

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Indians' postseason runs ends at Manchester in Sweet 16

By Daysha Pandolph
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The Towns County Indians finished their basketball season strong, reaching the Sweet 16 of the Class A D-II State playoffs.

After a hard-earned victory over Twiggs County during the first round, they traveled south to be defeated by Manchester.

On Wednesday, Feb. 21, Towns County played hard to take home a 54-48 victory at Twiggs County. Although the Indians jumped out early with a 16-8 lead at the end of the first quarter, Twiggs County began chipping away at the gap throughout the second.

The opposing crowd got explosive behind several three-pointers by their team, encouraging them to turn the eight-point deficit into a three-point lead by halftime. Going into the second half, Twiggs County held the winning seat with a score of 31-28.

Their momentum continued into the third quarter until Towns County turned the tide with full-court pressure.

The Indians managed to cut the deficit to 43-36 during the period, then went on to outscore Twiggs County 18-5 in the fourth quarter to secure the win.

Zane Floyd led the Indians in scoring with 16 points and nine rebounds. Tanner Cunningham followed with 14 points and 17 rebounds.

Other contributors included Gage Rogers with nine points and rebounds, Connor Chastain with eight points and five rebounds and Dustin Barrett with five points, six rebounds and five steals.

The triumph earned the team a spot in the Sweet 16, facing Manchester on Saturday, Feb. 24.

Despite taking an early lead of 16-14, the Indians were unable to match Manchester's speed as the game progressed, resulting in a 71-58 loss.

By the end of the second quarter, Manchester held a four-point lead, which they would only increase as the match went on. After Towns County was called for a questionable foul on Manchester's last-second heave, Manchester trailed 46-43 by the end of the third quarter, then tied the score with only six minutes on the clock.

In the final three minutes of the game, Towns County was able to score three free throws. This increased their lead to 43-36.

In the beginning of the second half, Towns County battled back with great defense and timely scoring. They trailed Manchester 46-43 by the end of the third quarter, then tied the score with only six minutes on the clock.

In the final three minutes of the game, Towns County had managed to decrease the scoring gap to only three points. However, Manchester shot 17 free throws in the fourth quarter, surpassing Towns County's eight.

Manchester shot 25 of 34 from the line, against only 15 free throws by the Indians. This loss concluded Towns



The Class of 2024 basketball players will depart TCHS as one of the most successful groups in program history. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

County's 2023-24 season.

Chastian, Cunningham and Floyd led their team in scoring with 13 points. Chastian also contributed five rebounds and two assists, while Cunningham and Floyd each added 10 rebounds and five assists.

An additional nine points came from Kade McConnell. Barrett scored five throughout the game, and Rogers scored three.

"Overall, this was a great season with an unbelievable bunch of young men," commented coach Brian Hunnicut. "To win 19 games, only lose one game in the region and to advance to the Sweet 16 was such an accomplishment."

Furthermore, Hunnicut shared that the team had been battling injuries and sickness

in Towns County history. "This group did not have great size or great speed, but they had more heart and grit than any team in the state. It was such a pleasure to get to coach them their last 3 years of high school.

"Personally, they have given me so much. Their departure is hitting our coaching staff hard. They are six of the best young men that I have ever met."

While he and his team are heartbroken by their departure, they look forward to becoming lifelong friends with the seniors after graduation.

"They have represented our community well, and each one of those kids bleeds Towns County Blue. No matter how many years pass, they will always just be my boys, and that fills me with such happiness that it overwhelms me," said Hunnicut. "What a blessing God gave me to get to have these young men in my life."

He shared that by becoming leaders both in and out of school, these seniors have left big shoes for the rest of the team to fill.

"Next year's team will be tasked with continuing the success of this program for the last decade," he commented. "We have a group that is capable of doing that, but they will have to dedicate themselves to working and loving one another like these seniors did."

Hunnicut believes that the current group, along with the upcoming 8th graders, will be able to accomplish just as much as the senior class of 2024.

