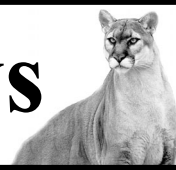




Towns County Herald's Sporting News



Indians' season ends with loss to Lakeview Academy

JERRY KENDALL
Sports Writer

After a resounding win over Social Circle in their regular season finale, the Towns County Indians Varsity Basketball Team faced a difficult match-up in Lakeview Academy on the Lions' home court in Gainesville in the first round of the Region 8A Tournament last Tuesday. The Lions employ a lot of players who use an in your face full court defense which proved to be too much for the Indians on this evening as they fell to defeat by 73-35 score.

Ten Indians entered the scoring column with Ezekiel Gribble leading with 7 points and Devin Henderson right behind with 6. Chase Ellis led the way in assists with 3 for the game.

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE - One of the more difficult times in the career of a high school athlete is the time when they play their final game in a particular sport. The Lakeview Academy game marked the end of the high school basketball careers of three Indian seniors—Chase Ellis, Ezekiel Gribble, and Andy Page.

These players feature the unique situation of basketball not being their primary sport with Ellis headed to Pikeville College in Kentucky to play football and Gribble to remain in his home county as a baseball player at Young Harris College. Page seems destined to also continue his career in football as he explores his op-

tions as of press time. Ellis and Page, like Gribble, are also baseball players of note in completing three sport participation at the high school level.

Ellis transferred to TCHS for his final two years of high school from Westfield High School in Perry, Georgia, while Gribble and Page got their sports careers started at Towns County Recreation Department. Gribble also played basketball for Towns County Middle School while Page dropped out of basketball for a couple of years before returning for four years at the high school level.

All three seniors have provided many hours of dedicated service to the Indians with Gribble and Page especially seeing vast change in the number of players participating in basketball. With very limited participation their first two years, they often saw extensive action in a combination of five quarters in JV and varsity play. A large group of players in this year's sophomore class especially brought about a transition to a potentially bright future for the Indians with a large number of players all seeing extensive action.

All three seniors are "chips off the old block" as the fathers of all three were prominent athletes in their own right. It has been a tradition to acknowledge athletic activity for relatives of the senior players with these connections being extensive this year. Ellis' father, Ricky, played multiple sports, including baseball at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC) in Tifton. He

has served for many years as a school coach in multiple sports, mostly in middle and south Georgia but including coaching duties in football, basketball, and baseball in Towns County for the last two years.

Chase's oldest brother, Ric, quarterbacked his Tiftarea Academy to the 2002 Georgia Independent School Association (GISA) Class AA State Runnerup Trophy. His other brother, Bryan, was then the Class AAA statewide offensive player of the year as he quarterbacked Peach County High School to the Class AAA GHSA State Championship two years ago and is now on football scholarship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

The fathers of Gribble and Page were both prominent multi sports stars at TCHS with Gribble playing both basketball and football and graduating in 1970 and Page playing baseball, basketball, and football before graduating in 1978. Allan Gribble is best remembered by this reporter for his stardom on the basketball court for the Indians while Allen Page especially excelled on the baseball diamond, including for a Dixie Majors age seventeen and under state runnerup team in 1977. Your reporter was privileged to serve as assistant coach to Jack Mathis on that Dixie Majors team and viewed first hand the multiple skills and intensity displayed by "Alley Cat" as he was affectionately known.

Ezekiel Gribble has had two noteworthy relatives playing sports at the college level with first cousin Drew Duff having served as a pitcher for

four years at Notre Dame University and second cousin Randy Campbell having been a star quarter back at Auburn University. Finally, Andy Page has a sister, Allison, who was a seventh grade member of the Towns County Middle School's outstanding basketball team this year.

Perhaps the most satisfying basketball action for the three seniors would be their outstanding individual performances on senior night in an 82-53 drubbing of Social Circle described in last week's Herald. It would be neglectful for your reporter to not address two noteworthy accomplishments of Ezekiel Gribble during his basketball career at TCHS.

Gribble appeared in all 106 games played by his teams, usually as a starter, during his four years at TCHS, a very rare occurrence for an Indian player. Although a very capable and sometimes explosive scorer, he is probably known best at just 5'7" for a near perfect defensive technique of being able to draw a charging foul by his opponents. While such records have rarely if ever been compiled, observers of Towns County basketball for decades have little doubt that he would hold a lead of many times more charges taken than whoever the nearest player might be.

