

# Seventeenth Battle of the States begins Monday

By Jerry Kendall  
Towns County Herald  
tcherald@windstream.net

The 17th annual Battle of the States Prep Basketball Tournament is scheduled for Monday through Wednesday of next week in the Towns County High School Gym. Eight games will be played each day, beginning at 10 a.m. and continuing until around 10 p.m. The Tournament has become a most respected sporting event, drawing interest from fans and teams over much of the Southeast, as evidenced by the fact that teams from six different states have made appearances during the first sixteen years the event has been held.

The Hebron Christian (Georgia) Girls and Boys Teams and the Southside-Gadsden (Alabama) Boys will be replaced in this year's tournament by the Gordon Lee (Georgia) Girls and Boys and the Piedmont (Alabama) Boys. All three of these teams appeared in the tournament as recently as two years ago. Returning from last year will be the Fannin County (Georgia), Union County (Georgia), Hayesville (North Carolina), Murphy North (Carolina), and Polk County (Tennessee) Boys and Girls Teams and the Hokes Bluff (Alabama) Girls along with our host Towns County Teams. Polk County and Towns County are the only two schools to have appeared in all sixteen previous tournaments.

This is our annual edited and updated review of winners, details from some of the earlier tournaments, and a look at some of the teams and individuals who have played in previous tournaments. For many if not most readers, most of the quite lengthy article will be old news but it is provided for newcomers to the area and visitors to the tournament who have not previously had access to the information.

**THE TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONS** - Previous Battle of the States Girls Tournament Champions have been Smoky Mountain (North Carolina) in 1994, Polk County in 1995, Elbert County (Georgia) in 1996, McEachern (Georgia) in 1997, Holy Innocents' (Georgia) in 1998, Polk County again in 1999 and 2000, White County (Tennessee) in 2001, Robbinsville (North Carolina) in 2002, Fannin County in 2003, White County (Tennessee) again in 2004, South Cobb (Georgia) in 2005, White County (Georgia) in 2006, Fannin County again in 2007, Polk County for the fourth and fifth times in 2008 and 2009.

Boys Champions have been Walhalla (South Carolina) in 1994 and 1995, Tavares (Florida) in 1996 and 1997, Loganville (Georgia) in 1998, Andrews (North Carolina) in 1999, Union County in 2000, North Forsyth (Georgia) in 2001, Cherokee County (Alabama) in 2002, North Forsyth again in 2003, White County (Tennessee) in 2004, Chapin (South Carolina) in 2005, Union County again in 2006, Fannin County in 2007, Pendleton in 2008, and Southside-Gadsden in 2009.

**TOUGH COMPETITION BUILDING STRONG TEAMS** - It's a very tough assignment to win a tournament such as the Battle of the States but beyond winning such a tournament, the tough competition enables teams to get a learning experience for the remainder of the season. In looking at details from earlier tournaments, it may seem strange to look at some of the seventh place games of the past, but a close look at the teams who appeared in some of these contests gives perhaps the most interesting insight into how tough the Battle of the States Tournament can be.

In 1994, the Cherokee County (Alabama) Girls appeared in the first Tournament with a 7-1 record and ranked

Second in Class 4A, with 6A being the highest classification, in their state after having won State Championships in two of the three previous years. They proceeded to lose three straight games to eventual Tournament Champion Smoky Mountain (North Carolina), Polk County, and Walhalla, with the latter two games going into overtime, for an eighth place finish. Of course, the Cherokee County Girls appeared in many subsequent Battles of the States and acquitted themselves well, including finishing second in the 2001 tournament.

In 1995, the Lake Weir (Florida) Girls appeared in the Tournament with a fifth place ranking in Class 6A, with 6A being the highest classification, in their State. Although playing without an All American Player who was injured, they were defeated by Hayesville and Smoky Mountain before pulling away in the final quarter of their game with Walhalla for a seventh place finish. Although the significance was not known at the time, perhaps the Seventh Place game eventually creating more discussion than any among close observers of the Tournament was the Boys contest in 1996. Polk County defeated Hayesville 50-48 in one of the most intense and interesting games of any year the Tournament has been held. No one could have anticipated it at the time, but the eighth place Hayesville Boys from the Battle of the States would become almost invincible in future weeks and play in the Dean Dome in Chapel Hill and earn a State Runner-up Trophy in Class A in North Carolina for the year.

