

# Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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## Wrestling team looking good ahead of King of the Mountain

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

This weekend, the King of the Mountains will be decided in a two-day tournament of champions taking place Friday, Dec. 2, and Saturday, Dec. 3.

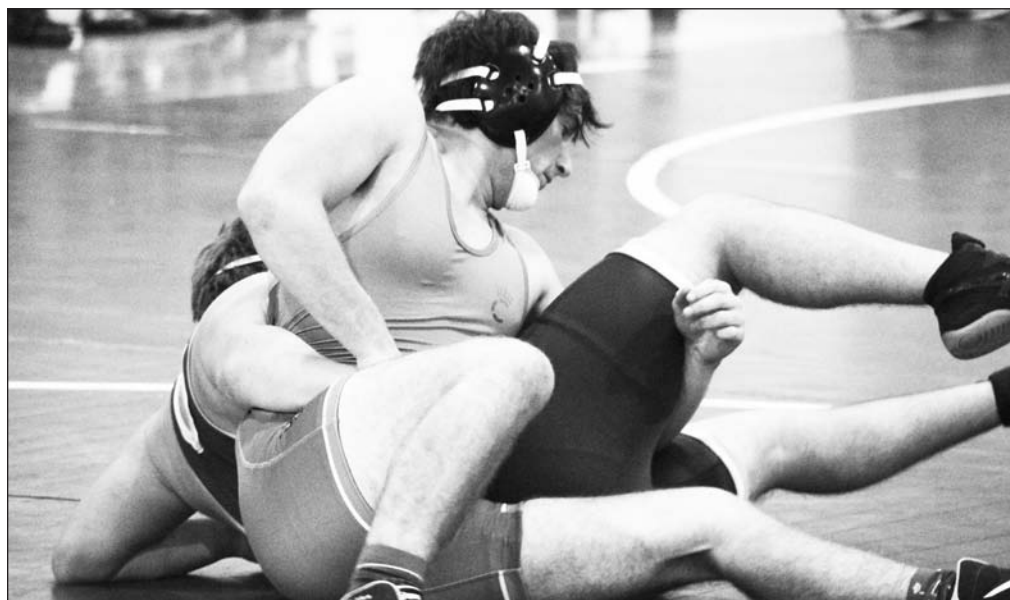
The tournament will begin at 5 p.m. on Friday, and wrestling will recommence at 9 a.m. on Saturday, both days taking place at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park.

"It's set up to be a really tough tournament," said Indians Wrestling Head Coach Jeff Stowers. "We've got 28 teams, we've got four states represented. We've got some big schools coming back. Blessed Trinity didn't get to come last year, and they're coming back this year."

"Banks County is coming back this year, Savannah Country Day is coming this year for the first time. Harris County is coming, a big AAAA school out of South Georgia. Notre Dame High School out of Tennessee's coming."

"So, we've got some quality programs that are going to be represented, and some outstanding individual wrestlers that will be there. It ought to be a good two days of wrestling."

With so many schools



coming to the area, many families will be staying in and around Towns County, meaning that the tournament will be bringing in potentially thousands in tourist dollars to the area.

"I hope everybody comes out and supports our kids and supports our tournament," said Coach Stowers. "It's a big deal. It's a lot of people coming in from out of town. They're going to come spend their money, stay, and possibly come back later on and vacation."

The Indians recently held their first matches of the wrestling season during the Nov. 18

Melee in the Mountains, where they got a chance to show their might with a triple victory that evening at home.

