

# Shopping...from Page 1A

that he had been there shopping.

"Deputy Stanley asked him if he had paid for the items, Love said that he had and that the receipt should be in one of the bags," Sheriff Mason said.

Georgia State Patrol TFC Cody White stopped to assist Deputy Stanley. He advised Stanley that a beer appeared to be missing from a six-pack in the passenger floorboard, Sheriff Mason said.

"I guess he popped him a

beer and thought he was home free," Sheriff Mason said. "The video footage from Wal-Mart told another story than the one Love was telling Deputy Stanley."

After Trooper White discovered a beer was missing from the six-pack, Deputy Stanley asked Love to step outside the vehicle, and he complied.

"Deputy Stanley asked him if he had been drinking and Love told him one beer," Sheriff Mason said. "Deputy Stan-

ley asked him where he drank the beer, and he told him in the car.

"Deputy Stanley told Love that the video at Wal-Mart would be reviewed to see if he had paid for the items in his car," Sheriff Mason said. "Love then told him he had not paid for the items."

Love was handcuffed and put in the rear of Stanley's patrol vehicle, Sheriff Mason said.

A search of Love's vehicle revealed \$490.44 in stolen

items from Wal-Mart, 10 Tramadol pills, and a prescription Ibuprofen, sheriff's reports show.

Love was charged with open container of alcohol, theft by shoplifting, possession of prescription medication not in its original container, and illegal possession of a dangerous drug, Union County Jail records show.

Love was being held in the Union County Jail, jail records show.

# The Pit...from Page 1A

was a great place. Back in the 1970s we had pep rallies every Friday and your ears would be ringing when you went home after each game. They also held a 'woman-less wedding' every year during the Sorghum Festival to raise money. The guys would get all dressed up in tuxedos and some in dresses. But the thing I remember most from my playing days was when we beat Lumpkin County 102-51. That was only time we scored 100 during my playing days in a region game."

Under Coach Odom, the Panthers reached the State Championship Game in Macon during the second season in The Pit in 1970-71. The team's only loss was in the State title game and the following year, the Panthers reached the Final Four, in the midst of Union's longest home winning streak in school history.

"When the gym opened it was unique," said Larry Turner, a sophomore in 1969-70. "I remember going over to Towns County's old gym and getting burned by cigarettes when you dove into the bleachers. So when The Pit opened it was the nicest gym around."

Smoking at the games was common back in those days. David Chatham, a freshman in 1970-71, remembered how the gym was full of smoke from everyone smoking up top while they stood on the railing. Smoking in the locker room was even a common occurrence in those days.

"I remember Earl Odom coming into the locker room at halftime and lighting up a Marlboro," Collins said. "He would give us Coke to drink from the concession stand. It's a wonder we won as many games as we did and didn't crash during the second half."

Whatever magic Coach Odom and the new gymnasium were summoning, it worked. After a 15-year State Playoff drought, Odom and The Pit seemed to click immediately.

The Lady Panthers under Coach Tom Wilson had never reached State but from 1970-74, the first five seasons in The Pit, Union County's boys and girls didn't miss a State Tournament, with the girls reaching two Final Fours during the impressive run, and all five boys' teams finishing in the Top 8 in the State. The girls reached the Elite 8 in four of the five seasons. However, the gym floor was flooded and the superstitious players and coach were sad when the hardwood had to be replaced.

"We had such a long winning streak in that gym that we didn't want the floor to be replaced," said Troy Collins, a sophomore on the 1971-72 team. But back in those days, you didn't host any State Playoff games, all the games were played in Macon. Both teams went every year and probably bankrupted the Tip-Off Club or whoever it was that paid for us. We'd get down there and stay the whole week because we'd keep on winning."

Many school records were set on that floor with post player Danny Aaron setting the record with 46 points in 1970-71. Later, in 1998-99, Trint Rich topped Aaron with 47 points in a contest that saw the last Union County team to score 100 points in The Pit. Despite Rich's performance and the team breaking the century mark, the Panthers still lost to Gilmer County. In that contest 78 fouls were called and 111 free throws attempted in one of the wildest games every played in the Pit.