"We have a lot of talent and heart coming back from our varsity program and coming up from the middle school. I've seen the looks in their eyes; they are ready for the challenge," he said.

Moving forward, the Towns County Indians basketball team will also be saying goodbye to assistant coach, Michael Anderson. Anderson has been a part of the program for over a decade and made a hard decision to retire from the coaching scene to focus on his family life.

"His love for Towns County and our kids is unparalleled," commented Hunnicut. "He is very knowledgeable about basketball, but more importantly, he loves our kids and does everything he can to empower them and help them.

"Coach [Alan] Rogers and I can never repay Michael for what he has done for us as coaches. His sage advice has often been the calm in the storm.

"Our program will never forget the hours spent talking basketball, and sharing laughs and tears while driving all over this great state. Michael Anderson is one of a kind. He is a treasure to Towns County, and we greatly appreciate his service to our kids."

Lady Indians' season ends at top-seed Johnson County in first round of State

By Daysha Pandolph
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A close loss to the No. 1 seed, Johnson County, at the first round of the State Playoffs called the Towns County Lady Indians home early last week, marking the end of another great basketball season.

On Tuesday, Feb. 20, the girls traveled to Johnson County to face their opponent as the No. 4 seed in the playoffs. The game remained close all night and the scoring margin reached only 10 points at most, which Towns County held during the fourth quarter.

Johnson County slowly chipped away at the gap, however, banking in a few three-point shots and taking advantage of some opportunities at the foul line during the final minutes of the game.

That, paired with eight questionable fouls called against the Lady Indians, led to a 52-50 Johnson County victory.

"We had our chances to win but foul trouble, committing an abundance of turnovers and leaving too many points on the floor (was) our demise," commented coach Shea Taylor, who was a little surprised by the results.

"I really felt like we were the better team going into this game (and) this was not the way we wanted it to end," he shared.

Nonetheless, competing at that level for a loss of only 2 points is still an accomplishment for the Lady Indians. They were led by Breelan Sieveking, who scored 18 points and six rebounds in her final high school basketball game.

The team's other two seniors, Laura Mauldin and Emma Lallement, also put forth their best effort last Tuesday with Mauldin pouring in 11 points and 15 rebounds and



Senior Breelan Sieveking scored 18 points in her final outing at Towns County High School. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Lallement adding 10 points and five rebounds.

Other players contributing to the score included Kaleigh Beaver with nine points and five rebounds and Jamie McCarter with two points and four rebounds.

"Knowing that we have three seniors that played their final game with this team is hard to accept," said coach Taylor. "(They) have been a huge part of this team and they are irreplaceable. Every year it gets harder to say goodbye to them."

Although they will never play basketball for TCHS again, Taylor cherishes the memories they have made together and reminds them that "they will always be part of this team's family and will always be Lady Indians."

Along with the juniors, the seniors have served as invaluable leaders to their teammates – something Taylor expects from the upcoming

seniors, Kaleigh Beaver and Ansleigh Hardin, as well.

Next year's juniors, Scotlyn Fain and Jamie McCarter, will join the two seniors to take full command of the group as the team captains in 2025. It will be their responsibility to lead the girls in surpassing the accomplishments from this year.

From placing third in the Battle of the States to winning many important region matches, the Lady Indians have had a great year despite battling adversity.

"I have never experienced anything like the amount of injuries we have had to deal with this season," said Taylor, who shared that the team lost their main rotation to illness early in December.

"Considering (that), I am proud of this team for finding a way to win 17 games. I know we would have accomplished much more if we could have stayed healthy all season."

Soccer season underway at Towns County

By Daysha Pandolph
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The Lady Indians hosted a JV game against Gilmer last Tuesday, Feb. 20, to kick off the soccer season. A few days later on Friday, Feb. 23, the varsity team made their first season appearance at Banks County, where they also picked up a win.

