

# Rabun cruises to 73-55 win in 8-AA consols; Union men to visit Callaway

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**Homer** - Rabun County put Union County away early during its 73-55 Region 8-AA Consolation Game victory, using a 21-3 run that turned a 6-4 Union lead into a 25-9 Wildcats' runaway less than a minute into the second quarter.

Trailing 6-4 just past the midway point of the first, Rabun County's offensive onslaught was highlighted by three treys and a one-handed slam to build a 20-8 advantage after one. A free throw and a corner-3 by junior Lake Hughes kept Union hanging around at 25-12, but the Wildcats answered with a 7-0 spurt for a 32-12 margin.

Still trailing 36-16 following consecutive baskets by junior Landon Kight, Union cut the deficit to 37-21 with buckets from sophomore Eli Underwood, junior Austin Taylor and a Hughes free throw.

Kight and junior Hayden Payne, who finished with a career-high 16, capped off the Panthers' first-half scoring with their team down 42-27.

Payne split two free throws early in the third but Union County wouldn't connect on its first field goal of the period until the 4:48 mark when Hughes drove inside for 2.

Taylor kept the Panthers within 20 with a free throw, followed by a base-line drive, but a Rabun triple pushed the difference back to 51-31. Payne's put-back with 44 seconds left in the quarter kept Union within 20 after three at 53-33.

The Wildcat's largest lead night came at 62-35 in the fourth, but the Panthers outscored Rabun 20-11 down the stretch behind 9 points from Payne.

The junior forward pulled down five rebounds to go with this 16-point outing on 7-for-10 shooting.

Taylor finished with a career-best 12 points while recording three assists and two boards. Hughes scored seven of his 9 points during the first half while grabbing five rebounds and one steal. Kight added 8 points - four in each half - and hauled in four boards.



Junior forward Hayden Payne is fouled as he attacks the hoop vs Rabun County last Wednesday. Photo/Todd Forrest



Junior forward Landon Kight was one of three Panthers recognized during the 8-AA All Region voting. Photo/Todd Forrest

Junior Caleb John had 4 points, Underwood and Daniel Snow scored 2 points each.

Fourth-seeded Union will visit Callaway (Hogansville) on Wednesday with the girls game at 6 p.m. and the men at 7:30 p.m.

Callaway entered last week's Region 5-AA Tournament with an 8-9 overall record. The 0-13 Panthers are looking to avoid its first winless season in program history.

Like the girls, Union and the top-seeded Cavs have no common opponents. However,

Callaway twice defeated Bremen by an average margin of 30 points. Bremen lost 40-38 to Gordon Central, who lost twice to Fannin County by an average margin of 6.5.

Fannin defeated Union County 50-49 on Dec. 12 in Blue Ridge.

**All-Region Teams:** Union County juniors Caleb John and Landon Kight each received an 8-AA All-Region Team nod for the 2020-21 season. Junior Lake Hughes was named 8-AA Honorable Mention.

## Baseball... continued from 2B

A one-out single by Dyer was all the offense the Panthers could muster in the seventh inning.

Mullinack finished with 6 Ks over four innings, surrendering four hits, two walks and five runs (three earned). At the dish, he walked twice and scored.

Chitwood went 2 for 4 with an RBI; Shields scored once during a 2-for-4 day.

Shields pitched one inning, notching two strikeouts and giving up two hits during Lumpkin's one-run fifth.

Tyler Loyd drove in one run while going 1 for 3. He also allowed one earned run and one hit while on the mound in the sixth inning.

Swartz went 1 for 3 with a run, and Towe scored once as a courtesy runner.

Union County left nine

runners on base in the loss. The Indians left four aboard.

The Panthers were expected to host Gilmer on Monday (weather permitting) before traveling to Fannin County at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday. Union caps off the week with a twin bill at Pepperell (Rome) on Saturday, beginning at 11 a.m. In the second contest, the Panthers will take on Heard County at 1:30 p.m.

## Lady Panthers... continued from 2B

ity stripe. Her 10 free throws match a career-high -- also coming at Banks County in January 2020.

Along with 15 points, Cook's stat line included four steals, two assists, one rebound and one block.

