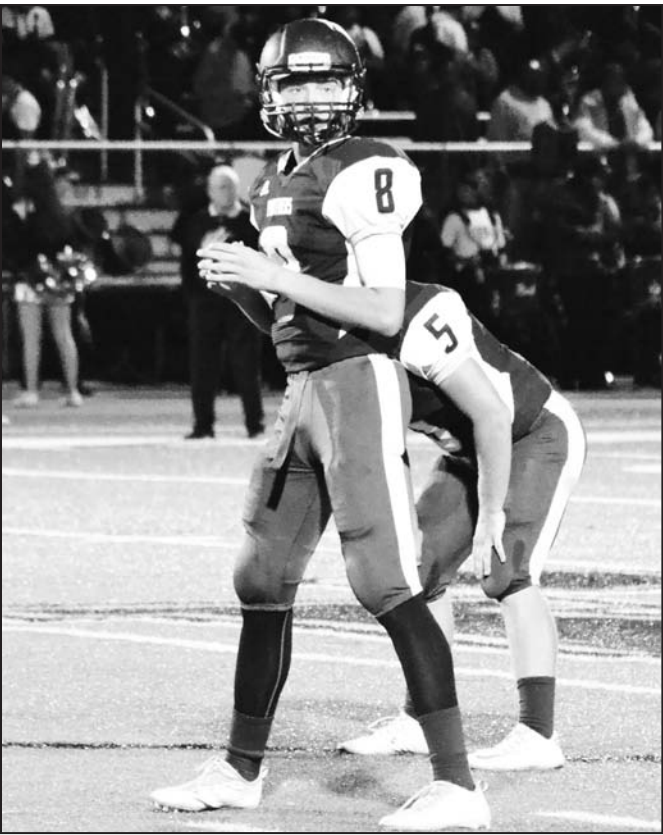


Offensive MVP Wright headlines All Region Team for Union

Groves, Brown, McConnell, Winkler, and Gilbert named First Team All Region in 7-AAA



Junior QB Cole Wright (8) is the Offensive MVP. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior tackle Dawson Groves (55) was named to 1st Team. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior DB Micah Gilbert (80) was named to 1st Team. Photo/Todd Forrest

7-AAA All Region Football team

Player of the Year: Davis Mills, QB - GAC (Senior)
MVP Offense: Cole Wright, QB - Union Co. (Junior)
 MVP Defense: Luke Martin, LB - Dawson Co. (Senior)
 MVP Special Teams: Brooks Buce, K/P - GAC (Senior)
 Athlete of the Year: Markese Jackson, WR - EHall (Senior)
 Lineman of the Year: Zach Johns, OL - Lumpkin Co. (Senior)
 Academic Player of the Year: Josh Parrish, DB - NHall (Senior)

FIRST TEAM: OFFENSE
 QB: Coey Watson - Dawson Co. (Junior)
 RB: Zach Matthews - Lumpkin Co. (Senior)
 RB: Kyle Bacus - NHall (Senior)
 RB: Deon Ellison - EHall (Senior)
 FB: Maddox Turner - NHall (Senior)
 WR: Cooper Earls - Fannin Co. (Senior)
 WR: Austin Young - Dawson Co. (Senior)
 WR: Harrison Sloan - GAC (Senior)
 WR: Sedrion Morse - EHall (Junior)
 TE: Jacob Reese - Fannin Co. (Senior)
OL: Dawson Groves - Union Co. (Senior)
OL: Blaine Brown - Union Co. (Senior)
 OL: Jordan Waddell - Dawson Co. (Senior)
 OL: Cameron Jeffery - NHall (Senior)
 OL: Ford Roberts - GAC (Junior)
 OL: River Dixon - Fannin Co. (Senior)
 OL: Wyatt McMahon - Dawson Co. (Senior)
 Athlete: Kyler McMichael - GAC (Junior)
 K: Wesley Walls - Lumpkin Co. (Junior)
 K: Brandon Carranza - Fannin Co. (Senior)
 Specialist: Kolton Brumbelow - Dawson Co. (Senior)

