

# Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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## Soccer: Towns County coaches reflect on 2021

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When the Towns County soccer teams walked off the pitch for the final time in 2021 they did it with their heads high.

Despite a few bumps in the road, both squads saved their best performances for the postseason, and almost shocked the world.

The Lady Indians lost 4-1 at eventual state champ Atlanta Classical Academy in the State Semifinal round.

The Indians also reached the final four, falling 2-0 at home to eventual champion Georgia Military College. Down 2-0, Towns settled down and controlled possession throughout much of the second half but were unable to notch the equalizers.

An incredible penalty kick saved by the GMC keeper in the opening minutes denied Towns a 1-0 advantage and sparked a pair of match-clinching goals for the visitors - a moment that Coach Thomas knew could come back to haunt his club.

"Missing the early PK definitely impacted the game," he said. "On paper, GMC was an intimidating team that seemed unbeatable. Scoring against them early would have given us a level of confidence to capitalize on throughout the remainder of the game."

"Missing that one took some air out of the tires. We gave up opportunity after opportunity, and really just tried to weather the storm until halftime. It was a situation that we haven't faced all season, being down at halftime, so it was an opportunity to see how we'd respond."

Trailing at the break, Thomas attempted to light a fire under his team in the locker room, with some degree of success, but the shots simply didn't find the net for Towns down the stretch.

"Our halftime locker room environment was stressful," he said. "When you've got so many seniors potentially playing their last match, emotions can be a little difficult to control."

"I gave my guys an earful at halftime. I criticized our efforts and attitudes after conceding the two goals. Our frustrations turned inward, and we saw some finger-pointing as a result. I really just tried to refocus on our ability to convert goals. I reminded the team that we shouldn't be worried about the deficit; considering we have put up at least five goals in a half on numerous occasions this season. If we came out and played our game, we would be okay. We were a top offensive threat in the state for a reason."

"The second half saw a 30 minute stretch where we dominated the game. We came out and played in our attacking third for most of that time. We won second half possession. Unfortunately, we just couldn't connect. We landed a few shots off the post and crossbar, placed a few right into the keepers hands, and had a number land everywhere else behind the goal line."

After the match, Thomas addressed his seniors for the final time.

"I spoke my peace," he said. "I focused mostly on the seniors. I've always tried to mirror soccer to life, or athletics to life. I tried to focus on the positives, on the takeaways of such an incredible season. Making school history is hard to appreciate after being handed a season-ending loss."

"I opened the floor to the seniors. A few of them had touching words to share. It's one of those situations in life where you just kind of feel numb. It's hard to take in at the time. I ended with a 'thank you.' I thanked the seniors for buying into the program. For giving me so much of their effort and energy. To have athletes want to succeed at the state level and working for it makes coaching a lot more fun. I thanked the seniors for bringing the program a heightened awareness within the community."

"I equated my players to professional athletes, having middle and elementary school students attending games and walking by star-struck before and after matches. This group has inspired the next generation of Towns County athletes. That is something for the community to be proud of."

When asked what he'll remember most about this group years from now, Thomas admitted that a man could go insane contemplating 'what might have been.'

"All the 'what-ifs' can drive you crazy. Any season shy of a title produces the 'what-ifs.' I'd like to think I can focus on the accomplishments, a program-first region title, a state final four run, numerous team and individual records broken. I'd especially like to remember the group of guys I was fortunate to get to work with. Some will go to play collegiate soccer, some, other collegiate sports, but I'd like to think that all of them will be successful in whatever it is that they do in the future."

Towns County Lady Indians head coach Clay Livingston also had high praise for his departing seniors. And last week, the *Towns County Herald* also discussed the 2021 season with the Lady Indians coach.

"We had three seniors this year," he said. "Three amazing young ladies, including my first

born, Kenzie, who was our captain. Kindra Bryant played stopper for us and was our MVP. Sam Matheson gave us quality minutes in the back on defense. Most people have no idea what kind of commitment it took for Sam to play. I will be forever grateful for her dedication to this year's team. These three will definitely be missed, not just for their production on the field, but more for their leadership and amazing attitudes and work ethic."

Unlike the men, who opened the year 7-0 en route to a No. 1 seed, the Lady Indians needed a tiebreaker to qualify for state. But once things clicked, no one could ever mistake them for a 3 or 4-seed.

"Early in the year, we really struggled on the road and with certain teams because of their resumes, so to speak," Livingston said. "I think the turning point for us was vs. Commerce at home; we gave them all they wanted."