McNabb added six rebounds (one short of last week's career-high vs. Elbert County) to go with 4 points and a steal. Turner had 4 points and two boards; Chambers finished with 2 points and three rebounds.

Collins ended her day with 2 points and a steal. Sophomore Corinne Hill had a team-high three assists, four rebounds and a steal; fellow sophomore Kaylee Helton added one board.

Both Union County teams will visit Callaway (Hogansville) on Wednesday at 6 and 7:30 p.m. The Cavaliers defeated No. 10 Heard County 56-50 in the Region 5-AA title game to earn the top seed and home court.

Union and Callaway have no common opponents, but Callaway twice defeated Bremen by an average margin of 14.5 points. Bremen lost 55-53 at Gordon Central, who fell three times to Fannin County by an average margin of 17.7 points.

Fannin beat Union County 58-47 on Dec. 12 in Blue Ridge.

**All-Region Teams:** Junior forward Ava Hunter was voted Region 8-AA Co-Player of the Year for the 2020-21 season.

Junior Rebekah Chambers and sophomore Ellie Cook also received an 8-AA First Team All-Region nod.

## Chatuge Shores Ladies Golf League opens 2021 season

The Chatuge Shores Ladies Golf League is looking forward to a new golf season in 2021.

Applications for membership are now being taken and all returning as well as new members are welcome. Play is every Tuesday at Chatuge Shores Golf Course with a 9 a.m. tee time.

A fun group of ladies, the league has 20 members from throughout the tri-county area. Membership dues are \$30 per

year and the weekly course fee is \$27 which includes a cart. Membership requires an official USGA handicap in the USGA system (called GHIN). Establishing a handicap is easy and the league can help with that if needed.

For more information the league web site is [www.chatugeshoreslga.com](http://www.chatugeshoreslga.com) or email [chatugeshoresgolf@gmail.com](mailto:chatugeshoresgolf@gmail.com). Come out and join the fun (socially distanced, of course!). NT(Feb24)FSH

## Benton MacKaye Trail Association hikes for March

hikers for either or both of the hikes listed.

March 2 (Tuesday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a strenuous 8.2 mile on the backcountry Trail at Fort Mountain State Park. This trail travels around the edge of the park and passes below the summits of both Cohutta and Fort Mountains down to the lake. Hike leader Mike Pilvinsky. For more information contact hikeleaderMP@bmtamail.org.

March 3 (Wednesday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 5 mile Loop hike at Fort Mountain State Park including parts of the Gahuti Trail, Gold Mine Creek Trail, Lake Trail and Big Rock Nature Trail. Hiking poles are recommended. Hike leader Mike

Pilvinsky. For more information contact hikeleaderMP@bmtamail.org.

March 5 (Friday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderately strenuous 8.3 mile hike using Hemp Top and Jacks River Trails. We will start hiking from Watson Gap and enter the Cohutta Wilderness Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

# Mountain Gymnastics Center captures four golds at Winter Warm-Up

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**Dahlonega** - Blairsville's Mountain Gymnastics Center brought home four first-place all-around performances from last month's Winter Warm-Up in Dahlonega.

Shy'Ann Beasley, Addison Harkins, Madelyn Primeaux, and Josie Poston each turned in their respective levels' highest all-around score at the January 23-24 event. In AAU Silver competition, Beasley's 37.4 marked the overall high score of the entire day and Harkins' 36.9 all-around tally was the fourth-best total.

Primeaux recorded a 36.3 score in AAU Bronze, finishing tied for first with a 9.6 on the beam and tying for second on the bars with a 9.0. In USA Gold Level 6, MGC picked up the top four spots, headlined by Poston's first-place performance.

Poston's 36.65 all-around score featured a pair of first-place finishes on the vault (9.3) and floor exercises (9.5). Right behind Poston was teammate Emma Schuette with a 36.625, highlighted by a first-place score of 9.3 on the bars. Lola Patton came in third with a 36.6 behind a high score of 9.35 on the beam.

Rounding out Union's top four was Avery Frechette's 36.15 that included third-place performances on the vault and the bars.