Many thanks are extended to Chase Ellis, Ezekiel Gribble, and Andy Page for their dedicated sports participation at Towns County High School and best wishes are extended as they continue their education and sports careers.

Nikki Winn named Region 8A Player of the Year again, other Towns players honored

JERRY KENDALL
Sports Writer

Region 8A has announced its All-Region basketball teams for the 2009 season and for the second year in a row, Towns County Lady Indian Senior Nikki Winn has been named the Region 8A Player of the Year. She is accompanied this year by Junior Melissa Conrad on the All Region first team and by Freshman Gabby Arencibia who received honorable mention. The Indians were also represented on the boys All Region team by Senior Chase

Ellis who was named to the second team.



Winn

Individual Basketball Scoring

Hebron Christian		Lakeview Academy	
Nikki Winn (12)	21	Ezekiel Gribble (12)	7
Melissa Conrad (11)	13	Devin Henderson (10)	6
Ali Bleckley (9)	8	John Bleckley (11)	4
Jordan Moss (10)	8	Will Adkins (11)	3
Ellie Parton (12)	6	Tommy Black (11)	3
Heather Hamilton (11)	2	Brandon Henderson (9)	3
		DJ Rogers (10)	3
		Bradley Swanson (10)	3
		Brett Bradshaw (10)	2
		Chase Ellis (12)	1
Athens Christian			
Nikki Winn (12)	14		
Melissa Conrad (11)	12		
Jordan Moss (10)	6		
Lindsay Patton (9)	6		
Gabby Arencibia (9)	3		
Ali Bleckley (9)	3		
Amber Allen (12)	2		
Social Circle			
Nikki Winn (12)	24		
Jordan Moss (10)	10		
Melissa Conrad (11)	7		
Gabby Arencibia (9)	6		
Ellie Parton (12)	5		
Amber Allen (12)	2		
Heather Hamilton (11)	2		



NASCAR 2009 By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

KENSETH GETS SECOND WIN IN A ROW

FONTANA, Calif. — Matt Kenseth showed Sunday he still knows how to drive a race car.

Winless in 2008, Kenseth backed up his victory in the season-opening Daytona 500 by holding off Jeff Gordon in Sunday's Auto Club 500 Cup race at Auto Club Speedway.

"I've got to thank these guys in the pit," said Kenseth. "They gave me a good pit stop and I was able to get out first in the clean air. That was a huge difference."

With a lightning-fast pit stop, Kenseth's crew made sure his No. 17 Roush Fenway Racing Ford was first off pit road for a restart on Lap 216, after Kevin Harvick slammed the Turn 1 wall to cause the fifth and final caution on lap 208 of the 250-lap race.

Kenseth, who won for the 18th time in the Cup Series, stayed in front the rest of the way and beat Gordon to the finish line by 1.463 seconds to become the fifth driver in Cup history to win the first two races of a season. Gordon was the last to do it in 1997, at Daytona and Rockingham.

"This is a new team and they showed it tonight," said Gordon. "I'm really pumped up this season. We've got a little bit of work to do, but I'm so excited."

Kyle Busch's bid for an

unprecedented weekend sweep of three major NASCAR touring series events on one weekend at any track came up short as he finished third.

"It was less than a stellar race," said Busch. "It was a good run, we had a shot but Matt was so strong. It was tough, but we're going to Las Vegas really excited."

Greg Biffle, Kurt Busch, Denny Hamlin, Carl Edwards, Tony Stewart, Jimmie Johnson, and Brian Vickers rounded out the top-10 finishers.

The engine and right front tire blew on Harvick's Chevrolet on Lap 208, and he retired from the race, ending a modern-era record streak of 81 races without a DNF.

Hendrick Motorsports teammates Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Mark Martin suffered rare engine failures; they finished 39th and 40th, respectively.