More recently, the Pisgah (Alabama) Boys, a very impressive seventh place participant in the 2003 Battle of the States, made it all the way to the Class AA State Final Four in Alabama that season where they lost by just three points to the eventual State Champion. Further, the Towns County Girls finished eighth in that 2003 Battle of the States but rallied as the season progressed to a 16-12 record and an appearance in the State Tournament, including in the Georgia Class A Sweet Sixteen.

The Towns County Girls finished eighth again in 2004 but again qualified for the State Tournament for the sixth time in seven years under the direction of Head Coach Jim Melton. Melton, by the way, has been a moving force of the Battle of the States for many years as the Chairman of the Tournament Committee who contacts the teams, assures that the vital volunteers are available for service each year, makes lodging arrangements, and much more.

And seventh place games in the 2005 and 2008 tournaments also proved to gain significance as participants from those contests entered post season play. The seventh place Hayesville Boys from the 2005 Tournament made it to the second round of the North Carolina Class A State Tournament and the seventh place Pendleton Girls from 2008 surprised observers of that tournament. The Lady Bulldogs battled their way through a thirty two team field to the state Class AA finals in South Carolina before losing by just a 58-54 score to Marion.

**EXCELLENCE IN THE BATTLE OF THE STATES AND CONTINUING** - Success in post season has, of course, not been limited to the teams competing for seventh place in the Battle of the States although perhaps more striking. The 1997 Battle of the States featured three teams who would make huge marks in their states during post season play.

The Cherokee County Girls entered that Battle of the States with a 12-0 record and finished fifth by taking nine and five point wins over Frank-

lin (North Carolina) and Polk County following an opening night eight point loss to fourth place Towns County. The Lady Warriors went on to win the Alabama Class AAAA State Championship for the third time in the 1990's. The Cherokee Ladies were under the direction of Head Coach Jason Shields who currently serves as head coach of the Hokes Bluff Girls who will be making their third straight appearance in the tournament this year. The Paideia Boys of Atlanta finished third in that 1997 Battle of the States and went on to become State Runners-up in Class A in Georgia while the Paideia Girls, who finished second in the Battle of the States the same year, made it to the State Final Four in Class A.

The 1998 Battle of the States Girls Champion, Holy Innocents' of Atlanta, won the Class A State Championship in Georgia later that school year and at least two teams from the 1999 Battle of the States went on to prominence in post season play. The Towns County Lady Indians, who finished second to Polk County in the 1999 Tournament, compiled a 24-6 record in winning their sixth consecutive Sub-Region 8A North Championship and making it to the 2000 State Final Four in Class A in Georgia. Meanwhile, the 1999 Battle of the States Boys Champion Andrews Wildcats finished their season with a 24-2 record in winning their Smoky Mountain-West Conference Championship and finishing in the Final Eight in Class A in North Carolina.

Both Union County Teams from the 2000 Tournament went on to excellence in both regular and post season play as both won their Sub-Region 8AA North Championship and had very successful postseason runs as well. The Lady Panthers, who finished fifth in the Battle of the States, made it all the way to the State Finals before losing to fellow Region 8AA foe Greater Atlanta Christian while the Battle of the States Champion Panthers made it to the Elite Eight in Georgia.

The Towns County Lady Indians, who finished sixth in the Battle of the States that year, were no slouches either in regular season and postseason play. They finished just one game behind Union County in their Sub-Region after having handed the Lady Panthers a defeat in the Union Gym. The Lady Indians qualified for the State Tournament for the third straight year and outplayed Greater Atlanta Christian for more than three quarters, leading 33-28 through three quarters, before falling in the Region Tournament to the soon to be State Champions. The GAC Lady Spartans of that year featured front line players measuring 6'4", 6'2" and 6' along with Superstar Sherrill Baker, a four year star guard for the nationally prominent University of Georgia Lady Bulldogs.

The 2003 Battle of the States featured another team in addition to the aforementioned Pisgah Boys and Towns County Girls which made a strong showing in post season play. The unranked Battle of the States Champion Fannin County Girls, who had won two State Championships in the 1990's under legendary Head Coach Johnny Farmer got stronger as the season progressed. The Lady Rebels completed a 25-8 season by finishing second in the Georgia Class AAA State Tournament, falling to fellow Region 7AAA foe Gainesville, which featured 6'3" Superstar Tasha Humphrey, later a four year sensation with the University of Georgia Lady Bulldogs.

