeback the final nine minutes of the game.

The Lady Indians hold two wins, by 21 and 18 points over Battle of the States participant Union County but the second was quite a battle for some two and a half quarters before severe foul trouble for the Lady Panthers contributed significantly to the Lady Indians breaking the game open the final quarter and a half.

The Lady Indians have been led in scoring by two returning All Region 8-A guards, sophomore Stephanie Patton with an average of 23.1 points **See Preview, Page 9A**

19th Annual Battle of the States has plenty to offer to basketball fans

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The 19th Annual Battle of the States Prep Basketball Tournament is scheduled for Thursday through Saturday, December 27-29th, in the Bill P. Kendall Gymnasium.

Eight games will be played each day, beginning at 10 a.m. and continuing until around 10 p.m. The Tournament has become a most respected sporting event, drawing interest from fans and teams over much of the Southeast, as evidenced by the fact that teams from six different states have made appearances during the first 18 years the event has been held.

This is our annual edited and updated review of winners, details from some of the earlier tournaments, and a look at some of the teams and individuals who have played in previous tournaments. For many readers, most of the quite lengthy article will be largely old news with a few updates but it is provided for newcomers to the area and visitors to the tournament who have not previously had access to the information.

THE TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONS - Previous Battle of the States Girls Tournament Champions have been Smoky Mountain (North Carolina) in 1994, Polk County in 1995, Elbert County (Georgia) in 1996, McEachern (Georgia) in 1997, Holy Innocents' (Georgia) in 1998, Polk County again in 1999 and 2000, White County (Tennessee) in 2001, Robbinsville (North Carolina) in 2002, Fannin County (Georgia) in 2003, White County (Tennessee) again in 2004, South Cobb (Georgia) in 2005, White County (Georgia) in 2006, Fannin County again in 2007, Polk County for the fourth and fifth times in 2008 and 2009, and Gordon Lee in 2010 and 2011.

Boys Champions have been Walhalla (South Carolina) in 1994 and 1995, Tavares

(Florida) in 1996 and 1997, Loganville (Georgia) in 1998, Andrews (North Carolina) in 1999, Union County in 2000, North Forsyth (Georgia) in 2001, Cherokee County (Alabama) in 2002, North Forsyth again in 2003, White County (Tennessee) in 2004, Chapin (South Carolina) in 2005, Union County again in 2006, Fannin County in 2007, Pendleton (South Carolina) in 2008, Southside-Gadsden in 2009, Union County for the third time in 2010, and Hayesville in 2011.

The Towns County teams have never won the tournament although the Lady Indians have finished second on seven occasions, including each of the first three years and 2008 through 2010. They have also finished third three times and fourth on three other occasions. The Indians have made it past the first round on nine occasions, finishing second on one occasion, third on another, and in fourth place seven times.

TOUGH COMPETITION BUILDING STRONG TEAMS - It's a very tough assignment to win a tournament such as the Battle of the States but beyond winning such a tournament, the tough competition enables teams to get a learning experience for the remainder of the season. In looking at details from earlier tournaments, it may seem strange to look at some of the seventh place games of the past, but a close look at the teams who appeared in some of these contests gives perhaps the most interesting insight into how tough the Battle of the States Tournament can be.

In 1994, the Cherokee County (Alabama) Girls appeared in the first Tournament with a 7-1 record and ranked Second in Class 4A, with 6A being the highest classification, in their state after having won State Championships in two of the three previous years. They proceeded to lose three straight games to eventual Tournament Champion Smoky Mountain (North Carolina), Polk County,

and Walhalla, with the latter two games going into overtime, for an eighth place finish. Of course, the Cherokee County Girls appeared in many subsequent Battles of the States and acquitted themselves well, including finishing second in the 2001 tournament.

In 1995, the Lake Weir (Florida) Girls appeared in the Tournament with a fifth place ranking in Class 6A, with 6A being the highest classification, in their State. Although playing without an All American Player who was injured, they were defeated by Hayesville and Smoky Mountain before pulling away in the final quarter of their game with Walhalla for a seventh place finish.

Although the significance was not known at the time, perhaps the Seventh Place game eventually creating more discussion than any among close observers of the Tournament was the Boys contest in 1996. Polk County defeated Hayesville 50-48 in one of the most intense and interesting games of any year the Tournament has been held. No one could have anticipated it at the time, but the eighth place Hayesville Boys from the Battle of the States would become almost invincible in future weeks and play in the Dean Dome in Chapel Hill and earn a State Runner-up Trophy in Class A in North Carolina for the year.

More recently, the Pisgah (Alabama) Boys, a very impressive seventh place participant in the 2003 Battle of the States, made it all the way to the Class AA State Final Four in Alabama that season where they lost by just three points to the eventual State Champion. They defeated Polk County 86-61 in the seventh place game but had fallen to North Forsyth by three points in the opening round and to Union County by seven in the second.