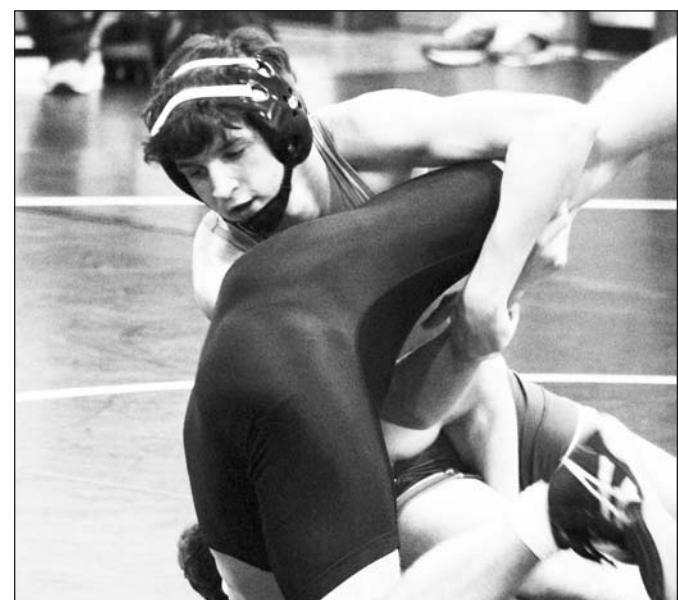
The Boys in Blue defeated White County 41 to 30, Smoky Mountain 54 to 24 and Hiwassee Dam 66 to 18.

"Our older kids are pretty good - we're probably as good as we've ever been," said Coach Stowers. "We got lots of veteran kids back, and did some really good things. Our young kids, the new kids, are just really young and really new. Some of those kids did some really good things, too, but it's a big step from mid-

dle school to high school." This being the start of the season, Coach Stowers has been working his team hard to get them in shape for the rest of the season, especially to make those weight classes where they might have holes.

Of course, a lot of the kids who are wrestling now just finished playing football, and Coach Stowers, who is an assistant coach for the football team, likes what he's seeing so far this season.

"The record, I don't think, reflected the positivity around the (football) program,"



said Coach Stowers. "Coming out of football, the kids had a good football season. The win-loss record didn't reflect it as much, but they were upbeat about the way that we competed against some teams, and the way we played against some teams that most people didn't think we could play with."

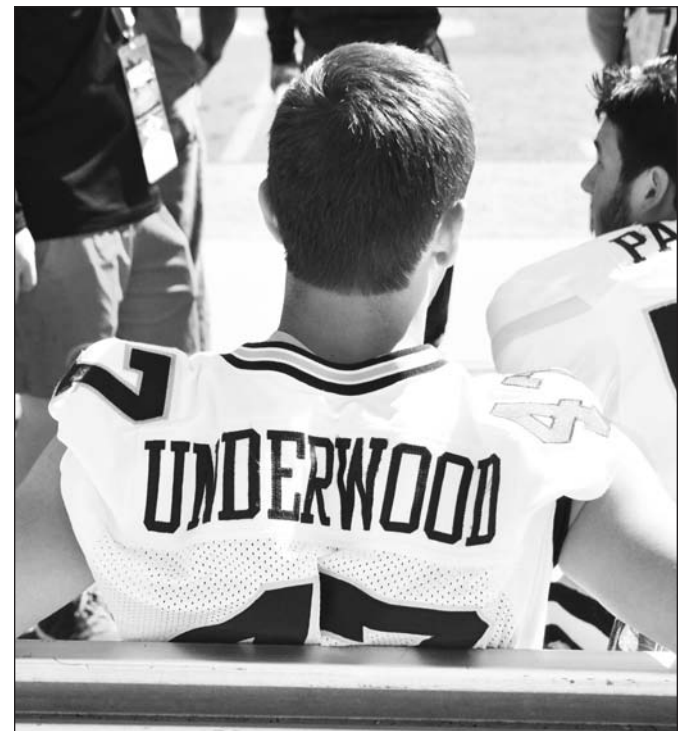
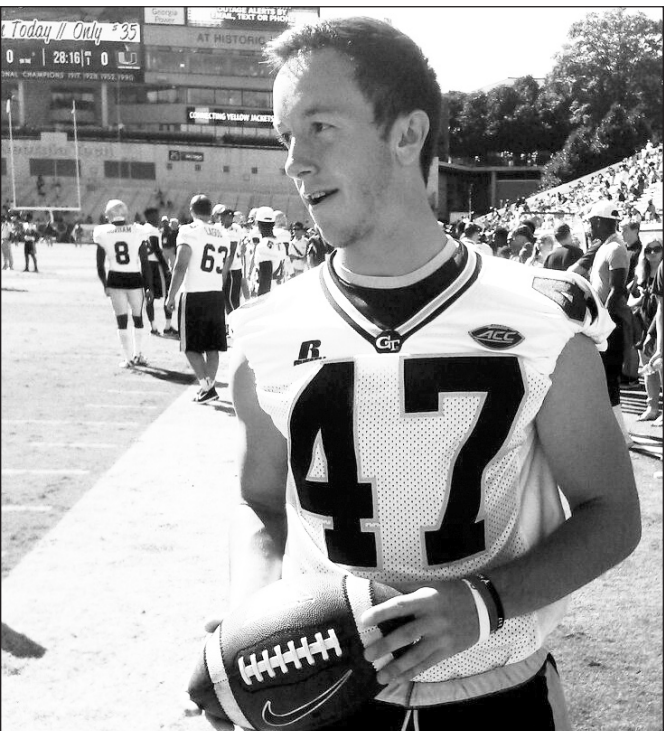
"Coming into wrestling season, the kids are upbeat. We were blessed and didn't have many serious injuries during football season. This time last year, we had three starting wrestlers that were out for more than half the season because of