Although the neighboring North Carolina Class A State Champion Hayesville Boys of 2004 didn't participate in the 2003 Battle of the States, they did encounter strong battles with two tournament participants. The Sixth

Place Battle of the States Robbinsville Boys handed the Yellow Jackets one of just two losses, their only home court loss for the season. Further, the Third Place Battle of the States Towns County Boys were within one point with four minutes to go at Towns County and the Indians led Hayesville by a point with two minutes to go at Hayesville before the Yellow Jackets pulled away for seven point victories in each game.

And the Towns County Lady Indians, who finished third in the 2007 Battle of the States, went on to a record setting season, finishing with a 28-4 record and making it to the Georgia Class A State Final Four for the second time in nine years. They trailed by just five points near the three minute mark before falling in the state semi-finals by a thirteen point margin to eventual state champion Calvary Day of Savannah. The Lady Indians then followed up runner-up finishes to Polk County in the 2008 and 2009 tournaments with a Region 8A Championship and as region runners-up. Their records for those two years were 25-6 and 23-7 respectively and it required a team of metro all stars from the Wesleyan School in Norcross to eliminate them in the Elite Eight and Sweet Sixteen rounds respectively. The Wesleyan Girls went on to easily win their sixth and seventh state championships, split between Class AA and Class A, in the last nine years.

The most competitive grouping of teams to date in the Tournament would have to be the Boys field in 1995 when five of a total of twelve contests were decided in overtime and four other games were decided by seven or fewer points. A comparison of results of some of the contests reveals the competitiveness of the 1995 Tournament from top to bottom. Tournament Champion Walhalla was taken to three overtimes in the semi-finals by Fourth Place finisher Towns County who was taken to overtime by Seventh Place Gilmer (Georgia) who was taken to overtime by Eighth Place Polk County during the course of the tournament. Further, the competitiveness of the four games among the top four finishers in 1995 is just as striking when including Second Place Franklin and Third Place Hayesville in the comparison. Franklin won in overtime in the semi-final game over Hayesville while the Championship game between Walhalla and Franklin and the Third Place Game between Hayesville and Towns County were decided by four and two points respectively.

**PLAYERS FROM PRIOR TOURNAMENTS ACHIEVING CONTINUING SUCCESS** - There have been many individual performers from the Battle of the States who have pursued their basketball careers and some in other sports as well with great success in college, including in Division I, through the years. It would be impossible to list or even know of all the performers who have continued their careers in college but several will be identified here.

Some of the more notable among the Division I signees are Lee Scruggs, a 6'10" three year starter in the Tournament for Franklin, who went on to stardom for three years at Georgetown University in Washington, DC; Angelina Miller, also a three year starter in the Tournament for McEachern (Georgia), who was a top player for four years at Georgia State University in Atlanta; and Megan Isom of Paideia, a two year starter at Georgia Tech. Wynter Whitley of Holy Innocents' finished her career several years ago at Duke University as did Andrea Neely of Union County at Georgia State University.

Of more recent vintage, two all tournament players from previous Battles of the States both battled injury but had significant success at Division I Ken-

nesaw State University. Nikki Gurley of Union County earned all tournament honors in the Battle of the States three times during her career while Stephanie Searce of Fannin County made the all tournament squad in her only appearance in 2003. Kennesaw State, by the way, is coached by Colby Tilley who directed Truett McConnell College to a Junior College National Championship in 1980 with Towns County's own Martha Moss being a superstar on that team.

Two other Division I players to mention are all tournament player Matt Womack of North Forsyth from 2003 and Union County's Candace Williams, a three time all tournament selection through the 2008 tournament, who each participated for a year as walk on players at the University of Georgia. Kori Penland of Gordon Lee, a 2007 Battle of the States all tournament player, completed two seasons of basketball at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga before leaving after limited action, in part due to injury, to spend more time working with faith-based groups.

Locally, 1997 Towns County Graduate Keisha Taylor was a top player for NCAA Division II Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia, with the Lady Cougars being the top ranked team in the nation for much of the 2001 season. The Lady Cougars made it to the National Final Four for the second year in a row that year before being upset in a close decision for their only loss of the season by Cal Poly-Pomona, the eventual National Champion, in the Semi Finals.

Three vital members of the Towns County Lady Indians Class A State Final Four Team in 2000 completed successful four year college careers. Brandy McNabb (TCHS Class of 2000) completed her career in 2004 at LaGrange College as did Olivia Swanson (2001) in 2005 while Candice Blythe (2000) completed her career in 2004 at Piedmont College under the late Head Coach Charles Cooper, the 2001 Battle of the States Breakfast Banquet Speaker. McNabb and Blythe were two year starters at Truett McConnell Junior College before moving on to their respective four year schools. Blythe returned to Piedmont for the 2005 season as an assistant coach and recently served for two years as the top assistant for the Towns County Lady Indians.