Top-10 Sprint Cup leaders after 2 of 36: 1. Kenseth-385, 2. J. Gordon-304, 3. Kurt Busch-294, 4. Stewart-294, 5. Biffle-268, 6. Bowyer-266, 7. Waltrip-264, 8. Ragan-262, 9. Edwards-260, 10. Montoya-256

KYLE BUSCH GETS DOUBLE WIN
Kyle Busch picked up right where he left off in 2008, as he scored wins in the Camping World Truck Series and Nationwide Series, Saturday at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif.

"This is awesome, and to

win here twice in one day is even more special," said Busch, who now has five wins across NASCAR's top-three series at Fontana - two in the Nationwide Series, two in the Camping World Truck Series and one in the Sprint Cup Series. "I wouldn't be able to do it without all these guys at Joe Gibbs Racing. This Toyota Camry was just flawless and I can't thank them enough."

Top-10 Nationwide Series leaders after 2 of 35: 1. Ky. Busch-360, 2. Edwards-340, 3. Harvick-305, 4. Ragan-297, 5. Vickers-297, 6. Reutimann-273, 7. Logano-268, 8. Gaughan-256, 9. Keller-255, 10. Biffle-221

Top-10 Truck leaders after 2 of 25 races: 1. Busch-370, 2. T. Bodine-365, 3. Crafton-293, 4. Peters-288, 5. Hornaday-285, 6. Bell-285, 7. Skinner-281, 8. McCumbee-276, 9. Starr-272, 10. Cook-253.

Walking Around Daytona
Each year I come away from the races at Daytona tired. It's because I walk so much. The Daytona infield is a pretty big place, and NASCAR doesn't furnish buses or trolleys to ferry around the news media.

No sir, if you are with the press, and you want to get from one end of the garage area to the other, you hoof it.

The drivers and television crews have electric golf

cars they zip around on, but the ones who write for the print media are at the bottom of the pile, and god forbid, if one of us should try to sneak a ride on the back of a cart reserved for Jimmie Johnson, or Dale Earnhardt Jr.

NASCAR would take away your press credentials. But that's missing the point.

We need to walk a lot more in this country.

If we walked more and drove less, then maybe we could become less dependent on Ahab the Arab and his bunch.

I walk all the time at tracks and ride all the time when I'm home. Believe me the next couple days after getting back from a three-day weekend at a track I feel better. Maybe it's because I've walked more than I would if I was seated at my desk at home.

Have you seen these little two-wheel riding machines that the police are using to patrol downtown areas and shopping malls? I tried to get my wife to buy me one for Christmas so I could drive between rooms in our house, but she was afraid I would hurt myself going up the stairs on it.

Let's face it. We are slaves to our automobiles and the gas they run on. We are snared by the big oil companies, and no matter what they charge, we are going to pay their prices to get around.

I could walk the half-

mile to our nearest Circle-K for a loaf of bread.

The Waffle House where I like to eat isn't much farther.

And I could walk to a friend's house, which is just three doors down at the foot of the hill, but I don't.

I hate to admit it, but the most walking I do is at the race tracks on the weekend. Maybe that's why I gained 18 pounds over the winter.

Let's wake up America. If we did more walking and less riding, we would be cutting down on the amount of oil our country imports, and it would help our health.

Next Week:
Pulse of the Camping World Truck Series

Weekend Racing:

The Cup and Nationwide teams will be at the 1.5-mile Las Vegas Speedway. The Trucks have an off week.

Sat., Feb. 28, Nationwide Series Sam's Town 300, Starting time: 4:30 p.m. (EST); TV: ESPN2.

Sun., Mar. 1, Sprint Cup Shelby 427, Starting time: 4:30 p.m. (EST); TV: Fox

Racing Trivia Question:
What was the total driver purse of the 2009 Daytona 500?

Last Week's Question:
Who is the driver of the No. 14 Cup car? Answer: Tony Stewart.

You may contact the Racing Reporter at: hodgesnews@earthlink.net.



Car owner Jack Roush and Matt Kenseth celebrate their California win

Sniff, Wag, Sit, Snake! Conservation Dog Tracks Indigos



C.J. is a chocolate Labrador retriever trained to sniff out rare species, such as the federally threatened eastern indigo snake. Using dogs' keen sense of smell to pinpoint imperiled wildlife is a growing practice. Photos by Rick Lavender/Ga. DNR.

