

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Two impressive victories propel Indians into Elite 8

Final Four spot up for grabs Tuesday when Towns visits No. 3 Irwin County

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The fourth-ranked Towns County Indians varsity basketball team took impressive home court victories over Manchester and Warren County last week in the first two rounds of the Class A Public State Tournament, qualifying for the Elite Eight round this week.

They got to the Sweet 16 on Tuesday by taking a 78-67 win over Manchester and to the Elite 8 round on Saturday with a 77-67 victory over Warren County of Warrenton.

With the two wins, the Indians are set to travel on Tuesday of this week to Irwin County High School in Ocala, about twenty miles northeast of Tifton, for a third round state tournament game at 5 pm.

A coin toss at the state level brought about the Indians having to travel to Irwin County as each team was seeded number one from their region.

The Indians came quite close to hosting Mitchell County this week instead of the trip to Ocala as Mitchell County as the number three seed from their region lost by just a 69-66 score on Irwin's home court and the Indians would have had seeding rights over Mitchell if they had been the winner.

The winner of the game between the Indians and Irwin County will reach the final four round of the state tournament on Friday or Saturday of this week against the winner of a game between Chattahoochee County and Portal with the day and time to be determined and there will be another coin toss for hosting as both of those teams are top seeds from their regions.

The Indians completed the week with a 22-3 record, including 11-1 in regular season Region 8-A Public play, and ranked fourth in the state by the Atlanta Journal and Constitution.

Irwin County, the Indians' next opponent is ranked third in the AJC poll and potential Indians opponents Chattahoochee County and Portal are ranked seventh



Jake McTaggart went off in Towns' second round victory over Warren County, scoring 26 points with 17 boards. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

A planned article related to the Indians' region championship and All-Region teams promised for this week's *Towns County Herald* is being delayed until the season is completed for the Indians with answers to additional questions and other issues about both the Lady Indians and Indians to be explored.

Indians 78, Manchester 67 – The first half of the game against Manchester was a bit of a struggle for the Indians as shots found ways to bounce off or roll out of the rim with the Blue Devils including a pair of three point baskets in taking a 10-6 lead at the 4:01 mark with Indians highlights to that point being an old fashioned three point play by junior Jake McTaggart and a deuce by senior Colton Day.

The Indians went on a scoring rampage after that, however, as baskets by McTaggart and junior Collin Crowder got the Indians even at the 3:01 mark. And they followed a trey by Manchester for a 13-10 deficit with a field goal by McTaggart and two free throws by junior Kyle Oakes for a 14-13 lead

at the 3:01 mark they would not relinquish and Crowder added another basket for a 16-13 Indians lead at quarter's end.

The Indians weren't finished with early game heroics, however, as two baskets for four points each by senior Kolby Moss and McTaggart got them a 24-13 lead at the 5:19 mark. They then continued on their scoring run following a pair of treys by the Blue Devils and a 24-19 score with a 16-5 run the remainder of the quarter for a 40-24 lead at intermission.

McTaggart and Moss led this scoring run with six points each with Crowder and Day each contributing a basket within an overall 34-14 scoring run back to the 10-6 deficit midway through the first quarter.

Baskets by Crowder, Moss, Oakes, and McTaggart got the Indians what would be their biggest lead of 48-28 at the 5:56 mark of the third quarter. McTaggart went to the bench for awhile as a precaution with his third foul but the Indians followed six straight Manchester points and just a 48-34 lead by using eight points by Moss, a

trey by Day, and a deuce by Crowder in getting them four 18-point leads ending with a 61-43 advantage at the 2:08 mark.

The Blue Devils ended the quarter on a 7-0 run, however, for a 61-50 Indians lead entering the fourth quarter.

The two teams broke even in the fourth quarter with the Indians maintaining double digits leads of between 10 and 14 points with the exception of a nine points advantage for just 19 seconds during the final minute of play before Moss sank two free throws at 15.1 seconds for the final Indians margin of victory of 78-67.

Senior Aidan Berrong scored the first five Indians points in the quarter on a trey and deuce, McTaggart got the next six on three deuces, and Moss the final six on a pair of deuces and the two free throws.

McTaggart led the Indians in scoring with 25 points and was followed by Moss with 24, Crowder with 10, Day and Oakes with 7 each, and Berrong with 5 while all seven players seeing action in the game had at least one assist with leaders being Moss with 5, Berrong with 4, McTaggart with 3, and Oakes with 2. Leaders in rebounds were McTaggart and Moss with 12 each, Crowder with 5, Berrong with 3, and Oakes with 2 while Oakes led in steals with 2 and McTaggart in blocked shots with 3.

