

# Sports

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## Wrestling: Panthers claim King of the Mountains crown

Union County takes home tourney title behind four wins, 10 top-three finishes

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**Hiwassee** - Union County wrestling took another leap forward, picking up a signature win at last weekend's King of the Mountains tournament, edging Banks County, 199-195 by way of a victory in the event's final match.

Union County junior Wilson Walker, wrestling in his first tournament, scored a pin over Rabun Gap's Joquin Acuna in the 195-pound consolation finals, allowing the Panthers to leapfrog Banks County via the pinfall bonus points.

"We were right there in the hunt, but how about Wilson Walker taking home third in his first tournament ever, that last pin is what put us over the top," said a thrilled Union County coach Justin Byers following Saturday's tournament finals. "This is one of the biggest wins [UCHS wrestling] has had. In fact, I think this might be the first tournament that we've ever won. We've placed in the top-five, maybe finished third once, but as far as winning a tournament, I don't think we've ever done that before."

The Panthers qualified six individuals for the tournament finals, coming away with four victories: Asa Smith-Foot (145), Payton Legatt (152), David Heredia (170) and Sean Phillips (182).

Anderson Clouse (132) and Lane Lance (220) each finished second. Coming in third for Union County were Kaiden Smith (120), Landon Clark (126), Brady Guild (160), Huck Whisenhunt (170) and Walker.

Kanon Abercrombie placed fourth at 126 and Xander Rotko came in fourth at 138. Cody Meeks finished fifth at 285.

"This is not only our first win, but this is the most we've ever placed here," Byers said. "Coming in, we had been to three really tough tournaments and we placed fifth at North Hall, which I think was a really good indicator of what was to come. But Banks County is tough, Swain is tough and overall, we faced some really good competition here [at KOTM]."

Smith-Foot started the weekend with a first-round pin over Banks County's Shane Roberts. He scored a 54-second pin over Rabun's Keaton Webb, then knocked off Austin Jenkins of Swain County, North Carolina by a 10-7 decision in the 145 finals.

Legatt earned a berth in the 152 semifinals by forfeit before picking up a 10-1 major decision over Walhalla, South Carolina's Hunter Lusk. He went on to record a first-round pinfall in the finals, defeating Israel Ferguson of Swain County.

Heredia pinned Towns County's Zion Calhoun in the first round to begin the tournament. He picked up a 10-5



UCHS wrestling scored a program-defining victory over the weekend at Towns County High School's annual King of the Mountains tournament. Photo/Todd Forrest



A fired up Wilson Walker celebrates his pinfall victory in the tourney's final match to propel Union into first place. Photo/Todd Forrest

decision over UCHS teammate Huck Whisenhunt in the semis before pinning Walhalla's Ethan Weisner in the 170 finals.

Phillips defeated Cherokee, North Carolina's David Saunooke by a 7-2 decision, then he pinned Towns County's Seth Gillis to earn a spot in the finals. Facing Banks County's Cam Cooper, Phillips needed just 2 minutes and 44 seconds to pin his opponent and take home gold at 182 pounds.

Lance recorded wins over Cherokee's Vincent Owle and Rabun Gap's Gideon Herbert before suffering a pin at the hands of Banks County's Mason Dodd.

Clouse defeated Banks County's Cohen Ward and Swain's Revis Robinson but fell to Banks' Jaxon Mitchell in the finals.

Walker opened the tourney with a win over Acuna

before falling to Towns County's Stone Chauncey in the second round. In the consols, Walker defeated teammate Brooke Kennedy, who was fresh off a pair of wins over Towns County's Lindsay Giles, to earn a rematch with Acuna where he secured third place individually and propelled his team into first.