FIRST TEAM: DEFENSE
DL: Tyler McConnell - Union Co. (Senior)
 DL: Chris Hinton - GAC (Sophomore)
 DL: Mac Bennett - North Hall (Senior)
 DL: Josh Chastain - Lumpkin Co. (Junior)
LB: Luke Winkler - Union Co. (Senior)
 LB: Devin Thomas - GAC (Senior)
 LB: Jonathan Rose - GAC (Senior)
 LB: Andrew Pavao - Fannin Co. (Senior)
 LB: Clint Garrett - Dawson Co. (Senior)
DB: Micah Gilbert - Union Co. (Senior)
 DB: David Markham - GAC (Senior)
 DB: Noah Dyer - EHall (Senior)
 DB: Trey Morrison - GAC (Junior)
 DB: Trent Fowler - GAC (Senior)



Senior DL Tyler McConnell (59) was named to 1st Team. Photo/Todd Forrest



Wright (8) joins Joseph Mancuso (2X) as recent Region MVPs. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior tackle Blaine Brown (78) was named to 1st Team. Photo/Todd Forrest



Senior LB Luke Winkler (51) was named to 1st Team. Photo/Todd Forrest

Lady Panthers... continued from Page 2B

As for Union's first round opponent, the Lady Maroon Devils are a fairly young team with a roster dominated by juniors and freshman - however they are still older than Union's youth-laden squad.

Swain's backcourt-led offense is powered by its spark plug, junior point guard Lynsey Hicks, who can score on dribble penetration and from beyond-the-arc.

Another shooter to keep an eye on is senior guard/forward Taylor Medlin.

Others to watch are freshman guard Ashton Younce, junior guard Alissa Smith, sophomore guard Ayianna West, and junior shot-blocker, forward Grace Cabe.

Swain County will try to force Union into an up-tempo style of play where it can take advantage of turnovers so Hicks can lead the fast break.

They also like to shoot the 3 on the break and will spot up shooters from the wing and the corners - much like Union.

The Swain County Lady Maroon Devils and Lady Panthers could easily provide fans with the most thrilling match-up of the opening round - especially if both teams heat up from long distance.

In the second round, win-or-lose, Union will face either Lumpkin County or Hokes Bluff, AL.

Lumpkin is currently 3-9 with a pair of blowout wins over winless Towns County and a 48-40 victory over Fannin County. However, their record is deceiving since they've played a much tougher schedule than Union.

They've lost by 28 at Dawson, by 14 at East Hall, and in overtime to White County.

The Indians have also suffered a two blowout losses by a combined 38 points to Chestatee, a 17-point loss to Lakeview Academy, an 11-point defeat to North Forsyth, and a 30-point rout at the hands of Lanier.

Lumpkin lost only one starter from last year's 2-24 squad and are led by senior center Rylie Vaughan, senior

forward Mallory Stringer, and sophomore forwards MacKenzie Pulley and Ashlynn Wistoski.

In their last game, Lumpkin used a 19-1 run out of the gates to propel them to a 70-35 victory over Towns County.

Twelve-of-13 Lumpkin Ladies appearing in the game entered the scoring column with leaders being Vaughan with 15 points and Pulley with 12.

Lumpkin County's opponent, Hokes Bluff is currently 8-2 and ranked fourth in Alabama's Class AAAA.

Although, the AAAA schools in Alabama are equal in enrollment to Class A or a small AA school in Georgia.

In a match-up of top five teams earlier in the season, Hokes Bluff defeated No. 5 Cherokee County, 46-40.

Junior guard Logan Black led the Lady Eagles with 14 points and 6 rebounds, senior center Kendall Johnson had 9 points and 6 boards, junior guard Amanda Noah added 9 points, and senior forward Sydney Ball had 5 assists.

In their most recent game, Black hit a trey at the buzzer to defeat Fort Payne, 44-42 in the third place game of the Wills Valley Shootout.

Johnson had 17 points and 12 boards, Noah and Black finished with 9 points.

Register had six rebounds and five assists, while Ball dished out five assists.

In an overtime loss to Glencoe earlier this month, Johnson scored 13, West had 12, and Register chipped in 10.

On Dec. 6, Hokes Bluff squared off with another Battle of the States team, the Piedmont, AL Lady Bulldogs and the Eagles came away with an easy 60-18 victory.

Piedmont, AL and Towns County will meet in the opening round of the BOTS.

The other match-up on that side of the brackets will pit 3-4 Hayesville, NC vs 1-8 Polk County, TN. Polk's only win came against a 1-10 Nantahala, NC squad.

NASCAR 2016

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter
Stewart Is A Proven Winner

The 2016 Sprint Cup season was Tony Stewart's last as a driver, but he will continue as a NASCAR owner, and open-wheel driver.

While he is best known as the driver of the No. 14 Chevrolet in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series, he has scored 12 driver championships since he first drove a go-kart in 1978 at a Westport, IN, just outside his hometown of Columbus.