And the Pendleton Girls, who defeated Hayesville 75-35 in the seventh place game in the 2008 tournament, especially surprised observers of that tournament after losing to Union

County by fourteen points in the first round and to Gordon Lee by eighteen in the second. The Lady Bulldogs battled their way through a thirty two team field to the state Class AA finals in South Carolina before losing by just a 58-54 score to Marion.

EXCELLENCE IN THE BATTLE OF THE STATES AND CONTINUING - Success in post season has, of course, not been limited to the teams competing for seventh place in the Battle of the States although perhaps more striking. The 1997 Battle of the States featured three teams who would make huge marks in their states during post season play.

The Cherokee County Girls entered that Battle of the States with a 12-0 record and finished fifth by taking nine and five point wins over Franklin (North Carolina) and Polk County following an opening night eight point loss to fourth place Towns County. The Lady Warriors went on to win the Alabama Class AAAAA State Championship for the third time in the 1990's.

The Cherokee Ladies were under the direction of Head Coach Jason Shields who currently serves as head coach of the Hokes Bluff Girls who will be making their fifth straight appearance in the tournament this year. The Paideia Boys of Atlanta finished third in that 1997 Battle of the States and went on to become State Runners-up in Class A in Georgia while the Paideia Girls, who finished second in the Battle of the States the same year, made it to the State Final Four in Class A.

The 1998 Battle of the States Girls Champion, Holy Innocents' of Atlanta, won the Class A State Championship in Georgia later that school year and at least two teams from the 1999 Battle of the States went on to prominence in post season play. The Towns County Lady Indians, who finished second to Polk County in the 1999 Tournament, compiled a 24-6 record in winning their sixth consecutive Sub-Region 8A North Champi-

onship and making it to the 2000 State Final Four in Class A in Georgia. Meanwhile, the 1999 Battle of the States Boys Champion Andrews Wildcats finished their season with a 24-2 record in winning their Smoky Mountain-West Conference Championship and finishing in the Final Eight in Class A in North Carolina.

Both Union County Teams from the 2000 Tournament went on to excellence in both regular and post season play as both won their Sub-Region 8AA North Championship and had very successful postseason runs as well. The Lady Panthers, who finished fifth in the Battle of the States, made it all the way to the State Finals before losing to fellow Region 8AA foe Greater Atlanta Christian while the Battle of the States Champion Panthers made it to the Elite Eight in Georgia.

The Towns County Lady Indians, who finished sixth in the Battle of the States that year, were no slouches either in regular season and postseason play. They finished just one game behind Union County in their Sub-Region and qualified for the state tournament for the third straight year with very impressive games played against the two Class AA state finalists. They used a 43-14 run in rallying from a 24-8 deficit in handing state runner up Union County a 58-54 regular season defeat on the Lady Panthers' home court and outplayed Greater Atlanta Christian for more than three quarters, leading 33-28 through three quarters, before falling in the Region Tournament semi-finals to the soon to be State Champions. The GAC Lady Spartans that year featured front line players measuring 6'4", 6'2" and 6' along with Superstar Sherrill Baker, a four year star guard for the nationally prominent University of Georgia Lady Bulldogs.

The 2003 Battle of the States featured another team in addition to the aforementioned Pisgah Boys which made a strong showing in post season play. The unranked Battle of the

States Champion Fannin County Girls, who had won two State Championships in the 1990's under legendary Head Coach Johnny Farmer got stronger as their season progressed. The Lady Rebels completed a 25-8 season by finishing second in the Georgia Class AAA State Tournament, falling to fellow Region 7AAA foe Gainesville, which featured 6'3" Superstar Tasha Humphrey, later a four year sensation with the University of Georgia Lady Bulldogs.

Although the neighboring North Carolina Class A State Champion Hayesville Boys of 2004 didn't participate in the 2003 Battle of the States, they did encounter strong battles with two tournament participants. The Sixth Place Battle of the States Robbinsville Boys handed the Yellow Jackets one of just two losses, their only home court loss for the season. Further, the Third Place Battle of the States Towns County Boys were within one point with four minutes to go at Towns County and the Indians led the Yellow Jackets by a point with two minutes to go at Hayesville before the Yellow Jackets pulled away for seven point victories in each game.

And the Towns County Lady Indians, who finished third in the 2007 Battle of the States, went on to a record setting season, finishing with a 28-4 record and making it to the Georgia Class A State Final Four for the second time in nine years. They trailed by just five points near the three minute mark of the fourth quarter before falling in the state semi-finals by a thirteen point margin to eventual state champion Calvary Day of Savannah.

The Lady Indians then followed up runner-up finishes to Polk County in the 2008 and 2009 tournaments with a Region 8A Championship the first year and as region runners-up the second. Their records for those two years were 25-6 and 23-7 respectively and it required a team of metro all stars from the Wesleyan School in Norcross to eliminate **See History, Pg. 9A**