

# Sports

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## Hometown fighter Tyler Jones ready for Vegas spotlight

### Union County pair taking big steps in amateur combat sports

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**Las Vegas** - Two local fighters are turning up the heat in the desert this summer as Tyler Jones prepares to battle for the vacated IKF Super Cruiserweight kickboxing title, and 18-year-old Asa Smith-Foot takes his first steps into the world of mixed martial arts.

Jones, 22, already a decorated amateur, hopes to leave Nevada as the IKF Certified Amateur Super Cruiserweight (205 lbs) Unified Rules United States champion following his July 19 bout at Westgate Resort & Casino. Meanwhile, Smith-Foot, fresh off his Union County High School graduation in May, is training alongside seasoned pros in Vegas as he launches his MMA journey.

Next weekend, Jones will square off with undefeated Jack Kerr for the 205-pound IKF belt — a fight the Blairsville native expects to be one of his toughest yet.

“He’s a six-time world champion and undefeated, so it’s going to be a good fight — it’s for the No. 1 ranking in the USA at 205,” Jones said.

In the lead-up to the bout, Jones has split his training between his father, Travis; boxing coach Rocky Quinn; and Torch MMA & Fitness in Canton.

“We spend half our time down at Torch with Warren Thompson,” Jones said. “We recently added him to the team, and it’s been a game changer for us. Between him, Dad and Rocky, the preparation has been great, and we’re feeling good about this fight.”

The July 19 contest will mark Jones’ third fight in 11 weeks after recovering from a pair of meniscus injuries. He tore one meniscus and, shortly after healing, injured the other — resulting in a six-month recovery process.

“I got healed up, and this year I’ve been able to get back into it heavy,” he said. “We’ve been very active and trying to fight as much as we can.”

Jones fought May 24 for the XFA Light Heavyweight title, then returned to action June 21 for the Elev8 Fights Light Heavyweight title — winning both by knockout.

Currently, Jones — whose first official fight came



Blairsville’s Tyler Jones (left) following his recent win over John Louis in the Elev8 Kickboxing title fight on June 21. Photo courtesy of Tyler Jones

at age 11 — is the reigning light heavyweight champ in both XFA and Elev8 Fights. He is also a two-time IKF champion, an Aries Fight Series champion, and holds a 24-1-1 overall record.

The July 19 fight will be available on the IKF Fight Platform website via pay-per-view.

Looking ahead, Jones plans to add a few more amateur titles before turning professional, where he expects to remain in Muay Thai and kickboxing.

“If we can get a couple more fights in and a couple more titles, we hope to turn pro by the end of this year,” he said. “That’s the plan. My dream is to get on with Glory Kickboxing somewhere down the line. But right now, we’re just taking it one step at a time.”

Jones credited his father Travis as his greatest influence, along with his team and his girlfriend.

“My dad has been my biggest inspiration, and he’s the one that got me into fighting,” he said. “I’ve always looked up to how hard he

worked and all the titles I watched him win when I was younger. I want to thank my family for always traveling with me and making the trip to watch me fight. I want to thank my team and sparring partners at Torch MMA — Warren Thompson, Stephen Kent, Rocky Quinn — and of course, I have to thank my girlfriend. She always drives me to the fights and puts up with me when I’m cutting weight, so I have to give a shoutout to her, too.”

While Jones trains in Georgia, Smith-Foot has already spent more than five weeks in Las Vegas getting his MMA career off the ground.

Smith-Foot, a four-year state wrestling qualifier at Union County High School, is currently living with professional MMA fighter Karl Williams, who wrestled at Eastside High School under Asa’s father, Michael Smith-Foot.

“Once (Williams) found out I wanted to be a fighter, he texted my dad and said, ‘If he wants to train, he needs to

come out here and train with the best,’” Asa Smith-Foot said.

His interest in fighting began during childhood when he stayed up late — without his parents’ permission — to watch UFC 189.

Little did he know, one of the fights on that card became one of the most iconic in UFC history.

“I was supposed to be asleep, but I stayed up and saw a real famous fight: Robbie Lawler vs. Rory MacDonald II, and it just sparked an interest that never went away.”

Smith-Foot waited a few years before telling his parents about his MMA dreams, though it didn’t come as much of a surprise due to the family’s wrestling background.

“I grew up wrestling and grappling, so it didn’t really come as a shock to them,” he said. “But my mom wasn’t a big fan of it at first. She didn’t want me getting hurt. But they’ve always been sup-



Recent UCHS graduate Asa Smith-Foot has been living and training in Vegas since June 1. Photo courtesy of Michael Smith-Foot

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Tyler Jones (third from left) with his family and team following his XFA title bout on May 24. Photo courtesy of Tyler Jones.



# Local fighters... continued from Page 8A

portive and never once told me not to do it. Their only thing is, they want me to have a backup plan in case (fighting) doesn't work out."

He briefly considered wrestling in college but ultimately decided against it. "I love wrestling and would have loved to do it at college," he said. "But I never really enjoyed schooling very much — it was never my thing."

