

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Towns Soccer fights hard, comes up short against Social Circle

By Jeremy Foster
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Staff Writer

Towns County Soccer took to the field on Tuesday, March 8, in a pair of away games against Social Circle High School.

The Lady Indians were up first against the No. 2-ranked team in the state, and though they played a hard-fought game all the way through, the final score saw a victory for Social Circle at 8-0 to hand the Towns County girls their first loss of the season.

"Social Circle is a very talented team," Girls Head Coach Clay Livingston said. "They defeated No. 1-ranked team Commerce High School in the girls division, so they should be moving up to No. 1 now."

"We did not play bad against them, they are just so skilled that if you make even the tiniest mistake, they will make you pay for it. We did some good things; we mainly need to clean up some coverage issues on our corner kicks and free kicks, but we will get better from it."

The Indians were up next to take on the same challenge, and following a tight



The Towns County Indians in action during a recent home match. Towns is back in action on Wednesday at Lincoln County. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

race throughout, the boys experienced a heartbreaker of a loss 4-2 against Social Circle.

"We had key highlights of the game from senior Lane Lalletment, as he scored both

of our goals for us in the second half of the game," Boys Head Coach Rollie Thomas said. "I am proud of how our boys played against the No. 5-ranked team in the state of

the boys division, and we are going to only continue to get better playing against high level competition like that.

"We just are proud of our Indians fans for continu-

ing to support us, and we hope to see everyone at our next game."

Towns County Soccer will see action again on Wednesday, March 16, during

away games against Lincoln County High School. Visit www.townscountyathletics.com to stay tuned on the upcoming spring sports teams scheduling.

Baseball: Indians building momentum as roster finally fills up

By Jeremy Foster
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Staff Writer

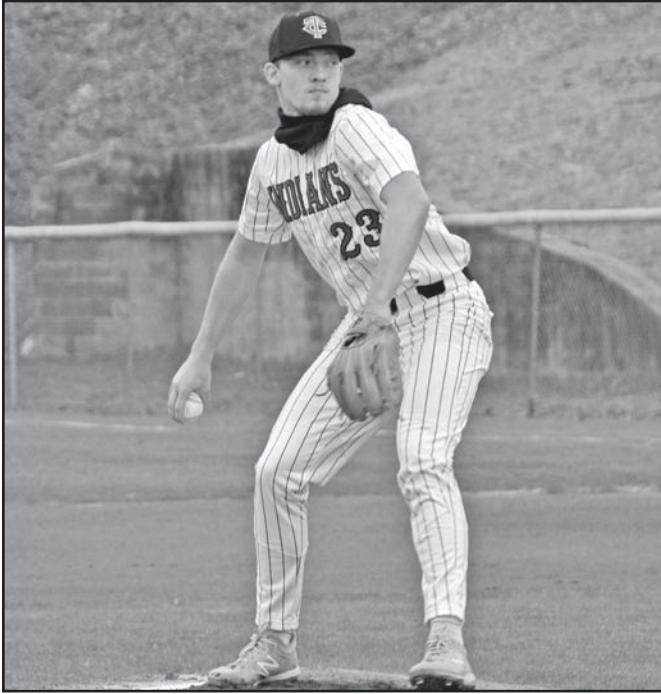
The Towns County Baseball Indians are breaking through a temporary period where they did not have a full staffed team, as more than half of their roster was playing another sport at the start of the season due to the overlap with the end of basketball season.

As a result, several starters on the varsity team have just recently joined play, though the Indians have been doing a respectable job of holding the competition at bay with a current region record of 2-3 consisting of two wins over Greene County.

Towns County held its most recent game held on Friday, March 11, at a home game against Washington-Wilkes High School, and it was neck-and-neck all the way through.

Washington-Wilkes scored in the top of the first inning, and Towns County answered back in the third inning with a run and took the lead in the fourth to head into the top of the fifth 2-1.

The Tigers scored again in the top of the fifth to tie the game up and took the lead in the sixth with two more runs,



Senior Collin Crowder deals after making his diamond debut on the heels of a record-breaking basketball season. Photo/Jacie Wood

plus two more in the top of the seventh for a 6-2 score.