Further, Heath Hooper of Towns

County made the 2004 Battle of the States All Tournament Team and continued his basketball career at Reinhardt College in Waleska. He battled injury throughout his four years at Reinhardt but saw some quality playing time, including several starting assignments as a freshman, when able to play. He has followed up service as an assistant coach at Reinhardt to become an assistant coach for the newly revived Young Harris College men's basketball team.

Amanda Irwin of Towns County, a member of the Battle of the States All Tournament team in 2008 and then a first team All Region and honorable mention Class A All State selection, is a junior basketball player for the Division II Georgia College and State University Lady Bobcats in Milledgeville. And her former Towns County teammates Nikki Winn, Melissa Conrad, and Ellie Parton are all members of the brand new Young Harris College women's basketball program.

Appearing in a recent game between Young Harris and Tennessee Wesleyan at YHC were three veterans of the Battle of the States. Former all tournament selections Winn and Conrad were starters for YHC in the game as was former Polk County Wildkitten Candace Cain, a former Most Valuable Player in the tournament. Cain led her team in scoring with 21 points in a 76-68 victory while Winn easily leads Young Harris in minutes played, scoring, and 3-point field goal and free throw percentage while being tied for the team lead in steals at the Christmas break. Parton, on the other hand, was all region for Young Harris in Cross

Country last year as a freshman during the final year of participation for the school at the junior college level. **AND FINALLY** - Fans interested in top flight basketball action involving current and future individual superstar athletes and championship games, seventh place games, or anywhere in between, should give serious consideration to attending the 2010 Battle of the States Tournament. Complete girls and boys brackets are included in this week's paper but in their opening games the Towns County Lady Indians will face Hayesville at 7:00 on Monday with the Indians to follow against Hayesville at 8:30 p.m. Starting times and opponents for future games in the Tournament for all teams will be based upon the results of the contests as they are played.

## Birth Announcement



Isaiah, Elisha Cole, and Chloe Matheson

Chloe and Isaiah Matheson would like to announce the birth of their baby brother, Elisha Cole. Elisha Cole was born on October 29. He weighed 7 lbs. 4 oz. and was 19 1/4 inches long. Elisha Cole is the son of Chris

and Nicole Matheson. His grandparents are Roy & Vinita Matheson, Randal & Joan Moss. His great-grandparents are Hollis Moss and Ola Ledford. His great-great-grandmother is Bonnie Carroll.

NT(Dec22,A2)SH

## Lady Indian JV's lose a close one at Union, perform massacre at Andrews

By Jerry Kendall  
Towns County Herald  
tcherald@windstream.net

The Towns County Lady Indian JV's were on the road twice last week, at Class AA Union County on Friday and at Andrews on Saturday after having a scheduled Monday home game with Class AAAA Lambert High School of Gwinnett County postponed due to bad weather. They found themselves battling from behind nearly the entire game at Union County and came within a late 3-point attempt of a tie in a 39-36 loss to the Lady Panthers while romping past Andrews by a 54-24 score.

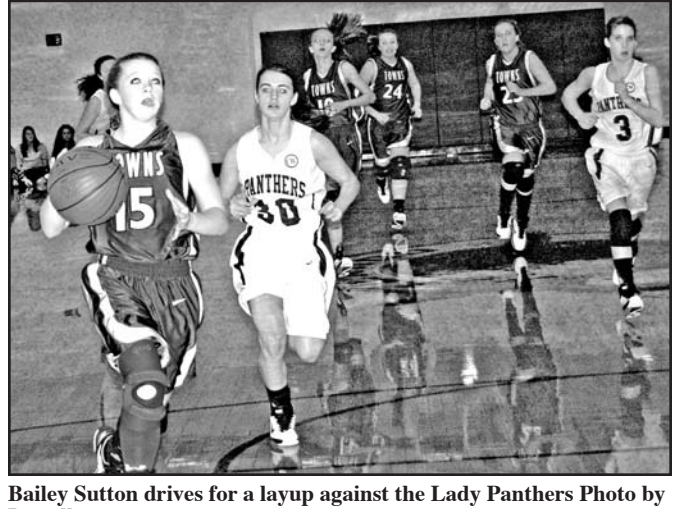
**UNION COUNTY** - The Lady Indians managed a 3-3 tie on a trey by Stephanie Patton near the mid point of the first quarter at Union but the Lady Panthers led by as much as 8-3 before settling for a 10-8 lead at quarter's end. The Lady Panthers then had as much as a 12-6 advantage in the second quarter but held just a 16-12 lead at intermission.