Tuesday night, Abby Gardella led the Lady Indians towards a 3-1 victory by scoring two goals, one of which Sailor Fain assisted. Fain also scored a goal herself, which was assisted by Halie Arrowood. From the goalpost, Drew Livingston kept the Lady Indians ahead with eight saves.

On Friday, the Lady Indians traveled to Homer to face Banks County. Once again, Gardella led in scoring with three goals. One was assisted by Emma Lallement and another by Chloe Sutton.

Playing off of a corner kick by Gardella, Lallement was also able to place the ball beyond the goalie Friday night. Brittany Carbera scored the final goal with assistance from Ansleigh Hardin.

Keepers Drew Livingston and Laura Mauldin worked hard to maintain the 5-0 win along with the team's defense.

Despite the strong start, the team remains young, which evokes questions about field placement.

"(This) is probably the most questions we've had going into a season since COVID," said coach Clay Livingston, who is working to rebuild his team after losing many great players over the past couple years."

This time around, the team consists of Emma Lallement, Ansleigh Hardin, Kandice Garrett, Chloe Sutton, Payten Wolf, Ava King, Abby Gardella, Sailor Fain, Brittany Perez, Reagan Rogers, Taylor Mulkey, Lilly Cannon, Dani Schmeltz, Kya Smith, Katelyn Walls, Halie Arrowood, Maddison Jordan, Jamie McCarter, Elizabeth Edwards,

Drew Livingston and Laura Mauldin.

"We're going to play some young girls this year out of necessity," he shared, "(but) we feel great about them. They just need to get on the field and get some game time."

With two more matches before the region schedule begins, Livingston is leaning on the senior players to eliminate a few of those questions and continue to uphold the standard of the soccer program.

Like always, the upperclassmen are expected to lead by example while setting the pace and intensity at practices. This particular group of seniors has always exceeded those expectations by finding the perfect balance of work and play.

"We've got a great group of kids that are fun to be around," said Livingston. "They do a really good job of keeping it loose but keeping it focused."

This year, he hopes that the Lady Indians will continue building on their previous accomplishments and make a deep run in the playoffs for a chance to play in the State Championship.

"We don't want to get complacent. That's easy to do when you've had the success that we've had," he shared.

To avoid that, Livingston plans to keep his team focused on smaller goals such as daily self-improvement.

"It's a cliché, but the past few years our girls have really embraced all those concepts and I think that's a big reason we've had so much success," he commented. "We want to continue that standard of excellence."

Last week, the men officially kicked off for Towns County with games against Gilmer and Banks. After over a month of practicing, the boys were excited to finally hear the first whistle blow.

Unfortunately, a large group of seniors did not return to the field this year, which has forced first-year coach Art Cartee to lean heavily on his freshman players.

While this will be a challenge for the entire team, Cartee has faith in the young players. He is even starting six freshmen on the field this season.

"That's a lot of freshmen to be playing varsity level soccer," he commented, "but they are doing a great job. They have amazing attitudes and their willingness to learn and take instruction is just amazing."

The Indians will face another challenge early this season – the absence of players who are on the basketball team. With soccer practice starting in January and basketball season running until mid-February, there is about a month of overlap between the two sports.

Fortunately, however, those players are some of Cartee's strongest, so when they make it back to the field the soccer team will only improve.

"I've got five starters that are on the basketball team," shared Cartee. "When they come out, the goalie will be a strength for us. The midfield area (will also be an advantage) for us once we get back to full strength."

Until then, the Indians continue to work on burying the ball in the net.

"We're getting the ball across the goal face, it's just being able to finish that (we struggle with)," said Cartee. He also hopes to improve the team's defensive play.

"We've got a new group back there on the defense, so they are having to learn," commented Cartee, who is depending on senior Chris Bectol to get them up to speed.

"(He) is doing a great job leading those new guys, but having to replace just about your whole defense is pretty rough," said Cartee.

Alongside Bectol, senior Brock Murray has been instrumental in the team's development this year. Both seniors have taken the underclassmen under their wings to instruct and encourage them down a competitive path.