In the bottom of the seventh, senior Collin Crowder slammed a base hit double that ultimately led to the final score of the game 6-3, with Washington-Wilkes walking away the victors.

"Our pitching has been extremely good, and we just played very good tonight

against the best team in our region," Head Coach Shannon Floyd said. "We are just now building our team from scratch, really, so we are slowly getting now to where we know we are as good as we can be and as good as anyone else."

"We just got back 10 of our guys last week, and against Wilkes was only our third game removed from hav-



Towns County's Tanner Cunningham slides into home plate against Washington-Wilkes on Friday, March 11. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

ing our full roster back, so we know that soon everyone will know that we are here to play with the best of them.

"We are certainly not using that as an excuse because of the caliber of the tradition of Towns County Sports, because our goal is to make the State Baseball Playoffs."

"Our pitching is what is going to keep ourselves in the

game, and we started tonight already seeing better swings all around in all of our players collectively, and we are seeing everyone have a better approach at the plate."

Defensively, Coach Floyd said the team is "still meshing things out but are as solid as we have ever been."

"We just need to work on throwing more and hitting

the ball better, which we did see improvements in tonight by Tanner Cunningham, Collin Crowder and Connor Chastain, and everyone else as a unit is really starting to get going," Floyd said.

The Indians' next contest was slated against Copper Basin High School in an away game on Monday, March 14, that occurred after press time.



The Indians' dugout encourages their teammates during last Friday's home meeting with Washington-Wilkes. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



Sophomore Zane Floyd at the plate. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

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Kudos to Collin Crowder, his teammates and his coaches

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Indians Varsity Basketball season came to an end in the elite eight round of the Class A Public State Tournament in Manchester but it provided some of the most memorable events of any season in the school's history as the Indians exceeded expectations in a marvelous way after the loss of most of the members of last year's state championship team. There are a number of noteworthy accomplishments during the Indians recently completed 2022 basketball season related to both the team and major contributions by senior Collin Crowder which will be addressed in this article along with a brief and I well deserved tribute to the Lady Indians.

The Indians followed last year's 25-3 record and a Class A Public State Championship under retiring head coach Rob Benson with a 20-8 record this year under head coach Brian Hunnicutt with this being just the second time for Indian teams to win twenty or more games in two consecutive seasons. The first such event occurred during the 1964 and 1965 seasons with records of 24-6 and 20-7 when they were led by head coach Bill Kendall who is the grandfather of Indians sophomore Zane Floyd and was in attendance at many of this year's games.

Although this article was prompted by providing details of heroics by the aforementioned Crowder rarely seen among numerous spectacular athletes at TCHS, a look at the Indians' truly marvelous season will be presented as it is a necessity for a star player to have an excellent supporting cast to reach lofty individual heights and this advantage for Crowder was most noteworthy during the recently completed season.

The Indians returned just three of 13 players who entered the scoring column last year—current seniors Collin Crowder and Kyle Oakes and sophomore Zane Floyd who saw limited playing time last year as a freshman. Among the 10 players not returning were first team all state members Kolby Moss and Jake McTaggart, Aidan Berrong who scored a most noteworthy 936 points during his career with the Indians, and Kabe Ellis who saw some successful varsity action in eight games as a freshman this year at West Virginia Wesleyan College after missing all state tournament activity due to a separated shoulder requiring surgery suffered in the region championship game against Lincoln County.

There have been quite a few Indians teams that had small numbers of contributing players returning who had great success but not to the extent of two achievements earned by the 2022 Indians. They won the team and school's second Battle of the States Tournament Championship and became just the third Indians team to reach the Elite Eight round of the state tournament.

The first team to win the Battle of the States Tournament was the most recent prior event during the 2020 season due to last year's event being cancelled due to Covid issues. The first team to reach the Elite Eight was the 1974 squad which was the first state tournament team for the Indians and also under the direction of head coach Bill Kendall. At that time just two teams from each of eight regions instead of four as is done now made the state tournament for a total of sixteen participants instead of the thirty two teams making the tournament now.

In 1974, the Indians went to the Macon Coliseum, now known as the Macon Centerplex, for completion of the state tournament on a neutral court, something many feel should be the case now instead of some schools, based at times on a coin toss, having to travel as the Indians did this year for example from bordering North Carolina to Charlton County which borders the Florida state line near Jacksonville.