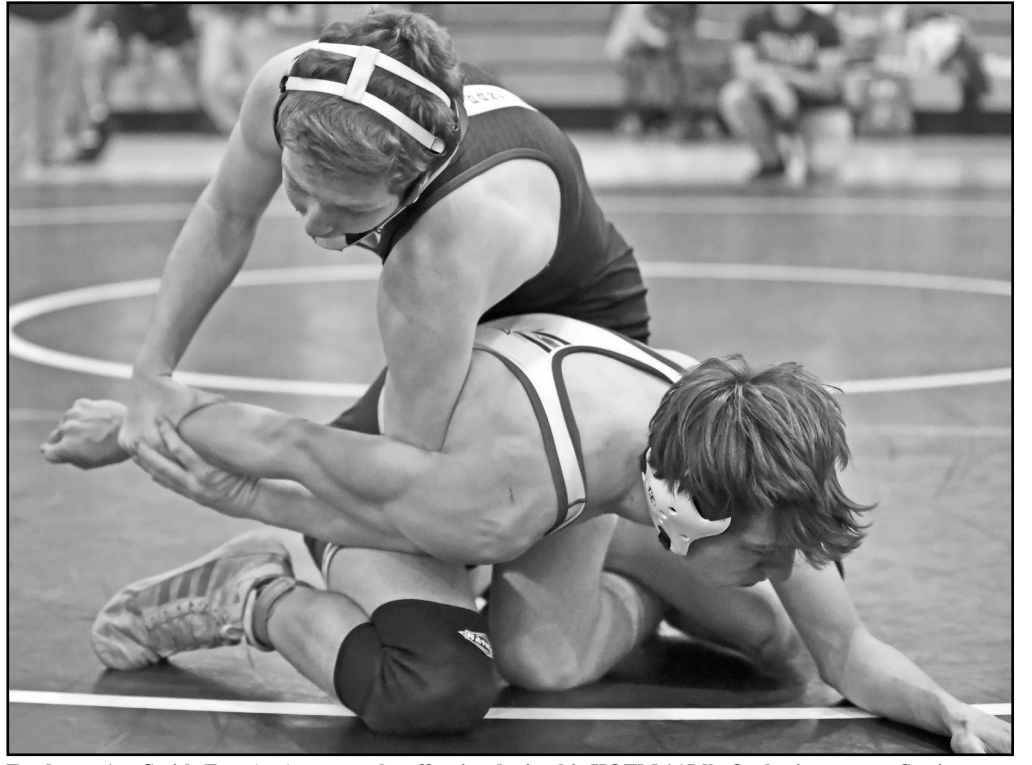
Guild picked up a pin over Cherokee's Josh Phillips but fell in the semis to Banks County's Kellon Walley. He bounced back with consolation victories over Jonathan Wert (Rabun Gap) and Cole Wickle (Swain) to take home a bronze medal.

Clark began his tournament by pinning Cherokee's Julian Wachacha before falling to Swain's Owen Craig. He defeated Walhalla's Siler Kerr and teammate Kanon Abercrombie to place third.

