

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Indians... continued from Front Page

Manchester, the Indians will host a second-round game on Friday or Saturday of this week against the winner of a game between Bowdon, the second seed from Region 6, and Warren County, the third seed from Region 7, with details to be determined following the first-round games. The third round of the tournament will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday of next week, and the fourth on Friday and Saturday of next week.

Unfortunately, amid the celebration of the region championship was a heartbreaking occurrence in the second quarter for dynamic senior point guard Kabe Ellis and his teammates and Indians followers. A collision following a layup basket by Ellis resulted in his suffering a separated shoulder injury and having to leave the game.

His medical status for future participation in basketball this season is unknown at press time with an appointment with an orthopedist scheduled for Monday. Best wishes for a quick and full recovery are sent to Kabe from the Towns County Herald and this reporter along with of course the same wishes from all players, coaches, and followers of Indians basketball.

Fortunately for the Indians, Ellis' teammates rose to the occasion for the remainder of the game, just as the 1975 Indians team had done during their region championship victory in spite of the loss of top player Eddie Rushton for the entire tournament due to having the mumps. This time, the Indians got the victory with a strong assist from Ellis himself who had played a strong role in the Indians leading 19-11 at the time of the injury at the 2:55 mark of the second quarter.

While it is great to celebrate the successes of the 1975 and 2021 Indians teams, the failure to win additional region championships does not diminish great team and individual successes by Indians teams between the two championships and prior. Many successes have been achieved in nearly 100 years since the first known basketball team was established in 1922 at the Hiwassee Academy which evolved into TCHS.

There is the reality, however, of Towns County High School being one of the smallest public schools in the state but with great successes achieved against much larger schools through the years, including times when falling just short of region championships.

Indians 74, Commerce 45 - Future looks at scores of games played by the 2021 Indians will probably receive puzzled looks when viewing the scores of the three games played between the Indians and the Commerce Tigers. The Indians took two decisive victories by scores of 79-65 and 74-45 over Commerce on the Tigers' home court while escaping with an 80-78 victory on the Indians' home court in a game played in between the two games at Commerce.

These scores are simply examples of the reality of sports of all types at any level with teams rising up in an unexpected manner to be a challenge to an opponent as did Commerce in the middle game between the two schools. The Indians actually appeared to be taking control of their home game but to their credit, the Tigers exerted a strong challenge toward the end of the game but just short of victory, with this challenge possibly being a deciding factor in the Indians rising to the occasion of an easy victory in the tournament game last week.

At any rate, the first 10



Region Player of the Year Kolby Moss. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

minutes of last week's game was quite a battle with the Indians taking 2-0, 4-2, and 6-4 leads in just over two minutes on baskets by junior Jake McTaggart and then a lead of 8-6 they would not relinquish on two free throws by senior Kabe Ellis at the 4:09 mark of the first quarter.

The Tigers would still hang tough through the first quarter, including trailing by just a 14-12 score at quarter's end. The Indians achieved their slender lead through the first quarter on the aforementioned six points by McTaggart, four by Ellis, and two each by senior Aidan Berrong and junior Kyle Oakes.

The second quarter would be a whole new game for the Indians and Tigers, however, as six different Indians entered the scoring column with leaders being senior Kolby Moss with eight points and junior Collin Crowder with six as the Indians used 21-5 dominance in building a 35-17 halftime advantage.

And they weren't through as eight more points by Moss, five by Ellis, and treys by seniors Colton Day and Hayden McClure led them to a 54-28 lead entering the fourth quarter on the way to the 74-45 victory. Fourth quarter scoring highlights included six points by Crowder, five by Berrong, and a trey by senior Liam King.

Ten Indians entered the scoring column during the game with leaders being Moss with 18 points, Crowder with 12, Ellis with 11, Berrong with 9, McTaggart with 6, Day with 5, and McClure and Oakes with 4 each.

Nine Indians provided at least one assist with leaders being Berrong, Crowder, and McTaggart with 4 each; Ellis with 3; and Day and Moss with 2 each.

Ten Indians entered the rebounding column with leaders in this category being McTaggart with 11; Crowder, Day, and Ellis with 5 each; Moss with 4, and senior Jordan Lovelace and Oakes with 3 each. Leaders in steals were Ellis with 3 and Day with 2 while McTaggart led in blocked shots with 3.