"The next important step in the progression was when we went to Social Circle and played a terrific game. I think the girls finally realized what it meant to focus on themselves and play at their highest level. [Then] we can deal with the results and get better."

"The playoffs actually started for us the last week of the regular season," he said. "It was pretty obvious that a road win at Washington Wilkes would put us into the playoffs. We basically approached it like, 'win and you move on or lose and you go home.' I talked to them before that game about what the mindset needed to be and how [every playoff team will] be solid, and it will come down to being the mentally tougher team."

"I've been fortunate to be a small part of a lot of success through the years. We had some unfortunate injuries down the stretch, but we had the toughness to fight through it with some young girls really stepping up. Starting with the Washington-Wilkes game, we were without our sweeper Rylie Livingston and keeper Jenna Pyle. Brooke Murrell stepped into the sweeper role and played amazing. Elizabeth Edwards stepped into Brooke's spot and played amazing as well. Laura Mauldin stepped in at keeper and played lights out."

"We were fortunate to get Rylie back in the second round and Elizabeth continued to give us strong minutes on the back end, allowing us to sub back there. We stayed pretty steady at the mid field and up top with Halie Arrowood, Kenzie Livingston, Sarah Shook, Bazya Smith, Miranda Spain and Jayden Taylor. We got quality minutes in the midfield from Emma Lallement. She played one of the best games I have ever seen

vs. Screven County in the Elite 8, earning her the Blitz Player of the Week Award. We also had Mauldin win the award for her 23-save performance vs Drew Charter. Taylor won it for her two goal performance in the first round as well."

Additionally, Livingston offered high praise for the school and community.

"No team can be successful without support and lots of it," he said. "That support must start at the top and filter down. We are very appreciative of the investments in our athletic programs made by Dr. Darren Berrong and the school board. Mr. Roy Perren and Coach Jim Melton were there for us all the way through. The parents always go above and beyond. They are an amazing group, the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree, so to speak. We had incredible support to help get a charter bus for the trip to Screven County."

"Personally, I would like to thank Peter Byrne and Rollie Thomas for their willingness to share their vast soccer knowledge. I have to thank Coach Shannon Floyd for helping us raise money, [along with] Jeannie Lovingood, Laranda Mauldin and Elisha Arrowood, to name just a few. I know I am leaving some people out and am truly sorry. The great thing is, I know these people do not do anything for their own glory, they do it for our kids. And thank you to my wife Sherri, who has always been there for me."

"Like I said, I have been very fortunate to be a small part of a lot of success, including multiple state titles as a player and a coach. But this season truly was the pinnacle for me. I have never been more blessed and honored to coach a group of kids. The opportunity to share it with two of my daughters made it even more special."

"Now it is time to get back to work and take the next step. It wasn't easy getting there and it will be even more difficult to get back, but I have faith in these players and the support of our parents, everybody in the school system and the community to help get us there."

## Pickleball Tournament in Young Harris



Mixed Doubles 3.5 - 17+, 35+, 50+: Gold: Gwen Fry-Mike Bruce Silver: Tresha McClure - Andrew Cobb.



Gold: Keith Moss - Michael Shook (left). Silver: Brad Doss - Marvin Soskin in Men's Doubles 3.0.



Dana Carroll and Chase Carroll (left) took Gold in the Mixed Doubles 3.0 bracket. Charlene Penland and Keith Moss took Silver.

There was a great pickleball tournament last weekend held at Young Harris College tennis complex. Their first PB tournament. Some of our local Towns County players won medals including Tresha McClure and Andrew Cobb who won Silver in 3.5 Mixed Doubles. (May 26, 2021) CA

## Benton MacKaye Trail Assoc. hikes for May 24-June 13

The following hikes are sponsored by the Benton MacKaye Trail Association. The current social distancing and health rules are used by hike Leaders.

May 24 (Monday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 4.5 mile hike on the Upper Springer Mountain Loop. Some history of these two trails is included. Hike Leader George Owen. For more information contact hikeleaderGO@bmtmail.org.

June 7 (Monday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 4.7 mile hike on the Quartz loop at the Whitewater Center in Ducktown, TN. Hike Leader Evelin Yarns. For more information contact HikeleaderEY@bmtmail.org

leaderSD@bmtmail.org.

May 29 (Saturday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 4.6 mile hike on the Upper Springer Mountain Loop. Some history of these two trails is included. Hike Leader George Owen. For more information contact hikeleaderGO@bmtmail.org.