The 1974 team defeated Echols County by a 62-58 score in the first round of the tournament before falling in the Elite Eight round by a 78-56 score to a powerful Hogansville team on its way to its fourth state championship in five years. Of course, the second Indians team to reach the Elite Eight was last year's team on the way to winning the Class A Public State Championship. An interesting note is the fact that Charles Cunningham was a member of the 1974 team and then a vital member of the 1975 Indians region championship team. Charles is the grandfather of current Indian Tanner Cunningham and he was in attendance at the game Manchester.



The Indians celebrate their 2021 Battle of the States title game victory over Rabun. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

While Crowder, Oakes, and Floyd carried much of the scoring load this year, the on court contributions of five other Indians were enormous with senior Cabe Poston, juniors Grant Ingram and Layne Rouse, and sophomores Connor Chastain and Tanner Cunningham being a major part of outstanding defense engineered by head coach Brian Hunnicutt and assistants Alan Rogers and Michael Anderson being a major reason along with strong rebounding for the team's success.

And timely points were also provided by those who joined Crowder, Oakes, and Floyd in providing most all of the additional game time support along with the other members of the team who played a vital role in cheering them on and providing necessary support in vital practice sessions. One of a number of stunning team defensive performances was the Indians' home court victory in the first round of the state tournament. Bowdon entered the game with an 18-8 record, was averaging 79 points per game, and had scored more than 90 points on nine occasions, including 100-plus on two of those occasions, but fell to the Indians by a 76-51 score after trailing 49-29 at halftime.

It is quite common for young players to leave much of the scoring to more experienced players but rise to the occasion themselves at various times. Sophomores Floyd, Chastain, and Cunningham gave examples of this talent during the state tournament. Floyd averaged 13.0 points and 5.3 rebounds in the three games while Chastain contributed 18 points, 9 rebounds, and 3 steals in the decisive victory over Bowdon and Cunningham contributed 9 points and 5 rebounds in the final game at Manchester.

During most any basketball season, there will be one or more individual players who reach outstanding achievements but Collin Crowder reached a number of achievements rarely achieved by Indians players or players on other teams for that matter, including seizing a single season scoring total never reached by either an Indian or Lady Indian.

Crowder became just the third Indian to reach 600 points in a single season and extended the total to 686 by season's end in passing the prior record of 625 by last year's all state member Kolby Moss who still holds the Indians career scoring record with 1,887 points. Bruce Wilson was the only Indian who had reached 600 points during a single season prior to Moss and Crowder. Collin finished his career with 1,496 points but it takes no imagination to realize that if this year's home games against Highlands and Tallulah Falls had not been cancelled due to Covid and weather issues he would have totaled more than 700 points for this season and more than 1,500 for his career.

Along with Crowder's record for most points scored during a single season is his establishing the school scoring average record for one season of 24.5 points per game. Other Indians known to average more than twenty points per game for an entire season are Bob Bryson at 24.0 in 1955, Kolby Moss at 23.1 in 2020, Bob Bryson again in 1956 at 22.8, Eddie Rushton at 21.8 in 1975, Zach Davenport at 21.0 in 2017, Bruce Wilson at 21 in 1962, and Carrol Shook at 20.4 in 1956. As an added note, the exact number of points and average for Bruce Wilson are no longer available but as clock operator for the Indians during the 1962, I vividly remember being present when Bruce's points were added and totaled more than 600 and that his average was 21 points per game with a good chance that it was a fraction of a point over that total.

Crowder finished the season in third place in verifiable career points behind his three years teammate Kolby Moss and

Kolby's one year teammate Zach Davenport who totaled 1,542 points through his senior season of 2018. It is quite remarkable that these three top scorers finished their senior season during the last five years. Eddie Rushton had held the verifiable career total of 1,366 since the 1975 season until Davenport passed him forty three years later during the 2018 season. The word verifiable is used here as the frequently mentioned Bob Bryson of the Class of 1956 was a prolific scorer with the scorebook for his sophomore season being missing with probably just tournament action during his junior year also being missing for an unknown number of points which could be added to his verifiable total of 1,181.