C.J. is all Lab: big, bad to jump on you, bent on chasing tennis balls.

Oh, and trained to find eastern indigo snakes.

On a recent romp in turkey-oak sandhills near Valdosta, the chocolate Labrador roamed the forest, trailing leash and handlers Kara and Mike Ravenscroft, and answering Kara's frequent calls to

stick a nose down gopher tortoise burrows and sniff.

Dirk Stevenson, an indigo expert with Project Orianna, a new conservation organization centered on conserving the protected species and its habitat range-wide, said a dog like C.J. can help pinpoint these rare snakes that wander far in warm months and often hole up in the bottom of tortoise burrows during cold weather.

"Even when they're abundant," Stevenson said of indigos, "they're in low numbers."

Eastern indigos are North America's longest snake, reaching more than 8 feet. Adults can be as thick as two fists and weigh upward of 10 pounds. Their color is a striking glossy or bluish black; indigos appear iridescent in sunlight. Their diet is indiscriminate, including almost any animal they can swallow, even rattlesnakes.

But Drymarchon couperi has been federally listed as threatened since 1978. The snake's historic range from southern Georgia to the Florida Keys and southwestern Alabama has been shredded by

habitat loss and fragmentation. Populations dwindled as the non-venomous snakes were run over by cars, killed by people and gassed in gopher tortoise burrows, an illegal practice tied to rattlesnake roundups.

Using dogs' keen sense of smell to pinpoint imperiled wildlife such as the eastern indigo is a growing practice. Conservation canines have been used to find everything from a threatened lupine in Oregon to brown tree snakes in Guam. C.J.'s resume already lists spider monkeys in Nicaragua and bats in Texas, plus a trained aversion to rattlesnakes.

Project Orianna rented the retriever from PackLeader Dog Training of Washington to explore survey methods for indigos, which are also listed state-listed in Georgia as threatened. C.J. didn't disappoint, finding live snakes and shed skins. His "alert" for each discovery begins with what Stevenson calls a "slappy" tail and ends in a sit.

"He has ... come onto the trail of a snake and gone as far as 200 meters to find (the snake)," Stevenson said.

This cold day spent

searching likely indigo sites on private property yielded some excited looks but no alerts. Yet, Georgia Wildlife Resources Division staff including Nongame Conservation Section program manager Matt Elliott had a chance to watch C.J. work, making a cursory check of areas where indigos have not been documented.

Conservation of indigos and key habitats such as the longleaf pine sandhills in Georgia's Coastal Plain are priorities in the State Wildlife Action Plan, a comprehensive strategy guiding Wildlife Resources efforts to conserve biological diversity. A recently announced DNR project funded in part by a Wal-Mart Foundation grant will help train Georgia teachers about sandhills habitats and wildlife. The grant was to The Environmental Resources Network, a nonprofit that supports DNR's nongame work.

The Nongame Conservation Section receives no state funds to help conserve wildlife not legally hunted, fished for or trapped, as well as rare plants and natural habitats. The work depends instead on grants, private support and fundraisers

such as sales of the bald eagle and ruby-throated hummingbird license plates and donations to the Give Wildlife a Chance state income tax checkoff.

C.J.'s outlook is less complex: Find a snake; get to retrieve a ball.

At day's end, Kara, who with her husband Mike was working for Project Orianna, even coaxed the dog to sit for a photograph.

Asked about the biggest challenge in working with C.J., she responded with a laugh, "Getting him to cooperate."

EASTERN INDIGOS ...
• Are sometimes confused with black racers, the indigo's slimmer, smaller, faster and much more abundant cousin.

• Are closely tied in Georgia to the Coastal Plain's longleaf pine sandhills, where

the snakes depend on gopher tortoise burrows for shelter in winter.

• Often return to the same gopher tortoise colonies and sometimes even the same burrows each winter, often traveling near-identical routes. (A University of Georgia student doing research for the DNR found that one male indigo followed the same course even though part of the area had since been cleared.)

• Are diurnal, or active mostly by day.
• Range far and wide. A recent study in Georgia determined that some males' home ranges exceed 3,000 acres.

• Are non-venomous and often eat venomous snakes such as rattlers and cottonmouths.
• Are protected by federal and state law: Harming an indigo is a federal offense.