football injuries.

"So, coming out of football season, everybody's relatively healthy and relatively upbeat. I think everybody's happy to be on the mat, everybody's excited about what could be this season and where we're at. We're just trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together and see where they fit best for us."

Be sure to support the youth of the community by attending the Towns County-hosted King of the Mountains tournament this weekend.

## Shea Underwood is a member of State Champ Yellow Jackets in Year One



The TCHS Cross County team aren't the only ones to return home as State Champions. Following Georgia Tech's 28-27 victory over rival Georgia on Saturday, Underwood is a member of the State Champion Georgia Tech Yellow Jacket football team during his redshirt freshman season. With 8 wins, Tech will play in a bowl game that has yet to be determined. Photos taken by Todd Forrest prior to Miami v GT game on Oct. 1st.

## NASCAR 2016

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

### BIFFLE QUILTS ROUSH

Greg Biffle has turned in his driving helmet at Roush Fenway Racing after 14 seasons behind the wheel of the No. 16 Ford.

"I'm thankful to Jack Roush for the opportunity to have driven his race cars for all these years," said Biffle. "It's very rare in this sport to have been able to stay with one team this many years, and to have been as successful as we have been."

Biffle announced his departure after the last race of the season at Homestead, but at this time he is still a free agent, with no job on the horizon.

Whether he lands with a top notch organization, or a mediocre one, the Vancouver, Washington native shouldn't have too many financial worries, because his net worth is listed at over \$50-million.

"We've had an incredible run and I am so appreciative for the opportunity to be a part of Roush Fenway," he continued. "I'm extremely proud of everything we have been able to accomplish over the last 19 years - both on and off the track. I've enjoyed every minute. I'm excited about the next chapter of my life, and I look forward to exploring other opportunities - particularly in radio and television - both inside and outside of NASCAR."

He won two Truck Series championships (1998 and 2000), before moving to the Xfinity Series in 2001 and winning Rookie of the Year. In 2002, he won the series championship. Roush moved him up to the Sprint Cup Series in 2003, where he has remained.

"I don't have the words to say what Greg has meant to this organization," said team owner Jack Roush. "He is a true racer who has always exhibited a will to win and



Greg Biffle and car owner Jack Roush in 2016

an intense passion for speed. For almost two decades Greg has given us an opportunity to run up front and compete for wins.

"Greg exemplifies what every owner hopes for in a driver and I'm extremely thankful for having him as part of our organization. I know that Greg and I will maintain a strong friendship and I look forward to leaning on him on occasion as we continue to work on improving our performance."

Biffle is one of only 17 drivers to make 500 consecutive Sprint Cup starts, and has started 835 NASCAR races.

"As much as the trophies and championships, I will cherish the memories and the relationships forged during our run," added Biffle. "We had some great teams, fast race cars and some really outstanding partners over the past two decades. I'll always be thankful to everyone that gave us the opportunity to go out and accomplish the milestones that we have been able to."