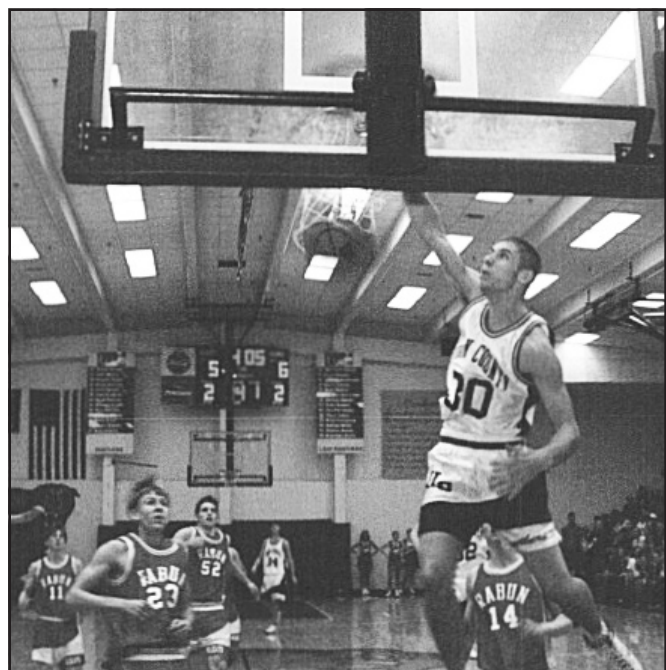
Aaron also set the rebounding record with 34 boards in 1970-71. Ricky Brown broke the record in 1976 with 35. During that season, both Union County teams returned to State after missing the postseason in 1975.

The tandem of big men Brown and Randy White led the 1976 Panthers.

In 1981, Union County's boys won their last Region Championship in Coach Odom's final season. The next season, Coach Jerry Helton took over and Union County once again advanced to State. The girls also made his-



The Infamous Pit Crew read the *North Georgia News* during a game against Dawson County in the mid-1990s. The intent was to ignore the Panthers' opponent.



The Panthers' Branden Dykes serves up the final dunk in the history of The Pit in January 2001.



Nikki Gurley (15) is the last Lady Panther to have played in The Pit to score 1,000 career points.

tory in 1981 when they handed the eventual Class AA State Champion White County girls their only loss of the season in The Pit.

In 1984, Jim Hughes took over the Lady Panthers and in 1984-85 the Lady Panthers reached the Elite 8 and advanced to State again in 1986.

In the late 80s Coach Renny Bryner became the head boys basketball coach and added a new wrinkle to the gymnasium in the form of the Pit Crew.

By the time The Pit closed its doors in February of 2002, it had become so feared by opposing teams, that some players would become nauseous at the thought of playing in front of Union's forever raucous and faithful followers, the "Pit Crew."

The harassing chants, taunting, props, and funny costumes became synonymous with Union County. Matthew Johnstone from Towns County (1996-2000) recalled that playing at Union County was the closest he ever came to playing in a major college atmosphere. The Pit Crew was even mentioned in a newspaper in Michigan regarding the most notorious student sections

across the nation. Some opposing players relished it, such as Johnstone and Mark Causey (East Hall), while most wilted under the non-stop scrutiny of the Pit Crew.

Longtime scorekeeper Debbie Thomas (1994-2011) recalled the 2001-02 season when the Pit Crew got under the skin of Rabun County's star player.

"Rabun had a really good player whose Mom also did the books," Thomas said. "She told me that before the Union games (her son) would literally get sick at the thought of playing in front of the Pit Crew."

Current Union County Panther Head Boys Coach Casey Jones played in The Pit from 1995-99, while a rivalry with fellow Region 8-A foe Dawson County was at its peak. After the passing of Coach Alan Ross before the 1997-98 season, the Tigers snapped Union's home win streak that spanned more than 20 games. From then on, the rivalry was at a fever pitch for the next 10 years.

"My favorite memory is when we played Dawson my senior year," Coach Jones said. "It was the year after they tore all the banners down

in the gym. The place was packed and the energy was awesome."

Union went on to win that game by 20 points and The Pit ended the same way it began some 30 years earlier. Union's boys reached State in each of the last three seasons in the gym and won Sub Region in five of the last six seasons, while the Lady Panthers reached the State Championship Game in 2001 under Head Coach Robbie Stancil, the next to last season in The Pit.

"I'm excited that our kids will get to experience playing there," Coach Jones said. "There was nothing like it."