Scoring leaders for Commerce were sophomore Jackson Morris with 12 points and junior Shaquario Sherrod with 8. Commerce has had a tough year record wise, completing the region

tournament with an 8-18 record following a 71-55 loss to Social Circle in the consolation game but with six of their losses being by four points or less. This was the 17th victory in a row for the Indians over the Tigers, beginning with a 54-51 win in Commerce on February 3, 2014.

Indians 66, Lincoln County 52 - The first quarter of the championship game between the Indians and Lincoln County was very similar to their game just nine days earlier in Lincolnton. The Indians were leading by just a 7-4 score in that game and 8-7 in this one although with cold shooting being prevalent in the first game and defensive excellence more dominant in this one in your reporter's view.

The Red Devils opened the scoring with a trey for what turned out to be their only lead of 3-0 just 13 seconds into the game. A trey by senior Kolby Moss got the Indians even at the 5:24 mark and a free throw by junior Jake McTaggart got them a 4-3 lead at 4:32 with a basket by senior Kabe Ellis at 2:33 extending the lead to 6-3. The Devils matched the Ellis basket for a 6-5 score and then matched a deuce by Moss for the aforementioned 8-7 Towns lead at quarter's end.

Lincoln tied the score 9-9 on a basket at the 7:27 mark of the second quarter only to see the Indians take over the game during the remainder of the quarter. A basket by junior Collin Crowder at the 7:27 mark got the Indians a lead of 11-9 and was the start of a 19-2 finish for a 28-11 Towns advantage at halftime. Five Indians entered the scoring column during the quarter with McTaggart leading the way with 11 points.

A long trey by McTaggart just 18 seconds into the third quarter got the Indians on an 8-2 start for a 36-13 lead with junior Kyle Oakes and Moss contributing deuces before the Red Devils embarked on an 11-2 scoring run interrupted only by a basket by Moss for just a 38-24 deficit at the 2:08 mark. The Indians struck back, however, with a coast to coast run for a deuce by Moss initiating a 7-0 scoring run by the Indians including a trey by Crowder for a 45-24 lead at 22.9 seconds, which became 45-26 entering the fourth quarter.



The Indians celebrate the 2021 region title. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Lincoln opened the fourth quarter with an old fashioned three-point play for a 45-29 deficit, but two baskets for four points each by Crowder and senior Hayden McClure highlighted an 11-8 Indian advantage between the 6:49 and 2:51 marks for a 56-37 Towns lead. After that, the Red Devils would send the Indians to the foul line where they sank 10 of 12 attempts, including six for six by Moss, between the 2:23 and 48.6 seconds marks for a 66-45 lead which became a 66-52 victory when Lincoln closed out the game with a 7-0 finish.

McTaggart led the Indians in scoring with 19 points and

was followed by Moss with 17, Crowder with 13, McClure with 6, Ellis - before his second quarter injury - and junior Kyle Oakes with 4 each, and senior Aidan Berrong with 3 while leaders in assists were Berrong with 8 and Crowder, Moss, and Oakes with 5 each.

Leading in rebounds were McTaggart with 11, Crowder with 6, and Moss with 4, while leaders in steals were Crowder with 3 and Berrong and Oakes with 2 each. McTaggart not only led in scoring and rebounds but in blocked shots with 6 in a marvelous performance.

Scoring leaders for the Red Devils were freshman

Semaj Jenkins with 15 points, senior Caleb Willis with 14, and sophomore Frank Sherman with 12. Lincoln County finished the tournament with a 10-10 record, including 7-5 and in third place in regular season region play. They got to the tournament championship game by knocking off Social Circle, the second place team with a 10-2 record in regular season, by a 48-43 score in the tournament semifinals.

The Red Devils had won five of six games entering the championship game with the loss being by a 58-52 score to the Indians in Lincolnton.

They showed vast improvement following a 1-4 start against mostly larger classification teams with the final loss in the start being by just a 52-50 score to Banks County, the ninth ranked Class 2A team in the state with a current 18-8 record and regular season champions of Region 8-AA.

An article providing some comparisons and connections between this year's Indians team and the Indians 1975 region championship team is incomplete at press time but is planned for next week's Herald as quite a number of Indian followers have had questions about and expressed interest in the 1975 team.

NASCAR 2021

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Christopher Bell gets first Cup win

Christopher Bell passed Joey Logano with less than two laps remaining in Sunday's Daytona Road Course race, and went on to victory lane by 2.19-seconds for his first NASCAR Cup Series victory.