Smith-Foot won Area wrestling titles in 2024 and 2025 at Union County, placed third at state in 2023 and 2024, finished fifth in 2025, and was Area runner-up in 2023.

With hundreds of matches under his belt, he says wrestling has been a lifesaver during early MMA sparring sessions.

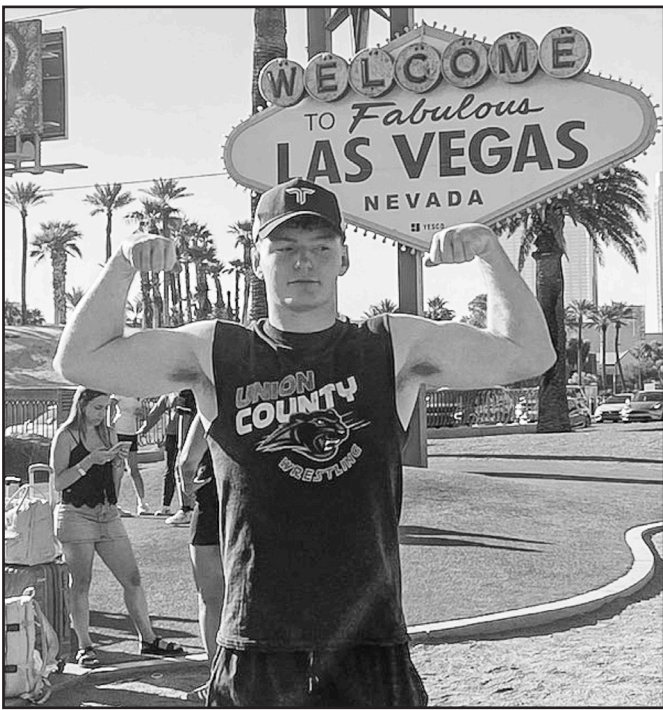
"For lack of a better term, it's been saving my butt a lot," he said. "But honestly, I'm just out here trying to train and learn as much as I can."

He began learning striking at age 16 and started training during his summers with Travis and Tyler Jones while focusing on wrestling during the school year.

"Travis and Tyler helped a lot," he said. "They taught me a lot of stuff that I still use with my training partners out here (in Vegas)."

Eventually, he added kickboxing and jiu-jitsu to his repertoire, courtesy of Blairsville Martial Arts and instructor DJ Tunnell. Still, Smith-Foot says he'll never miss an opportunity to take the fight to the mat.

"I like to strike, but I'm a little behind. Luckily, I don't mind getting punched or



Under the direction of Karl Williams, Asa Smith-Foot hopes to make his cage debut before the end of 2025. Photo courtesy of Michael Smith-Foot.

kicked in the head," he said. "But if I need to wrestle and that opens up, I'm always going to take a shot. I'm always going to hit the lat drop. If it's there, I'll take it and use it to my advantage, but I still want to get better at striking."

Looking ahead, Asa Smith-Foot — who turns 19 in September — is working to pick up a few part-time jobs to support himself, with hopes of making his amateur MMA debut later this year.

"The most important thing right now is not running out of cash while I'm out here," he said. "But I would like to make my debut later this year. Karl is thinking sometime around November or December. That's what I'm hoping for, but whenever my

coaches think I'm ready to hop in the cage, that's when I'll get started."

His ultimate goal is to one day reach the UFC or another major promotion.

"If everything goes to plan over the next five to 10 years, I'll have already made my professional debut and maybe get a call-up to the big leagues, whether it's UFC or PFL / Bellator."

In closing, Smith-Foot credited God and his parents as his greatest inspirations.

"I want to thank God and our savior Jesus Christ," he said. "Obviously, I want to thank my parents. If they hadn't helped me and raised me the way they did, I don't think I'd be able to do this. They taught me a lot of things,

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## North Georgia Rapids Swim Team Championship Summer League Meet 2025



The North Georgia Rapids Swim Team

The North Georgia Rapids Swim Team, located in Blairsville, Georgia, competed in the North Georgia Swim League Championship swim meet recently in Gainesville. The League consists of twelve teams from throughout the North Georgia area with over 400 swimmers competing at this meet.

The League is divided into two divisions with the Rapids falling into the smaller division, comprised of seven teams. This year our local team easily won its division, earning an impressive team trophy, beating out rival team member, Lanier Aquatics, located in Gainesville.

The Rapids swim team took seventeen swimmers to the competition and will return to training after a short and much needed break from the pool. The following breakdown represents the team member's individual achievements:

Boys 8 & Under Overall Finish: Lincoln Dettman - 2nd; Boys 10 & Under: Sawyer Yancey - 1st, Kevin Merritt - 5th, Sam Tippens - 7th.

Boys 12 & Under: Henry Livingston - 8th.

Mixed 14 & Under: Wyatt Yancey - 3rd, Ian Landers - 10th, Kimberly Simpson - 6th, McKynlee Simpson - 15th.

