

Brown signs with Fort Valley State



Union County High School's All Region 7-AAA offensive tackle Blaine Brown signed a National Letter of Intent on Friday to play at Fort Valley State University, located about 20 miles southwest of Macon. For the complete story and interview with Brown, check next week's edition of the North Georgia News. Photo/Todd Forrest

Playoff Time... continued from 4B

over, and a Lady Indians' try suddenly made it a game once again when they cut the lead to 46-42 with 24 seconds left. Daniel hit 1-of-2, three seconds later, but Lumpkin scored on a put-back to claw within three. With six seconds to play, Daniel hit 1-of-2 at the charity stripe to put the visitors away and pour in a game-high 20 points.

McCarter finished with 8 points and 8 boards, Mary Wischmeyer added 7 points, Fair had 6 points, 8 rebounds, and 4 steals.

Rogers chipped in 5 points and 7 boards, while Hill scored 2 points.

Daniel scored 16 in the second half and 11 in the fourth to help Union break away from a 19-19 tie at halftime when she opened the third with a 3-point play.

A pull-up jumper in the paint by Daniel gave the Lady Panthers a 24-20 lead, then a McCarter put-back made it 26-20.

A Lady Indians try cut the lead in half but Mary Wischmeyer connected from her favorite spot at the elbow to stretch the Union advantage back to five. However, Lumpkin would close with a 4-0 spurt to pull within one after three.

A baseline jumper from Daniel and an elbow jump shot by McCarter quickly put the



Senior Ashley Fair puts Lumpkin away with a steal-and-score following a trey on the previous possession. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers back up by five at 32-27 before another Lady Indians trey made it 32-30 at the 6:42 mark.

Rogers hit 1-of-2 at the foul line for a three-point lead before Lumpkin tied the game with a 3-ball 10 seconds later.

Daniel drove base line for two but the Lady Indians regained the lead with their third straight trey. A Union turnover led to a 1-for-2 trip to the line by Lumpkin and a 37-35 deficit with 4:06 to play.

It was all Union in the early-going as a put-back by Hill opened up an 11-3 lead at the midway point of the second quarter. However, Lumpkin answered with a 16-2 run to take a 19-13 advantage before the Lady Panthers tied things up with a 6-0 spurt over the final 29 seconds of the half.

A Rogers lay-in followed by a lay-up by Daniel pulled Union within two before McCarter tied the game with a jumper at the buzzer to even the score at 19-19.



Freshman Kait McCarter drives to the basket at Dawson where she finished with 10 points. Photo/Todd Forrest

Panthers... continued from 4B

led to a break away lay-up at the other end to seal the victory for the visitors.

Candler Colwell led the way with 16 points, 7 boards, 3 assists, and 4 steals.

Banton had 12 points, 4 rebounds, and 2 steals. Crawford Colwell added 11 while posting team-highs in rebounds (8) and assists (4).

Allison also finished in double-figures with 10 points while recording a career-high 5 steals.

In his return, Baeninger was steady with 8 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists, and 2 steals.

Wright had 2 points and 2 assists while Waller and Daniel each scored two.

Up next is the region tournament beginning on Wednesday when they face Dawson County.

Both teams split the regular season meetings with each team protecting home court. The rubber match will

be held at 6 p.m. on a neutral court at East Hall High School.



Candler Colwell (21) looks on as Crawford Colwell (24) fires a jump shot at Dawson County. Crawford had 12 points at Dawson County and 11 points vs Lumpkin County. Photo/Todd Forrest

Turkey Calling Contest



Open Tournament

Sponsored by:

Coopers Creek Sportsmen for Kids

When: Saturday, February 11

Time: 11:30 AM

Where: Union County Civic Center

Age Groups: 10 & under, 11-16, 17 & up

For more details:

call Tony Hughes 706-897-2032

NASCAR 2017

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Patrick's Team Sues Sponsor For \$31-Million

Danica Patrick's race team says one of her sponsors has defaulted on past, present, and future obligations in excess of \$31-million dollars.

Stewart-Haas Racing filed a breach of contract lawsuit against Nature's Bakery on Friday, accusing the company of refusing to pay millions of dollars it owes the team.

According to the filing, Nature's Bakery owes the team for two seasons; 2016 and 2017. SHR also accused the company of concocting "a scheme to avoid further payments" by claiming Patrick had been endorsing competing products and was not using her social media presence enough to promote Nature's Bakery.

The suit says Nature's Bakery sent a letter to the team on Jan. 19 terminating the sponsorship agreement, and that the company has missed several re-scheduled deadlines to pay.

The pairing with Nature's Bakery was touted as a natural fit for Patrick because she heavily promotes a healthy lifestyle and clean eating. She has started a fitness program that will be turned into a book, has launched an active-wear clothing line and uses her social media channels to encourage fans with recipes and workouts. Patrick has also promoted Nature's Bakery on social media, and has claimed she ate the fig bars before she was partnered with the company.

According to the Associated Press, Nature's Bakery took issue with Patrick using Instagram to promote Six Star Pro Nutrition Protein Powder, Purely Inspired Protein, homemade energy balls, a homemade spinach smoothie and various other homemade meals. SHR maintains none of those products is in competition with fig bars or brownies, and that Nature's Bakery "liked" most of the Instagram posts. An exhibit filed with the suit includes numerous Patrick photos from Instagram that show Nature's Bakery had "liked" the post. SHR claimed Nature's Bakery never complained about the Instagram posts until it began missing payments and accused Patrick to be in breach of contract.