"This is the high of my life so far," he said. "So incredibly thankful to be here for Joe Gibbs Racing. I've prepared all of my life for this moment to race in the Cup Series. Last year was a huge learning curve for me, and I'm very grateful that I got the opportunity to run in Cup. It definitely prepared me to move to Joe Gibbs Racing."

"Honestly, I didn't think I was going to get there, but Adam (Stevens, crew chief) up on the pit box kept telling me I was going to get there. I didn't believe it, but he (Logano) really struggled coming out of (Turn) 6 one time and allowed me to close the gap."

Bell said capturing his first Cup win a day after Ty Gibbs won in his Xfinity Series debut was "Unbelievable."

Logano had led 10 of the final 13 laps but on the next-to-last lap, Bell closed the gap. As the two leaders entered the frontstretch chicane of the road course, Bell powered to his inside and came away the leader to start the final lap.

"He had newer tires," said Logano. "One more caution lap would have been enough to allowed us to stay out front. I tried to get all I could out of that last restart, because I knew I was going to need it, because he was going to catch us pretty quick."

"We've made a lot of gains on our road courses. You can tell we're not quite good enough yet, but we maximized the day. I hate being that close, but congratulations to Christopher."

Bell, 26, is the second consecutive first-time winner in the Cup Series to start the 2021 season. Michael McDowell won last weekend's Daytona 500.

Denny Hamlin finished third, Kurt Busch was fourth and Brad Keselowski rounded out the top-five.

Completing the top-10 were Kevin Harvick, A.J. Allmendinger, Michael McDowell, Ryan Preece and Alex Bowman.

Chase Elliott won Stage 1, and led the most laps in the race (44). He probably had the fastest car, but a series of bad-luck incidents may have cost him the race.

Twice he had lengthy pit stops. Each time he went in first, but came out back in the field and had to work his way back towards the front. He was involved in contact twice, from other cars, and on lap 61, was bumped by Denny Hamlin and spun out. He finished 21st.

Top-10 leaders after 2 Of 36: 1. Hamlin-104, 2. Logano-92, 3. Harvick-83, 4. Bell-82, 5. Elliott-79, 6. McDowell-75, 7. Preece-74, 8. Kurt Busch-65, 9. A. Dillon-64, 10. Keselowski-54.

TY GIBBS WINS FIRST XFINITY START

Ty Gibbs turned in a stunning performance in his first Xfinity Series start. The 18-year-old held off reigning champion Austin Cindric on the Daytona Road Course. He took the lead on a restart in double overtime and held off Cindric by 1.726 seconds at the finish line.

"The family is everything to me, they do so much for me," Gibbs said. "I just can't thank them enough, this is just amazing; this is a dream come true. It's all the man above, I'm sorry I'm a wreck. I didn't think this was going to hap-



Bell gets first Cup win

pen at all. This is awesome, I can't thank everybody enough watching and last week I had a terrible interview. I want to apologize for everybody, I just can't thank everybody enough. This is just amazing."

Gibbs becomes only the sixth driver to win in his first series start - matching a feat achieved by NASCAR Hall of Famer Dale Earnhardt in 1982 and most recently, Kurt Busch, 15 years ago.

He is also the youngest driver to win a NASCAR Xfinity Series road course event. At 18 years, 4 months, 16 days, he breaks the record most recently held by Cindric (20 years old).

Cindric and AJ Allmendinger crashed racing to the finish of the first stage, and Cindric was left with a gaping hole in his front fender. He dropped to 34th in the field but still drove his way back to the lead.

He led a race-high 29 laps, and had a Daytona sweep in sight until a caution with three laps remaining gave Gibbs a chance. They both pitted for fresh tires, and Gibbs restarted 10th, Cindric in 11th.

Gibbs on the first overtime restart blew past a pack of cars and weaved his way in and out of traffic all the way to third. Another caution sent the race into double OT, and Gibbs this time drove inside for the lead.

The remaining top-10: 3. Daniel Hemric, 4. Brandon Jones, 5. Jeb Burton, 6. Harrison Burton, 7. Miguel Paludo, 8. Brandon Brown, 9. Justin Haley, 10. Jeremy Clements.

RHODES GETS SECOND CONSECUTIVE TRUCK WIN

Ben Rhodes has had two perfect race outings at Daytona. He won the Truck Series opener on the oval last week then came back to win Friday night on the infield road course.

Rhodes, 23, of Louisville, Ky., crossed the finish line .320-seconds ahead of Sheldon Creed, when a caution came out, freezing the field with a half-lap remaining in overtime.