### EARNHARDT TO START

### BACK DRIVING

Dale Earnhardt Jr. plans to be back in a race car soon. He said last week he will be practicing in a late model car in preparation for his return to full-time Cup racing at Daytona in February.

"We're going to go testing this off season," he said. "Obviously I need to get in a race car. I'd love to get in a car and go run a little bit somewhere just to shake the rust off and get some confidence."

"I can do the basics before we ever go to Daytona. We'll go do that sometime this off season."

"We have to squeeze it in there somewhere because I'm getting married and have my honeymoon, and I have to certainly devote proper time to (fiancée) Amy (Reimann)."

"But it'll be no problem. All signs point to us being in the car for Daytona." Earnhardt was sidelined by a concussion and missed the last 18 Cup races.

He will only be allowed to practice in late

model cars at non-NASCAR sanctioned tracks, because NASCAR prohibits their drivers from practicing at NASCAR tracks in the cars they drive in a regular NASCAR series.

### IS RACING TOO CALM

Allen Gregory of the *Bristol Herald Courier* said NASCAR needs to change their game plan to include some form of racing endeavors from the past.

"In the formative days of the sport, the allure of stock car racing included high speeds, daredevils and danger," said Gregory. "Basically anything could happen on the dusty short tracks and new superspeedways."

"In rural areas such as Southwest Virginia, families would take long Sunday afternoon drives into the country just to listen to Barney Hall and the Motor Racing Network crew describe the beating, banging and wrecking."

"As NASCAR moved into the television age, drivers became the attraction. Much like modern country music, folks became trans-

fixed on the looks and charisma of the stars instead of the actual product."

Thanks to the work of mechanical masters and armies of engineers, the cars have evolved into indestructible tanks that rarely crash or even spin out.

A handful of mega team owners control the game at every level while drivers spend a large amount of their time as corporate spokesmen who rarely rock the boat with their comments or actions.

"After eight weeks of tedious strategy and team orders, drivers busted out in a big way over the final 65 laps at Phoenix," continued Gregory. "There were hang-on-and-hope moments of side-by-side action, risky charges to the front and even a costly highlight-reel crash involving Chase contender Matt Kenseth to close the melodrama."

"Those sort of must-see moments are what NASCAR officials had in mind when they created the Chase."

Meanwhile, the "Throwback" episodes on NBCSN and the throwback weekends for the Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway have been big hits with older fans who yearn for the days when paint schemes were unique, the racing was unpredictable and the drivers were cowboys who were not surrounded by media handlers."

When Tony Stewart rode out of Homestead after the last race of 2016, the sport lost yet another maverick who appealed to both traditional and millennial fans.

If doesn't take a genius to know that the absence of the iconic Dale Earnhardt Jr. has played a part in the lackluster television ratings during this year's Chase.

With many current drivers now either past or

nearing the magical age of 40, NASCAR team owners and marketing experts must find a new crop of stars who are willing to compete like daredevils and then go off script and act like cowboys if the time is right.

When I started going to the NASCAR races in 1994, I could catch a driver who was just standing around, and get a quick interview. Not anymore.

If you want any type of real driver interaction, you have to go through the team's P/R person. You have to explain what the purpose of the interview is for, how it will be used, and what type questions will be asked.

Nowadays, driver conversations are like their racing. It is all polished up and politically correct.

But in all fairness to today's drivers, they are more complex and more intelligent, than they are given credit for. They have to be that way in order to survive in the sport.

NASCAR racing is more like a business than a sport. First, a wannabe driver must present himself as a business person. If he can come across in a manner that will entice a multi-million-dollar sponsor, then he usually becomes a driver.

With the current business model that NASCAR has in place, a driver does not need the fierceness of a Curtis Turner, the daring of a Dale Earnhardt Sr., or the charisma of a Rusty Wallace.

All he needs is a facade that the public corporations gobble up. Driving skills are secondary.

NASCAR will continue to provide exciting racing moments, but it's no longer about the sport, it's about which team has the most success at finding big dollar sponsors.