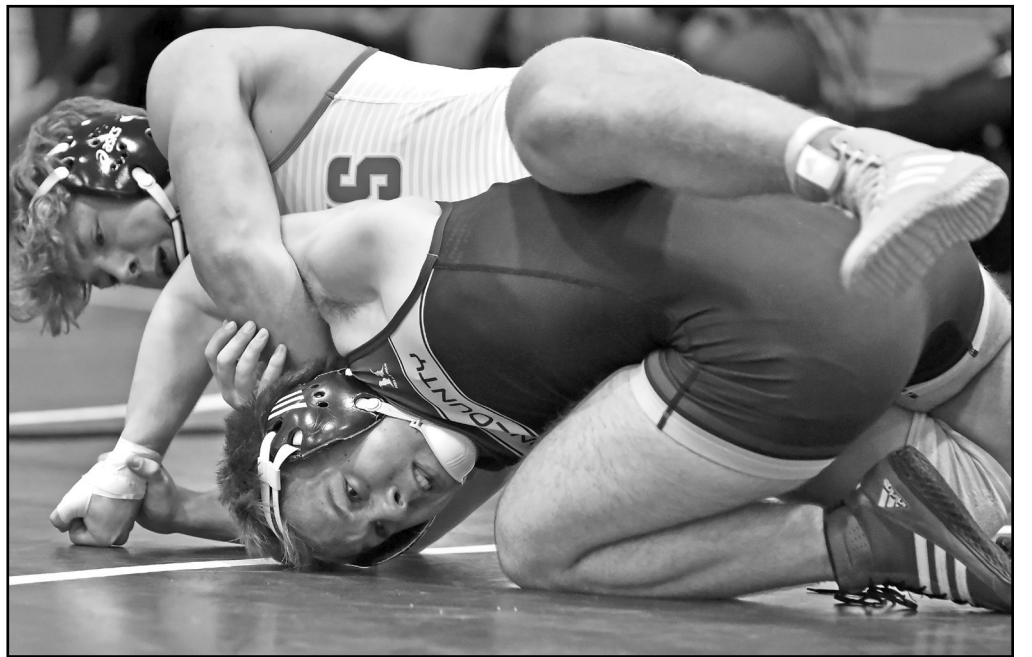
Meanwhile, Abercrombie placed fourth behind an opening-match win over Kerr and a consols victory over Banks County's Will Armour. He suffered losses to eventual champion Elijah Mullins of Banks County in the semis and Clark in the consol finals.

Kaiden Smith earned a first-round bye before falling to the eventual 120-pound champ, Walhalla's Tyas Nelloms in the semis. In the consols, he defeated Towns County's Konnor Davis and Swain's Cameron George.

As for Whisenhunt, he



Freshman Asa Smith-Foot (top) goes on the offensive during his KOTM 145-lb. finals victory over Swain County's Austin Jenkins. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sean Phillips (bottom) fends off Banks County's Cam Cooper, eventually scoring a reversal and a pinfall in under three minutes during the final match of the KOTM's 182-lb. weight class. Photo/Todd Forrest

knocked off Rabun's Celton Littrell to begin the tourney before suffering a loss to Heredia in the semis. He responded with pinfalls over Hayesville, North Carolina's Daniel Austin and Calhoun (Towns) to finish third at 170.

Rotko pinned Cherokee's Jesse Hernandez to begin the tourney but lost to eventual champ, Adam Cotterman of Swain in the semis. He earned a berth in the consol finals with a pinfall victory over Walhalla's Ammar Hassan but finished fourth after a loss to Banks

County's Danny Evans.

Meeks kicked off the tourney by pinning Rabun Gap's Jules Ney before dropping his semifinal match to Banks' Robert Walker - the eventual champion. Meeks' day came to an end with a consols loss to Swain's Tyce Neadeau.

Riding high off its win, Union County will host the 515 Classic at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday with Fannin County, Gilmer, Pickens and Towns County.

"This [KOTM win] gives us tons of momentum," Byers said. "We have a really tough

duals tournament at our place on Wednesday. We're going to see Gilmer, we'll see the defending state champ Fannin County, but this [KOTM win] gives us a huge momentum boost going into it.

"A lot of the credit belongs to our coaches like Pete Rotko, Jim Legatt and Michael Smith-Foot -- I want to thank them for all of their hard work. I also have to give credit to Richard Rivera for everything he's done with our middle school program. Hopefully we can keep on rolling."

### The Benton Mackaye Trail Association December Hikes

The current social distancing and health rules are used by hike Leaders

Dec. 13 (Monday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors an easy to moderate 4-5 mile hike on select trails of Talking Rock Nature Preserve. Dog-Friendly Hike (adult humans may bring a leashed dog. Hike Leader: Ken Cissna. For more information, contact

hikeleaderKC@bmtamail.org

Dec. 17 (Friday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors an 8.3 mile moderately strenuous hike on the BMT, Hemp Top, Jacks River trails. Hike starts from Watson Gap, and enters the Cohutta Wilderness on the BMT. Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information, contact HikeleaderSD@bmtamail.org.