"Unbelievable, I don't even have words for it," Rhodes said. "I don't even know what to say, this is so cool. I just have to thank my team. ThorSport Racing gave me a truck that handled this year and we were fast. Rich (Lushes) is a really good crew chief. It's good to be paired up with him and all of the guys on my team. I'm just thrilled. I don't know what to say. I've been on cloud nine all week, so it's above that. I'm just so happy."

John Nemechek was third, followed by Todd Gilliland, Riley Herbst, Matt Crafton, Derek Kraus, Kaz Grala, Timmy Hill, and Christian Eckes.

The race started under wet conditions with teams having to decide when the track was dry enough to switch from rain tires to slicks or "dry" tires. Nemechek was the early leader - pacing the field for the opening 14 laps until his No. 4 Toyota suffered an oil pressure and fuel pick-up problem, leaving the truck on the track and necessitating a caution. Later he ran out of gas and at one point was a lap down to the leaders before racing back to the front in the closing laps.

MICHAEL WALTRIP RETURNS TO RACING

Two-time Daytona 500 winner, Michael Waltrip announced plans to compete in the SRX Short-Track Series.

SRX features sprint races with drivers from a variety of motorsports backgrounds competing in identically prepared racers on a variety of tracks, including pavement and dirt. The SRX lineup already includes Tony Stewart, Tony Kanaan, Paul Tracy, Bobby Labonte, Willy T. Ribbs, Bill Elliott, Ernie Francis Jr., Marco Andretti and Helio Castroneves.

"This is an awesome opportunity and I'm genuinely excited to get back in a racecar," said Waltrip, who owns 17 victories across NASCAR's top-three national touring series. "I still love racing and I still want to compete. SRX is a great platform and all of us want to win. We might have gray hair and maybe even no hair, but when we put that helmet on and go race, the desire and talent is still there. You want to see a show? We're gonna put on a show."

Racing Joke: Denny was alone in an elevator when a girl stepped in with a phone pressed to her ear.

"I have to go," she told the person on the other end. "There's a cute guy standing here."

Before Denny could react, the girl turned to him and said, "Sorry for lying, I just wanted to end that conversation."

Racing Trivia Question: What year was NASCAR founded?

Last Week's Question: Derrike Cope, who started this year's Daytona 500 has one 500 victory. What year did he win? Answer: He won the 1990 Daytona 500 driving for Bob Whitcomb.

Chatuge Shores Ladies

Golf League opens 2021 season

The Chatuge Shores Ladies Golf League is looking forward to a new golf season in 2021.

Applications for membership are now being taken and all returning as well as new members are welcome. Play is every Tuesday at Chatuge Shores Golf Course with a 9 a.m. tee time.

A fun group of ladies, the league has 20 members from throughout the tri-county area. Membership dues are \$30 per

year and the weekly course fee is \$27 which includes a cart. Membership requires an official USGA handicap in the USGA system (called GHIN). Establishing a handicap is easy and the league can help with that if needed.

For more information the league web site is www.chatugeshoreslga.com or email chatugeshoresgolf@gmail.com. Come out and join the fun (socially distanced, of course!). NT/feb24-FJ/SH

Benton MacKaye Trail Association hikes for March

hikers for either or both of the hikes listed.

March 2 (Tuesday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a strenuous 8.2 mile on the backcountry Trail at Fort Mountain State Park. This trail travels around the edge of the park and passes below the summits of both Cohutta and Fort Mountains down to the lake. Hike leader Mike Pilvinsky. For more information contact hikeleaderMP@bmtmail.org.

March 3 (Wednesday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 5 mile Loop hike at Fort Mountain State Park including parts of the Gahuti Trail, Gold Mine Creek Trail, Lake Trail and Big Rock Nature Trail. Hiking poles are recommended. Hike leader Mike

Pilvinsky. For more information contact hikeleaderMP@bmtmail.org.

March 5 (Friday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a 4 mile easy hike on the Laurel Ridge Trail. Hike starts along the Chattahoochee River and ends with nice views of Lake Lanier and the Buford Dam. Hike leader Howard Baggett. For more information contact hikeleaderHB@bmtmail.org.

March 5 (Friday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderately strenuous 8.3 mile hike using Hemp Top and Jacks River Trails. We will start hiking from Watson Gap and enter the Cohutta Wilderness Hike leader Steve Dennison. For more information contact hikeleaderSD@bmtmail.org.