As for Beasley and Har-



The Mountain Gymnastics Center AAU Silver squad featured two first-place finishers at the Winter Warm-Up in Dahlonega. Photo/submitted

kins in AAU Silver competition, Beasley's day included first-place scores on the vault (9.5) and bars (9.4). Meanwhile, Harkins placed first in three of four events, along with a second on the beam.

Other notable AAU Silver performances included Keely Shook's second-best all-around score of 35.4 that saw her place second on the vault. Madelyn Early came in third all-around after taking first with a 9.6 on the bars.

Addyson Lee (sixth), Grace Rice (seventh) and Lindsey Hammond (eighth) each recorded a top-eight finish for

MGC.

Kylee Coggins was third all-around in AAU Bronze, tying for second on the beam. Lucie Burgess, Brooke Mowry and Selah Patterson each placed fifth in their respective AAU Bronze age groups, while Baylor Sullivan was sixth.

Shaylyne Davis came in third behind a second-place score on the bars in AAU Gold. Abby Brown placed eighth; Nevaeh Leopold was ninth.

In USA Gold, Reese Chambers turned in a pair of top-fives on the bars and beam.

## NASCAR 2021

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

### Christopher Bell gets first Cup win

Christopher Bell passed Joey Logano with less than two laps remaining in Sunday's Daytona Road Course race, and went on to victory lane by 2.19-seconds for his first NASCAR Cup Series victory.

"This is the high of my life so far," he said. "So incredibly thankful to be here for Joe Gibbs Racing. I've prepared all of my life for this moment to race in the Cup Series. Last year was a huge learning curve for me, and I'm very grateful that I got the opportunity to run in Cup. It definitely prepared me to move to Joe Gibbs Racing."

"Honestly, I didn't think I was going to get there, but Adam (Stevens, crew chief) up on the pit box kept telling me I was going to get there. I didn't believe it, but he (Logano) really struggled coming out of (Turn) 6 one time and allowed me to close the gap."

Bell said capturing his first Cup win a day after Ty Gibbs won in his Xfinity Series debut was "Unbelievable."

Logano had led 10 of the final 13 laps but on the next-to-last lap, Bell closed the gap. As the two leaders entered the frontstretch chicane of the road course, Bell powered to his inside and came away the leader to start the final lap.

"He had newer tires," said Logano. "One more caution lap would have been enough to allowed us to stay out front. I tried to get all I could out of that last restart, because I knew I was going to need it, because he was going to catch us pretty quick."

"We've made a lot of gains on our road courses. You can tell we're not quite good enough yet, but we maximized the day. I hate being that close, but congratulations to Christopher."

Bell, 26, is the second consecutive first-time winner in the Cup Series to start the 2021 season. Michael McDowell won last weekend's Daytona 500.

Denny Hamlin finished third, Kurt Busch was fourth and Brad Keselowski rounded out the top-five.

Completing the top-10 were Kevin Harvick, A.J. Allmendinger, Michael McDowell, Ryan Preece and Alex Bowman.

Chase Elliott won Stage 1, and led the most laps in the race (44). He probably had the fastest car, but a series of bad-luck incidents may have cost him the race.

Twice he had lengthy pit stops. Each time he went in first, but came out back in the field and had to work his way back towards the front. He was involved in contact twice, from other cars, and on lap 61, was bumped by Denny Hamlin and spun out. He finished 21st.

Top-10 leaders after 2:02 36: 1. Hamlin-104, 2. Logano-92, 3. Harvick-83, 4. Bell-82, 5. Elliott-79, 6. McDowell-75, 7. Preece-74, 8. Kurt Busch-65, 9. A. Dillon-64, 10. Keselowski-54.

### TY GIBBS WINS FIRST XFINITY START

Ty Gibbs turned in a stunning performance in his first Xfinity Series start. The 18-year-old held off reigning champion Austin Cindric on the Daytona Road Course. He took the lead on a restart in double overtime and held off Cindric by 1.726 seconds at the finish line.

"The family is everything to me, they do so much for me," Gibbs said. "I just can't thank them enough, this is just amazing; this is a dream come true. It's all the man above, I'm sorry I'm a wreck. I didn't think this was going to hap-



Bell gets first Cup win

pen at all. This is awesome, I can't thank everybody enough watching and last week I had a terrible interview. I want to apologize for everybody, I just can't thank everybody enough. This is just amazing."