Collin is believed to be just the fourth Indian to score 40 or more points in a single game and he did this twice during home games this season, scoring 42 against Commerce and 40 against Lincoln County. The name of Bob Bryson again comes to the forefront as he scored the school record of 48 points in a game during his junior year of 1955 and Michael Kimsey scored 43 and Chad Jones 41 in games during the 1992 season. Chad Jones was a transfer student to TCHS who didn't see a lot of action during his brief period with the team but had a career type game at Lakeview Academy during the 1992 season.

Crowder was a prime time contributor to his teams for four years, beginning as a freshman during the 2019 season, seeing action in all 110 games played during his four years and he won't reach age eighteen until May of this year. He gave a preview of what was to come when during his freshman year at age fourteen he contributed 15 points and 12 rebounds to his team in a very competitive 67-54 loss against a very athletic team at Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville. Riverside featured a team with seven seniors and one sophomore entering the scoring column in that game against the Indians on their way to a 21-6 record, including the regular season Region 8A championship and runners up in the region tournament to Lakeview Academy along with a trip to the Elite Eight round of the Class A Private State Tournament.

When providing statistics from a period of many decades in this article, it is pretty certain that the stats provided are accurate but there is always a possibility of other athletes having made accomplishments with records no longer available and perhaps forgotten by those of us who have followed the teams for decades. Apologies are sent to anyone whose accomplishments may have fit those presented but not available or known at this time.

Although not establishing any Indian scoring records, let's not forget the enormous contributions to the Indians of Crowder's senior running mate Kyle Oakes. Outstanding ball handling, passing, defense, and rebounding talents often took center stage for Oakes but very capable scoring talent was present as well. His scoring talent and other contributions were especially prominent when he used masterful power drives and moves to the basket along with sharp passes as highlights while contributing 21 points in the Indians' 63-61 Battle of the States championship victory over Rabun County. Those who follow basketball closely are much aware of the necessity of the various talents mentioned above in achieving success but the reality is that only scoring stats are consistently available to address in a historical perspective.

But how good was Rabun County and what was the significance of the Oakes led Indians victory? Well, the Wildcats finished the season with a 23-6 record with two of the losses coming while they waited for

the arrival of their football players and a third after just one practice following an outstanding football season. They included winning the Region 8AA regular season and tournament championships and a trip to the state Sweet Sixteen round where they lost by a 73-62 score to Woodville-Tompkins of Savannah, a Class AA State Final Four team. Of significance is Rabun having a 21-3 record after the 2-3 start affected by football play with the three losses being to the Indians, Rabun Gap, and Woodville-Tompkins.

Mention of Rabun County's loss to Rabun Gap brings the Indians' 63-61 victory by the same score over that school to mind. Rabun Gap played an ultra challenging schedule against largely private school powers and wound up with a 20-9 record with one of their wins a shockingly one sided 76-49 victory at Class 6A superpower Buford. And how good was Buford this year? They finished their year as Class 6A State Runnersup with a 25-7 record and lost by no more than 10 points in their other losses. There may have been missing Buford players or some other issue affecting the score against Rabun Gap but no such information has been found.

After a 4-4 start, this year's Indians embarked on a 16-4 finish with three of the last five losses being to Social Circle who finished with a 30-1 record and one to Manchester who finished with a 28-3 record and both being state final four teams with Social Circle falling to Drew Charter School of Atlanta 70-66 in overtime and Manchester to Warren County 49-48. Drew Charter then defeated Warren County 51-50 in the Class A Public State Championship game.

It is also noteworthy that one of the Indians' three losses last year was to Social Circle and in contrast to the Indians losing so many players as related above, the Redskins not only returned all but one senior from that team but had two transfers join their team this year. In a similar pattern, the Indians hosted and defeated Manchester in their opening state tournament game last year by a 77-67 score after building a 40-24 halftime lead with Manchester losing just one player who was their fifth leading scorer but he was replaced by a freshman who scored 10 points against the Indians in their final game this year.