SHR released the following statement.

"It is an unfortunate situation, as the team has delivered on all aspects of its contract and was prepared to do so again in 2017. Ultimately, this is a situation that will be resolved in a court of law," the statement said, adding the team is moving forward with plans to field four cars in the Cup Series while also expanding to include a full-time Xfinity Series team. "The litigation with Nature's Bakery will not impact the organization's on-track efforts."

Patrick and Stewart-Haas Racing last year signed a deal with Nature's Bakery as Patrick's primary sponsor. The company founded in 2010 by the father-and-son duo of Dave and Sam Marson was new to NASCAR last season and was scheduled to sponsor more than 20 races this year. In their lawsuit, SHR

stated that Nature's Bakery had agreed to pay \$15-million dollars for 20 races, which comes out to \$750,000 per race. That amount is just for the primary sponsor. Tack on three or four associate sponsors, and the team will receive over one million per race.

As the cost of funding a team goes up, less and less companies can afford to put their names or logo on a NASCAR Cup or Xfinity team.

Jeff Gluck reported that even before last season started, Nature's Bakery told SHR it was having cash flow issues and requested to modify the payment due dates. So instead of big payments like \$5 million and \$3.4 million, SHR spread out the payments into smaller increments like \$2.5 million and \$1 million.

SHR isn't the only team experiencing a lack of sponsors. Roush Fenway Racing one of the stalwarts of NASCAR racing, dropped one Cup team at the end of the 2016 season for lack of sponsorship. Two single-car operations have also shut their doors.

The sport's popularity peaked in the mid 2000s, and since then, overall revenue has plummeted. Sponsors like Nature's Bakery have walked away.

How fans consume live sports, has altered across all major sports, not just NASCAR. With the major costs that are now associated with attending big sporting events, such as tickets, lodging and transportation, fans are more likely to watch from their homes on television.

But even television has its problems. Ratings for the last Cup race of 2016 on NBC saw a 25 per cent dip over a year ago despite the dramatic race won by Jimmie Johnson on the final lap. Johnson secured his record-tying seventh Cup title in a story line that played out over the closing weeks of the 36-race.

"Stewart-Haas Racing remains focused on its preparation for the 2017 NASCAR season where it will again field four entries (Kevin Harvick No. 4, Kurt Busch No. 41, Danica Patrick No. 10 and Clint Bowyer No. 14) in the Cup Series while also introducing a full-time NASCAR Xfinity Series team. The litigation with Nature's Bakery will not impact the organization's on-track efforts."

While SHR can probably weather the loss of one major sponsor, there have been rumors that the No. 14, which was driven by Tony Stewart last year, will also come up short on sponsorship money. Stewart said lack of a full-time sponsor would not impact that team.

I'm guessing that a four-car organization like SHR can operate all four cars with the loss of a single, major sponsor, but to lose two would be a major financial blow.

In other racing news, Jeffrey Earnhardt, the grandson of Dale Earnhardt Sr. will make his first Daytona 500 start on Feb. 26.

He is the 27-year-old grandson of the late NASCAR Hall of Famer Dale Earnhardt and the nephew of Dale Jr. His



Danica Patrick in 2016

father is Kerry Earnhardt - a former driver himself, the eldest son of Dale Sr. and the half-brother of Junior.

His father Kerry Earnhardt had seven Cup Series starts.

Jeffrey will be driving for a new team (Circle Sport-TMG No. 33 car) that was formed during the off season. Earnhardt will have a guaranteed starting spot, because the team will be using the charter of the No. 95 car, which was owned last year by Levine Family Racing.

"This is really a dream come true," said Earnhardt. "We've been working every day for the past six years to get to the Daytona 500."

Jeffrey has 24 Cup Series starts with a best finish of 26th last October in Charlotte. He's driven in the Rolex 24 twice, competed in one Truck Series race, run three Xfinity races and competed in four Cup events. His best finish was a seventh-place result in the 2011 Truck race.

Cup teams tested at Phoenix last week, and for Toyota rookies Erik Jones and Daniel Suarez the tire test should have been a time to just get acclimated to their new rides. Joe Gibbs Racing (Suarez) and Furniture Row Racing (Jones) opted to have their new drivers get the seat time rather than have an experienced driver give feedback on the new Toyota body.

Jones has three races of Cup experience, in 2015 as a substitute for Kyle Busch and Matt Kenseth, while Suarez has none.

"My experience in a Cup car was totally different than what they drive like now -- I don't have a lot of [Cup] experience to lean on," Jones said. "I wouldn't say they are looking too much for feedback on the body from us because they do so much in the wind tunnel now in the simulations, they can really learn what they need to know through that rather than through driver feedback."

"I'm trying to help with the handling aspects of the car in breaking down some of the data they get off the car and interpreting it a little better."

Racing Trivia Question: Which Cup team will Greg Biffle drive for in 2017?

Last Week's Question: How many points races are in the 2017 Cup Series schedule? Answer: There are 36 points races. You may contact the Racing Reporter by e-mail at: hodges@race500.com.