The Lady Panthers used a pair of treys to advantage in building a 26-17 lead midway through the third quarter but the Lady Indians finished on a 9-3 run with four different Lady Indians contributing points for just a 29-26 deficit entering the fourth quarter. There were four lead changes and two ties in the fourth quarter with six different Lady Indians contributing points and neither team leading by more than three points.

Highlights of the fourth quarter for the Lady Indians included field goals by Bailey Sutton and Emily Anderson giving them one point leads, a free throw by Kellsie Cowart giving them a one point lead, and an Eryn Cochran free throw giving them a 36-36 tie with 1:10 on the clock. The Panthers responded to the Cochran shot with a trey at the fifty three second mark, however, and the Indians couldn't dent the scoreboard after that on several opportunities, the last on a potential game tying 3-point attempt as time expired with Union taking a 39-36 victory.



Stephanie Patton takes aim against Union County Photo by Lowell Nicholson.



Bailey Sutton drives for a layup against the Lady Panthers Photo by Lowell.

All eight Lady Indians seeing action in the game entered the scoring column with leaders being Cowart and Patton with 8 points each and Emily Anderson, Destiney Blythe, and McKenzi Moss with 4 each. Patton led in assists with 3 according to your reporter's tally.

**ANDREWS** - The Lady Indians jumped out to a 5-0 lead at Andrews and pretty much maintained it for an 11-7 lead after one quarter. The Lady Indians steam rolled the Lady Wildcats in the second quarter, however, for a 31-10 lead at intermission, led by a fifteen point explosion by Stephanie Patton and five assists by Eryn

Cochran in her only quarter of play. It was more of the same in the third quarter as Patton and McKenzi Moss added six points each on a trey and three point play by Patton and two treys by Moss as the Lady Indians led 48-17 on the way to a 54-27 victory.

Patton didn't start the game and didn't see action in the fourth quarter but wound up with 23 points for the game while Moss scored in every quarter for a total of 14 points with other scoring leaders being Elizabeth Turner with 7 and Kellsie Cowart with 5. Leaders in assists were Cochran with 5, Patton with 4, and Moss and Bailey Sutton with 3 each.

## Local artist showing at Burton Gallery



Julie Sibley

In the Spirit of Celebration, local artist Julie Sibley, of Young Harris, is pleased to announce her art is now included in the regular holiday showing at Burton Gallery.

Southern Living Magazine calls this gallery, located near Lake Burton, "one of the best in the state." Some of her creations are: hand colored silk-screen landscapes, batiks, and art quilts which portray fruits of the land, are now featured in the gallery on an ongoing basis. See more of her art online at: [www.artfromthewilds.blogspot.com](http://www.artfromthewilds.blogspot.com).

Continuing with the theme of the Earth's gifts to us the artist has donated 2 colored drawings to decorate a local office. Inspired by those who give unselfishly to others, the artist is giving the 9th District office where the Food Pantry for Towns County is located,

some fruit pictures to enjoy. She was called to action by stories of the depression when Americans lived with the understanding that it was, "one for all and all for one." A way of life born of hard times when it happened that oftentimes all someone had to give another person was love. And so that is what they gave. If all of us give from the light within us, in love to each other, we create even brighter lights. The artist personally thanks everyone who gives countless kindnesses, smiles, joy and peace. "This is my home and all of you make my life's work possible." NT(Dec22,A4)SH

## Towns County FBLA Christmas Outreach Group



Several of the many FBLA members who helped provide clothing, coats, shoes and toys for Christmas needy children in Towns County. T(Dec22,G1)SH

## Garrett and Painter featured in Copperhill Christmas Parade



People were lined along the streets to see the cars as car owner, No. 33, Kenny Garrett and driver, Bobby Painter were invited to attend the 2010 Christmas Parade. Pictured are Kenny Garrett, Nicole Garrett, Drew Kendall and Bobby Painter with the 2010 Sportsman Class Championship car, holding banner that led the way for the 2010 Championship winners, in the Copperhill, TN Christmas Parade on Saturday. T(Dec22,G1)SH