Gibbs becomes only the sixth driver to win in his first series start - matching a feat achieved by NASCAR Hall of Famer Dale Earnhardt in 1982 and most recently, Kurt Busch, 15 years ago.

He is also the youngest driver to win a NASCAR Xfinity Series road course event. At 18 years, 4 months, 16 days, he breaks the record most recently held by Cindric (20 years old).

Cindric and AJ Allmendinger crashed racing to the finish of the first stage, and Cindric was left with a gaping hole in his front fender. He dropped to 34th in the field but still drove his way back to the lead.

He led a race-high 29 laps, and had a Daytona sweep in sight until a caution with three laps remaining gave Gibbs a chance. They both pitted for fresh tires, and Gibbs restarted 10th, Cindric in 11th.

Gibbs on the first overtime restart blew past a pack of cars and weaved his way in and out of traffic all the way to third. Another caution sent the race into double OT, and Gibbs this time drove inside for the lead.

The remaining top-10: 3. Daniel Hemric, 4. Brandon Jones, 5. Jeb Burton, 6. Harrison Burton, 7. Miguel Paludo, 8. Brandon Brown, 9. Justin Haley, 10. Jeremy Clements.

### RHODES GETS SECOND CONSECUTIVE TRUCK WIN

Ben Rhodes has had two perfect race outings at Daytona. He won the Truck Series opener on the oval last week then came back to win Friday night on the infield road course.

Rhodes, 23, of Louisville, Ky., crossed the finish line .320-seconds ahead of Sheldon Creed, when a caution came out, freezing the field with a half-lap remaining in overtime.

"Unbelievable, I don't even have words for it," Rhodes said. "I don't even know what to say, this is so cool. I just have to thank my team. ThorSport Racing gave me a truck that handled this year and we were fast. Rich (Lushes) is a really good crew chief. It's good to be paired up with him and all of the guys on my team. I'm just thrilled. I don't know what to say. I've been on cloud nine all week, so it's above that. I'm just so happy."

John Nemechek was third,

followed by Todd Gilliland, Riley Herbst, Matt Crafton, Derek Kraus, Kaz Grala, Timmy Hill, and Christian Eckes.

The race started under wet conditions with teams having to decide when the track was dry enough to switch from rain tires to slicks or "dry" tires. Nemechek was the early leader - pacing the field for the opening 14 laps until his No. 4 Toyota suffered an oil pressure and fuel pick-up problem, leaving the truck on the track and necessitating a caution. Later he ran out of gas and at one point was a lap down to the leaders before racing back to the front in the closing laps.

### MICHAEL WALTRIP RETURNS TO RACING

Two-time Daytona 500 winner, Michael Waltrip announced plans to compete in the SRX Short-Track Series.

SRX features sprint races with drivers from a variety of motorsports backgrounds competing in identically prepared racecars on a variety of tracks, including pavement and dirt. The SRX lineup already includes Tony Stewart, Tony Kanaan, Paul Tracy, Bobby Labonte, Willy T. Ribbs, Bill Elliott, Ernie Francis Jr., Marco Andretti and Helio Castroneves.

"This is an awesome opportunity and I'm genuinely excited to get back in a racecar," said Waltrip, who owns 17 victories across NASCAR's top-three national touring series. "I still love racing and I still want to compete. SRX is a great platform and all of us want to win. We might have gray hair and maybe even no hair, but when we put that helmet on and go race, the desire and talent is still there. You want to see a show? We're gonna put on a show."

**Racing Joke:** Denny was alone in an elevator when a girl stepped in with a phone pressed to her ear.

"I have to go," she told the person on the other end. "There's a cute guy standing here."

Before Denny could react, the girl turned to him and said, "Sorry for lying, I just wanted to end that conversation."

**Racing Trivia Question:** What year was NASCAR founded?

**Last Week's Question:** Derricke Cope, who started this year's Daytona 500 has one 500 victory. What year did he win? Answer: He won the 1990 Daytona 500 driving for Bob Whitcomb.

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