The Blue Devils were led in scoring by junior Trae Jackson with 24 points, sophomore Eli Wright with 14, and senior Travius Hollis with 8. The Blue Devils ended their season with an 8-6 record with the reason for a small number of games unknown by your reporter but perhaps resulting from Covid issues at their school and others in their area.

A look at their six losses reveals that the five prior to last week's loss to the Indians were by seven points or less, including two by one point with the loss to the Indians being the only one lost by double digits.

Indians 77, Warren County 67 – After struggling

with early shooting in several recent games, the Indians got off to a strong start in this game with a basket by junior Jake McTaggart getting them a 2-0 lead they would not relinquish at the 6:41 mark of the first quarter.

They went on to claim an 8-0 lead before the Screaming Devils connected for three treys and a 15-9 Indians lead at quarter's end.

Two field goals and two free throws by senior Kolby Moss and deuces by juniors Collin Crowder and Kyle Oakes accounted for the additional Indians points for a 12-9 lead before senior Hayden McClure sank a trey from near mid court at the buzzer for the aforementioned 15-9 score.

The Devils opened the second quarter by sandwiching a pair of treys around two McClure free throws for just a 17-15 deficit but the Indians responded with a 12-5 scoring run for a 29-20 lead at the 3:19 mark.

The scoring spurt was begun on a deuce and finished on an old fashioned three point play by junior Collin Crowder with McTaggart contributing a deuce and two free throws for four points and McClure his second trey in between for a 29-20 Towns lead at the 3:19 mark of the quarter.

After Warren County edged to within 29-24 on a pair of free throws and a deuce at the 2:46 mark, senior Aidan Berrong sank a trey and McTaggart two free throws following a Devils free throw for a 34-25 lead only to see the Devils sink a trey off the back board for a 34-28 Indians lead at intermission.

At halftime, Warren County had sunk six treys and an old fashioned three point play for twenty one of their points with two additional deuces and three free throws accounting for their other points.

Following an early third quarter field goal reducing the Towns lead to 34-30, the Indians went on an 11-1 scoring run for a 45-31 lead at the 3:20 mark on six points by McTaggart on two

deuces and two free throws along with five on a trey and a deuce by Berrong. The Devils responded with a pair of baskets closing the margin to 45-35 before baskets by Moss and senior Colton Day matched them for a 49-35 Towns lead.

And following a deuce and trey by Warren County for just a 49-40 Screaming Devils deficit, a putback basket by McTaggart at the five seconds mark got the Indians a 51-40 lead entering the fourth quarter.

The fourth quarter would see the Indians able to answer every challenge issued by Warren County, largely at the foul line as the Devils used the long used tactic of fouling, hoping for enough misses and in this case overmatching two free throws with treys on four occasions in the closing minutes.

Red hot free throw shooting from the first quarter forward saw the Indians sink 25 straight free throws between the 51.4 seconds mark of the first quarter and the 25.0 seconds mark of the fourth before sinking two of four during the final 17.3 seconds in taking a 77-67 victory.

The Indians led by as many as twelve points on two occasions and by as few as seven on three in the fourth quarter.

After sinking five treys in less than three and a half minutes of playing time between the 2:05 mark of the first quarter and 6:43 of the second, the Devils had cooled off by sinking just two more before sinking four in the final 2:55 of the game with the accurate free throw shooting by the Indians a necessity for their taking the victory.

Moss included nine for ten free throw shooting among eleven fourth quarter points, McTaggart six of six free throw attempts among ten points in the quarter, and Berrong sank five of six attempts in completing the fourth quarter scoring for the Indians.

McTaggart had a monster game with 26 points including 10 for 10 at the foul line and 17 rebounds while other scoring leaders were Moss with 19 points including eleven for twelve at the foul line, Berrong with 13, McClure with 8, and Crowder with 7.

Leading in assists were Moss with 5, Berrong with 4, junior Kyle Oakes with 3 and McClure with 2 while other rebounding leaders were Crowder with 7, Berrong and Moss with 5 each, and Oakes with 2 and McClure led in steals with 2.

Warren County was led in scoring by junior Lorenzo Johnson Jr with 28 points, senior Cortavion Wilder with 13, and junior Enoch Grier with 12.

The Screaming Devils completed their season with a 12-7 record while playing in Region 7A, consistently one of the toughest in the state.

Three of their losses were by three or fewer points and the 10 points margin of victory by the Indians was their only double digits loss during the season as was the case in the Indians win over Manchester.



The Indians punch their ticket to the Class A Public State Elite 8. Photo/Lowell Nicholson