

Towns County Sports

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Lady Indians Region Champions; Host State Playoff Game Friday



The Lady Indians and their championship trophy Photo by Lowell Nicholson.

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"Towns County is a dog-gone good team. There was just a thin margin right there for us. We kept inching our way back and they would answer every time we did." Those were words spoken by Prince Avenue Head Coach Richard Ricketts to an Athens Banner-Herald reporter following the Region 8A Girls Championship game last Saturday night at Athens Christian School. They could well have been spoken, however, about any of three games played in the tournament by the Towns County Lady Indians last week.

The Lady Indians reached the highest level possible within their region in taking hard fought victories over Athens Academy in Commerce on Tuesday and over Hebron Christian and Prince Avenue Christian on Friday and Saturday at Athens Christian School. Each of the three teams far exceeded their level of play during regular season play against the Lady Indians and, quite frankly, better than against each other. But this is common when a team enjoying the success of the Lady Indians the last several years has a bull's-eye on its forehead with every opponent dreaming of knocking off the team considered perhaps to be the neighborhood bully.

When all was said and done, the Lady Indians had survived such obstacles as sometimes cold field goal and free throw shooting and a huge deficit against Hebron, offset by several incredible scoring runs, in winning their second Region 8A Championship in the last three years. In so doing, they extended their season record to 26-1, including 16-0 in all games played against region

opponents. Further, the victory over Athens Academy was the 100th for the team over the last four years as compared to just eighteen losses. And the win over Hebron was the 100th career varsity win for Lady Indian Senior Jordan Moss who has missed just one game played by her teams since beginning basketball in the third grade.

If the two region championships in three years suggest that such events are a common occurrence, this is not the case with this championship being a real deal. The Lady Indians had managed just one region championship prior to 2009 when they took three straight victories over Jackson County, Loganville, and Buford way back in 1977. The Lady Indians of Coach Dion Eller played in those days in the now deleted Class B prior to their opposing schools of that year seeing much growth and being elevated to higher classifications today.

The win over Athens Academy on Tuesday qualified the Lady Indians for the Class A State Tournament for the eleventh time in thirteen years with Head Coach Jim Melton at the helm. They will host Mt. Zion High School of Carroll County this Friday with the time of the game not decided as of the newspaper deadline. Additional information and some editorial comments about a complicated state tournament setup are included in a related article.

DOMINANT THIRD QUARTER SENDS LADY INDIANS PAST ATHENS ACADEMY

The Lady Indians brushed aside early 2-0 and 4-2 leads by the Athens Academy Lady Spartans on Tuesday in Commerce, with Lindsay Patton tying the score each time,

and sprang out to a 16-4 lead by the 1:44 mark of the first quarter. The Lady Indians got ahead, for good as it turned out, on two free throws at 4:34 and a long two point basket seconds later by Gabby Arencibia which were followed by four straight free throws by Eryn Cochran as highlights of the early run.

The Lady Spartans exerted themselves for the remainder of the first half; however, scoring the final three points of the first quarter for a 16-7 deficit and closing to within 20-16 by the 2:36 mark of the second with the Lady Indian lead just 30-25 by intermission. An eight point quarter by Arencibia

made one last push. They used a 6-1 run between the 4:40 and 3:34 mark to close within 54-44 but three field goals by Patton and Cochran's second four for four free throw shooting quarter of the game led the way as the Lady Indians broke away again for a 65-50 victory.

The Lady Indians were led by four double digits scorers in Arencibia with 17 points, Patton with 16, Moss with 15, and Cochran with 12. Leading in assists were Cochran with 5 and Moss and Arencibia with 3 each.

Cochran was a perfect twelve for twelve at the foul line, just two short of the



Ben Pong looks for an opening inside in the title game against Prince Avenue Photo by James Reese.

played the primary role in keeping the Lady Indians ahead but the loss of the early momentum was to be alleviated in the third quarter.

The Lady Indians clamped down defensively on the Lady Spartans for the entire third quarter and followed the lead of Jordan Moss who scored the first seven Lady Indian points for as much as a 44-28 lead which became 44-29 by quarter's end. The Lady Indians outscored the Lady Spartans 14-4 in the quarter with all of the Athens points coming on 4 for 6 free throw shooting. A three point play by Moss just twenty five seconds into the fourth quarter gave the Lady Indians their biggest lead of 47-29 before the Lady Spartans

known record for perfect shooting by the Lady Indians of fourteen for fourteen by Brandy McNabb during a home game with Franklin during the 1999 season. John Allen holds the known overall record for perfect free throw shooting with a seventeen for seventeen performance in a home game against Banks County during the 2000 season. Cochran is now tied for second among Lady Indians and tied for third overall as four prior Lady Indians and Indians—Darlene Palmer (Woodruff) during the 1976 season, Chet Kendall in 1986, Keisha Taylor (O'Hearn) in 1996, and Scotty Fain in 1998—have registered twelve for twelve performances.