It can certainly be stated that the Indians had a difficult assignment in what turned out to be their final game of the season at Manchester, a team with a 27-2 record and undefeated at home. The Indians were disadvantaged by having to travel more than 175 miles on a school bus, and the Manchester team used full court pressure throughout the game while having no tiring trip. But that wasn't all as key Indians starters Kyle Oakes and Connor Chastain were battling illness with this reducing their stamina.

Under these circumstances, it was very rewarding that the Indians led for nearly all of the first half, including by a 15-11 score after one quarter and 29-27 at halftime. Manchester no doubt benefited by having no tiring factor of travel, a home court advantage, and likely no illness and pulled ahead by a 46-37 score after three quarters. A trey by Layne Rouse near the five minutes mark of the fourth quarter matched three Manchester points and still had the Indians within a three possession deficit of 49-40 with three treys being sufficient for a tie. The home standing Blue Devils finished the game on a 15-5 scoring run, however, for a victory by a deceptive score of 64-45.

So four of the Indians' eight losses came at the hands of Social Circle and Manchester who both qualified for the state final four. Both of these teams suffered ultra close losses in their final four games at Valdosta State University

with Manchester losing by a 49-48 score to Warren County, a school located several miles south of Interstate 20 near Thomson that will be new to our Indians' region next year, and Social Circle losing 70-66 in overtime to Drew Charter of Atlanta. In an opposite direction, Social Circle will be moving into a different division of Region 8A under a new Georgia High School Association setup unfortunately returning private schools to compete against Class A public schools. It should be noted that this statement is not an attack against private schools but unfortunate in that a quite small number of private schools choose to put together metro all star teams which are an unfortunate mismatch for public schools representing small populations.

An evaluation of the Indians' three losses to Social Circle—two in regular season play and the third in the region championship game—brings about some interesting comparisons. There were times when the Redskins were totally unstoppable with this being evident during the first half of the Indians game at Social Circle and throughout the region championship game at Commerce but a much different story for the game and a half in between.

The Redskins sprang out to a 39-18 lead over the Indians at Social Circle only to see the Indians use an 18-4 scoring run at the start of the third quarter in reducing a twenty one points deficit to seven points and then after a rally by the Redskins the Indians used a 13-6 scoring run late in the game to twice reduce the deficit to seven points again. Social Circle sank four free throws during the final minute of play for a 65-54 victory with the Indians outscoring them by 10 points the last half.

The Indians home game against Social Circle was a battle all the way with the Indians leading 7-2 early and rarely trailing by more than seven points the rest of the way with a few sample scores being a 23-23 tie in the second quarter, a 34-30 Social Circle lead in the third and a 55-49 lead in the fourth before the Redskins sank three free throws at the end for a 58-49 victory. When totaling the points for the two teams for the last half of the game at Social Circle and the following entire game at Towns County, the Indians outscored the Redskins 85-84 while the Redskins clearly held the upper hand in the equivalent half game prior and full game after. Although the Redskins outscored the Indians by fifty one points in their dominant six quarters of play, this was in no manner to the extent of their victories by seventy eight and eighty two points in the first two rounds of the state tournament against teams who finished their seasons with records of 12-13 and 12-8. Social Circle completed a 30-1 season with the loss to Drew Academy.

A mention of the four losses other than to state final four teams may be of interest too. The Indians lost their season opening game at Hiwassee Dam by a 67-64 score very soon after the Indians football season ended with very little basketball practice for the football players. When the Indians faced Hiwassee Dam at home just a week later they raced out to a 31-2 lead in the second quarter on the way to a 56-28 victory.

Home court losses to Union County and Commerce came as a result of truly outstanding three point shooting by these opponents with Union winning by a 67-60 score and Commerce by a 70-68 score. And an early season loss by a 55-40 score at Tallulah Falls saw the Indians not able to get past a difficult start with a highly anticipated home event against Tallulah not taking place due to winter weather. Tallulah went on to compile a 20-6 record and finished second to Prince Avenue in an overtime game in the Region 8A Private tournament.

Tallulah Falls made it to the sweet sixteen of the Class A Private state tournament where they were hammered 80-34 in a game not that close by eventual Class A Private State Champion Greenforest Christian, a school showing 52 students enrolled for classification purposes for the the upcoming two years. Hiwassee Dam won 13 games and Commerce and Union County 12 each during the season and all three played in their state tournaments.