Mixed 18th & Under:

Wyatt Nichols - 8th, Hunter Yancey - 10th, Lily Helton - 7th.

Although not earning individual points, other swimmers had personal best times and helped earn team points as relay participants. These swimmers are valuable team members and will contribute in future competitions. Boone Johnson, Maggie Stallings, Carter Tippens, Eden Conley, Wyatt Chandler.

The team competes year round and practices at the Union General Hospital's Wellness Center. If you would like more information about the team, contact Coach Barry Gay at (706) 835-1662. NJul9/21/CA

## Rising Senior Bailee Brown: Leading Off with Purpose at Young Harris College

By Nicole Klucharich  
Young Harris College  
Athletic Communications

Young Harris Athletics' next student-athlete spotlight of the summer is Bailee Brown, a rising senior on the softball team. Brown is from Concord, Georgia, and a graduate from Pike County High School who has made a significant impact in the Enchanted Valley over the last three years. Get to know Bailee Brown on and off the field below!

In her junior season, Brown slashed .291/.363/.338 as the primary leadoff hitter for the Mountain Lions. In 151 at-bats, the outfielder recorded 35 runs on 44 hits (two doubles, one triple) for 20 RBI. She drew a career-high 16 walks. Defensively, Brown had 56 put-outs and one assist against one error, finishing with a .966 fielding percentage.

Brown has several softball memories that will stick with her, but the one that stands out comes from her freshman season. The Mountain Lions matched up against Anderson University, the team that her cousin played for, who was actually behind the dish during her first ever college at-bat. This was a special memory for her because the whole family was in attendance and gave her a great support system.

Away from the field, Brown is a psychology major who is a tutor on campus, specializing in elementary statistics and research methods. She will begin applying for graduate school in the fall to obtain an occupational therapy degree, to eventually work in an OT pediatric setting.

"Bailee is such a great representative of our softball program here at Young Harris. She excels in the classroom, on the field and as a person of strong integrity. It has been such a pleasure to watch her grow during her career. I know

make it work.

"I also want to thank Travis and Tyler Jones, Stephen Kent, DJ Tunnell, (UCHS wrestling coach) Justin Byers

and all the other wrestling coaches — they've all been super supportive. I want to thank all my friends and family that have supported me."



Bailee Brown on the diamond

there are great things in store for Bailee, and I am so proud that she is a Mountain Lion" says softball head coach Jessie Homesley.

"It means a lot to me to represent Young Harris. I have been here all four years and there isn't another college, coach or group of girls I would want to play for. It is a special place filled with special people who have made [my time here] unforgettable. I am so thankful for the college and community

## Learn to play Pickleball

The Blairsville Pickleball Club, in conjunction with the Union County Recreation Department, will hold free beginning pickleball classes every Tuesday evening starting at 6 PM, weather permitting.

Classes will start April 1st and continue through October 28th. No registration is required, and all required equipment is provided. Certified instructors will teach the classes, and all ages are welcome!

The classes will take place at the outdoor courts at the Union County Pickleball Complex at 108 Chase Drive, Blairsville (next to the Rec Center). NJul9/23/CA

for their support of us as both students and athletes" says Brown.

The leadoff hitter is really looking forward to her final season in purple. "We had a lot of young players last year who now know the ropes and know what it takes to be great," says Brown. "It is a bittersweet feeling knowing that it is my senior season and last year playing softball...but I'm looking forward to ending this chapter with my best friends."

Brown and the rest of the Mountain Lion softball team will begin preparation in the fall and return to action in February of 2026. NTJul9/21/CA

## Mountain High Hikers Schedule

Mountain High Hikers offers three hikes in the local area each week: Tuesdays - a long hike from 8-14 miles and a shorter hike of 5-8 miles. Thursday we lead a leisure hike usually around 5 miles. We also maintain over 100 miles of trails in North Georgia and Western NC area and run trail maintenance hikes on Thursdays each week.

For more information visit <http://www.mountain-highhikers.org>. NTJul9/22/CA

## Panthers attend Gordon Central camp Tuesday



Jaxon Totherow (65) and the Panthers will attend one final offseason camp on Tuesday when they travel to Gordon Central. Next week, conditioning begins for the 2025 season, followed by the first official padded practice on July 28 and a scrimmage game at Chestatee on Aug. 8. Photo/Todd Forrest

# Union 2025 UNION FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

vs. GILMER CO. AUGUST 22ND	vs. LEO LAKEVIEW-FORT-OGLETHORPE SEPTEMBER 26TH
@ FANNIN CO. AUGUST 29TH	vs. RINGGOLD OCTOBER 3RD
@ MURRAY CO. SEPTEMBER 5TH	vs. COALHULLA CREEK OCTOBER 17TH
vs. ROCKMART SEPTEMBER 12TH	@ SONORAVILLE OCTOBER 24TH
@ N. MURRAY CO. SEPTEMBER 19TH	@ NO. COBB CHRISTIAN OCTOBER 30TH