RESOUNDING LADY INDIAN COMEBACK TAKES CARE OF HEBRON

The conventional wisdom that it's hard to defeat a team three times during one season was in evidence but proved to not be unachievable in the region semi final game against Hebron Christian Academy on Friday at Athens Christian. The Lady Indians had taken two victories by scores of 66-32 and 62-36 over the Lady Lions during regular season but they didn't look like the same team on this night although entering the game with just a 13-12 record but with five wins in their previous six games.

The Lady Lions were off and running on a 3-point basket by the 7:25 mark of the first quarter and twice led by as many as four points but just by a 13-12 score after one quarter. Five different Lady Indians put points on the scoreboard in the first quarter with four late points on a free throw and a trey by Gabby Arencibia getting the Lady Indians to within the one point margin.

There were three ties and five lead changes in the second quarter with five different Lady Indians accounting for field goals, including three treys, as the Lady Lions led 28-25 at intermission. Things didn't get any better for most of the third quarter for the Lady Indians as Hebron followed a trey by Ali Bleckley at 6:48 for a 29-28 Lady Indian lead with a 17-3 run for a 45-32 lead with just 1:37 remaining in the third quarter.

With everything seemingly going the Lady Lions' way and the Lady Indians with their backs to the wall, a change in momentum was desperately needed and this began for the Lady Indians at the 1:25 mark on a twelve foot Eryn Cochran jumper. Arencibia followed just ten seconds later with a steal near the goal and converted an old fashioned three point play with the Lady Indians suddenly back within single digits at 45-37. They were far from through, however, as Bleckley drained a trey at 30.8 seconds with an inside foul called simultaneously on the Lady Lions and the Lady Indians retaining possession.

The Lady Indians made the Lady Lions pay as Arencibia sank a trey at nineteen seconds and then completed a fourteen point Towns run in just a minute and twenty five seconds, putting the Lady Indians ahead 46-45 with another trey at the buzzer. The Lady Indians would continue their run in the fourth quarter with Bleckley sinking still another trey at 7:40 and Makayla Underwood taking the ball coast to coast for a left handed layup at 7:05 for

an overall 19-0 run and a 51-45 Towns lead.

The Lady Lions responded with five straight points with the last basket in the run enabled by a non call on a clear double dribble for just a 51-50 Towns lead by the 6:12 mark. But two field goals by Lindsay Patton and a three point play on a coast to coast run by Moss lifted the Lady Indians to a 58-50 lead by the 4:29 mark. A Moss steal and eventual Cochran assisted field goal matched two free throws by the Lady Lions and Ben Pong more than matched two additional Hebron free throws with a trey for a 63-54 Lady Indian lead at 2:52.

A breakthrough layup for the Lady Lions got them within 63-56 at 1:04 but when Cochran drove to the basket for a left handed layup at 1:24 and Bleckley sank two free throws at 1:04, the Lady Indians had their biggest lead of 67-56. They had completed a miraculous overall 35-11 run in just eight minutes and twenty one seconds of playing time back to 1:25 of the third quarter, turning a thirteen point deficit into an eleven point lead.

The Lady Lions refused to go quietly, however, as a Hebron putback, a steal made possible by an uncalled foul, and a Lady Indian turnover led to a 6-0 run for just a 67-62 Towns lead by the twenty eight second mark. But a free throw by Arencibia at 22.9 seconds gave the Lady Indians a bit of breathing room with a 68-62 lead which held up until a putback basket by Hebron at the buzzer set the final score at 68-64.

Leading scorers for the Lady Indians were Bleckley with 18 points, Arencibia with 17, Moss with 11, Cochran with 8, Patton with 6, and Underwood with 5. Cochran led in assists with 5 with other leaders being Moss and Underwood with 2 each.

FIRST HALF TREYS EXPLOSION KEYS LADY INDIAN CHAMPIONSHIP WIN

The Lady Indians put on quite a first half show against the Prince Avenue Lady Wolverines in the Region 8A Championship game on Saturday at Athens Christian. They used six 3-point baskets by three different players between the 2:15 mark of the first quarter and the 3:20 mark of the second to great advantage in racing out to what proved to be an insurmountable 33-15 lead by exactly the two minute mark of the quarter.

See Indians Story continued on Next Page!



Gabby Arencibia launches a 3-ball against Prince Avenue Photo by James Reese.



Jordan Moss puts up a deuce in the Region championship game against Prince Avenue Photo by James Reese.



Region 8-A Coach of the Year Jim Melton provides the Lady Indians with direction during a timeout against Athens Academy Photo by James Reese.



Gabby Arencibia launches a 3-ball against Prince Avenue Photo by James Reese.