I believe all who followed the Indians closely this year can wholeheartedly agree with a well known statement of "Thanks for the memories" in relation to both the great success of the Indians team and the marvelous successes by Collin Crowder. In looking toward next year and future seasons, the Indians will greatly miss seniors Crowder, Oakes, and Poston but can look forward to returning juniors Ingram and Rouse and sophomores Chastain, Cunningham, and Floyd. And waiting

in the wings are a number of promising sophomores and freshmen along with a middle school team which won its conference championship this year.

KUDOS TO THE LADY INDIANS, THEIR COACHES, AND REGION 8-A PUBLIC—Let's not forget the Lady Indians who lost five seniors to graduation from last year's Sweet Sixteen team including the three leading scorers—Vanessa Floyd, Kennedy Henson, and Jayce Young—with Floyd and Henson both easily passing the 1,000 career points mark.

Sophomores Sarah Shook and Tabitha Barnes were the fourth and fifth leading scorers who returned as juniors along with the seventh and eighth leading scorers in sophomore Laura Mauldin and senior Emily Vargas. Senior Payton Calvert also returned along with a large group of younger players who saw extensive action.

After a difficult start to the season for the ultra young team against some mostly quite tough competition with an early 3-11 record by mid January, the Lady Indians compiled a 5-8 record the remainder of the season with two of those losses being in overtime by scores of 57-55 at Lincoln County and 54-50 at home to Social Circle. Their most impressive success came with three straight victories in just six days between Feb. 10 and Feb. 15.

The Lady Indians first earned a regular season tie for fourth place with Greene County in Region 8A Public when they won their final two regular season region games by scores of 56-45 at Washington-Wilkes and 49-39 at home against Lincoln County. They then earned a trip to the Class A Public State Tournament with a 43-33 victory over Greene County, who entered the game with an 11-11 record, in the region tournament at Commerce.

Although that would be their last win of the season, the Lady Indians played quite impressively in the first round of the Class A Public state tournament at Mt. Zion High School near Carrollton in a much more competitive game than the final score of 63-43 would indicate.

The Lady Indians had a school bus trip of well over 150 miles with a break down bringing about a late arrival to face a Mt. Zion team on their home court with a 21-6 record with just two of their losses at home and one of those being by a single point. A sampling of scores during the game included the Lady Indians leading 7-6 and then trailing by scores of 13-12 after one quarter, 18-17 in the second, 30-20 in the third, and just 45-36 pretty early in the fourth before Mt. Zion pulled away for a deceptive final 63-43 victory margin. Mt. Zion then fell by a 42-36 score to Dublin in the Sweet Sixteen round.

Most high school teams don't play in a region with both a state championship team and a state final four team included but that was the case for the Lady Indians this year as top ranked Lake Oconee Academy won five straight state tournament games in taking the Class A Public State Championship. And Commerce as the second place team in Region 8A won three straight state tournament games in making it to the State Final Four for the second year in a row where they fell at Valdosta State by a 50-37 score to Hancock Central who then fell in the championship game to Lake Oconee by a 45-30 score.

Five of the Lady Indians losses came at the hands of Lake Oconee in two regular season games and the region tournament semifinals and two regular season games against Commerce. Lake Oconee was a tough match for the Lady Indians but after falling in a Jan. 11 home game to Commerce by a 54-28 they traveled to Commerce on February 1 and gave the Lady Tigers a tough battle both before and after a 12-1 Commerce scoring run before falling by a 42-32 score.

The Lady Indians trailed by such scores as just 7-5 in the first quarter, 13-10 in the second, and 19-14 in the third before Commerce rose to the occasion for the 12-1 scoring run that gave them a 31-15 lead. The Lady Indians then responded with a similarly impressive 17-11 scoring finish of their own resulting in the aforementioned 42-32 win by the soon to be state final four team.

With lots of now quite experienced varsity Lady Indians and very promising younger players returning next year along with upcoming players from this year's Lady Indian Middle School conference championship, the future looks bright for the Lady Indians with much appreciation extended to all of this year's team members, head coach Shea Taylor, and assistant coaches Chase Phillips and Sheena Kendall and best wishes for the future.