No matter what series you name, he has probably been victorious in it.

In 1980 at the age of eight, Stewart had won his first championship, a 4-cycle rookie junior class championship at the Columbus Fairgrounds. Two more karting championships followed, but this time on a national level, the 1983 International Karting Federation Grand National championship and the 1987 World Karting Association National championship.

"I started racing competitively when I was about seven or eight, getting a trophy that was bigger than the other kids' was all I cared about," said Stewart in a 2009 interview. "I couldn't have asked for more out of this life. I feel like I'm a very, very fortunate person, so no matter what happens, no matter how long I race or don't race, the goals and everything that happens from here is just icing on the cake. I've been very lucky to do the things I've done."

Stewart's racing career began at age seven behind the wheel of a go-kart, with his father, Nelson, serving as car owner and crew chief.

"He (his father) never let me settle for second," Stewart continued. "He didn't like it when we ran second, and he knew that I didn't like it when we ran second. If he saw that I wasn't giving 100 percent, then he was on me pretty hard about it. He pushed me to be better."

Stewart came to NASCAR in 1999 by way of the IndyCar Series, where he was the series champion in 1997. Before he made his mark in Indy cars, Stewart made a name for himself in the rough-and-tumble world of the United States Auto Club (USAC). He has four USAC championships, including what at the time was an unprecedented win of USAC's "Triple Crown."

USAC's top-three national touring divisions are Midget, Sprint and Silver Crown. After winning the



Tony Stewart at Martinsville Speedway in 2006.

Midget title in 1994 and finishing 10th and sixth in the Sprint and Silver Crown divisions, respectively, Stewart went out and set a new standard of excellence in 1995 by winning all three divisions. No driver had ever won the Sprint, Midget and Silver Crown championships - divisions that run three very different types of race cars which compete on both asphalt and dirt - in a single season until Stewart came along.

He won the International Race of Champions (IROC) during that series' final year of operation in 2006, and it's clear that Stewart is in a league of his own.

He is the first and only driver to have won championships in stock cars, Indy cars and open-wheel Midget, Sprint and Silver Crown cars. And his three NASCAR Sprint Cup Series championships made him one of just nine drivers who have scored three or more Cup titles.

"My dad never pressured me to be the best race car driver in the world, but he did pressure me to be the best race car driver that I could be," Stewart said. "He never compared me to anybody else. He expected that what I could do was what I could do. He never said that because this guy over here could do something that I should be able to do it, too. He pushed me hard, but he was fair about it. That's probably

winless the past two seasons. None of their drivers finished in the top-20 in the final 2016 standings.

Stenhouse and Bayne remain as Roush Fenway's full-time Cup drivers. The team's charter (NASCAR's version of a franchise) for what was Biffle's No. 16 car will be leased to JTG Daugherty Racing for Buescher in 2017. Richard Petty Motorsports will downsize from two Cup cars to one for 2017, making it the fourth organization to either cut its number of cars or close after the 2016 season.

Brian Scott, who brought sponsorship from Albertson's Grocery chain as well as his family's Shore Lodge, announced his retirement last month, and RPM announced Friday that it would not field the No. 44 car next year.

The charter (NASCAR's licenses that guarantee spots in Sprint Cup races) from the No. 44 car has been leased to Go Fas Racing and will return to RPM for 2018, where it must either field a team with it or sell it.

RPM has driver Eric Almirola and sponsor Smithfield signed for 2017. The move allows the organization to regroup without fielding the second car it has no funding for. Almirola was 26th in the standings in 2016 while Scott was 31st.

"We feel that it's in the best interest of our partners and for Richard Petty Motorsports to focus our resources on the No. 43 Ford Fusion and Aric in 2017," said RPM CEO Brian Moffitt. "A concentrated effort on one team will position us for improvement while giving us adequate time to re-establish our two-car team in 2018."

RPM struggled this past season with both cars. Almirola failed to make the 16-driver Chase and ended up 26th in the series standings with one top-10 finish in 36 starts. His teammate, Brian Scott, finished 31st in the standings, also with one top-10 finish in 36 starts.

Racing Trivia Question: At which track will NASCAR open the 2017 racing season?

Last Week's Question: What famous family is Ben Kennedy, the Truck Series driver related to? Answer: He is the great-grandson of NASCAR founder, Bill France.

You may contact the Racing Reporter by e-mail at: hodges@race500.com.