June 7 (Monday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors a moderate 4.7 mile hike on the Quartz loop at the Whitewater Center in Ducktown, TN. Hike Leader Evelin Yarns. For more information contact HikeleaderEY@bmtmail.org

June 9 (Wednesday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors an easy 5-6 mile hike on the Bolling Park trails Canton, GA, a great preserve. Hike Leader Howard Baggett. For more information, contact the HikeleaderHB@bmtmail.org

June 13 (Sunday) - The Benton MacKaye Trail Association sponsors an easy to moderate, 4 miles hike from Ocoee Whitewater Center and see the water release arrive from two miles upriver. Hike leader: Clare Sullivan. For more information, contact HikeleaderCS2@bmtmail.org.

## VFW Golf League news

The week of May 10, the competition was fierce but the team led by Randy Tompkins prevailed by scoring a 63 which is 9 strokes under par. Team members contributing to the victory were Mark LaMone, Larry Schwalm and Scott Smith. Congratulations!

This week, the competition was fierce but the team led by Jim Risenberger prevailed by scoring a 66 which is 6 strokes under par. Team members contributing to the victory were Darryl Boltz, Ron Slatt and Bill Hockmett. Congratulations!

## Trout stocking sites week of May 17-21, 2021

Fannin: Rock Creek, Rock Creek Lake, Toccoa River and Toccoa River Tailwaters (below Lake Blue Ridge Dam)

Lumpkin: Etowah River and Nimbwill Creek.

Union: Cooper Creek

Murray: Holly Creek

Note: Information is subject to change. Please call the hatchery at 706-838-4723 for questions. Stay up-to-date with stocking and events through Facebook www.facebook.com/chattahoocheeforestnfh. The hatchery also provides trout for the state. Please contact Georgia DNR for information on sites stocked by the state. NT(May 26, 2021) CA

## YHC thanks supporters of the 2021 Clay Dotson Open



Winners of the 2021 Clay Dotson Open Alumni Challenge included Jarrell Johnson, '77, Jim Hudgins, '77, Grady Mosley and John Sillay, '75. They are pictured between Dr. Drew Van Horn, president of Young Harris College, and Dr. Clay Dotson, for whom the tournament is named.

On Monday, May 17, Young Harris College hosted the 17th annual Clay Dotson Open golf tournament at Brasstown Valley Resort to raise money for student scholarships. A total of 127 golfers played in the tournament, which raised more than \$70,000.

"Many thanks to everyone who sponsored, participated in and supported the 2021 Clay Dotson Open," said Vice President of Advancement Mark Dotson, '88. "Because of your generosity, deserving students will receive scholarships and the opportunity to pursue an education at YHC."

The Clay Dotson Open included two flights. The following teams walked away with first-place honors across the two flights: (Flight 1) Wade Patterson, '69, Debra Patterson, '76, Brian Helzog

and Michael Willard; and (Flight 2) David Loudermilk, Dave Yuhas, Rob Brown and Shanon Christian.

Teams with three or more YHC alumni qualified for the Tom Forkner, Sr. Alumni Challenge. The winning team included Jarrell Johnson, '77, Jim Hudgins, '77, Grady Mosley and John Sillay, '75.

Michael Willard won the Longest Drive competition for the second year in a row, and Angus Guberman won the Closest to the Pin competition.

"In addition to the golfers, we're fortunate to have the generous support of businesses and families who believe in the mission of Young Harris College and contribute to the Clay Dotson Open to support student scholarships," said Dotson. "For the 2021 tournament, Diamond Sponsors included

Brasstown Valley Resort and Sodexo. Gold Sponsors included Follett Higher Education Group, Truist and United Community Bank. Silver Sponsors included Batchelor and Kimball, Inc., EntryPoint Doors of Atlanta, Montag & Caldwell, LLC, Tri-State Utility Products, Inc. Kurt Mo-

mand, '77, and Heather Mo-mand Brunone, '08. Bronze Sponsors included Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, CMA Agency, Inc., Comfort Systems USA, Lamin-x Protective Films, Jim Ellison, '88, and Beth Ellison, Clay and Betty Dotson, and Mary Broadrick and John Moffitt. Along with several Hole Sponsors, Jacky Jones Chevrolet was our Hole-in-One Sponsor. This tournament wouldn't succeed without the help of our sponsors. We're very grateful for their support." NT(May 26, 2021) CA