

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Softball: Lady Indians to put youthful mistakes in rear-view mirror

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Towns County softball opens this week with its sights set on a state playoff berth in a new-look Region 8-A.

After relying on a young roster in recent years, the Lady Indians are primed for a breakout season behind an abundance of upperclassmen.

"Our seniors have taken on more of a leadership role over the summer and they have been outstanding," Towns County head coach Clay Livingston said. "It's also (the coaching staff's) second year in the program so they've been able to get used to us and know what to expect and how we do things."

The Lady Indians will host a scrimmage with West Hall on Tuesday before the season gets underway Thursday at West Hall. According to Livingston, the opener at West Hall could also end up classified as a scrimmage due to the Lady Spartans not having enough players to compete at the varsity level. If they elect to go with a JV schedule, Thursday's game will also go down as a scrimmage.

Regardless of when the season officially gets underway, the Lady Indians will enter with high hopes after returning all but two seniors (Sophia Shook and Jessica Taylor) from last year's squad. Unfortunately, Towns County will likely be without the services of dual-threat senior Kennedy Henson, who suffered her second ACL tear during the winter.

Over the last three years, Henson's leadership and athleticism have sparked the Lady Indians as the ace of the pitching staff and their leading slugger from the clean-up spot.

According to Livingston, he is taking Henson's recovery very slowly and not pressur-



Last year's Towns County Lady Indians were under the direction of a first-year coach and featured 16 sophomores and juniors that will another year older in 2020.

ing her to return. However, he wouldn't rule out the possibility of the senior getting a few late-September plate appearances.

"She's taking her time and working with a physical therapist," he said. "One (ACL tear) is bad enough, but she's had two on the same knee. The last thing I want is to be responsible for a third (ACL injury) because we rushed her back too soon."

"In a best-case scenario, she might be available later in the year as a pinch hitter or a DH. It would be nice if she could at least get an at-bat on Senior Night."

Towns County did gain a new addition this fall in basketball standout Vanessa Floyd, who Coach Livingston expects to make an immediate impact.

"She's a great kid and a great athlete," Livingston said. "I could only imagine what

kind of player she would be if this wasn't her first year."

Senior Natalie Smith is expected to anchor the Lady Indians pitching staff this fall. Freshman Haley Arrowood is a talented young arm who will also see time in the circle.

Rounding out the staff is senior Abby Mauldin, who was voted to the All-Region team at first base in 2019.

"We'd like to keep her at first as much as possible but she's available if we need her," Livingston said.

As for potential All-Region contenders in 2020, Livingston feels strongly that the Lady Indians will see multiple representatives receiving accolades at season's end.

"I definitely see several girls contending (for the All-Region team)," he said. "Being in this new region and playing other public schools will also help because we have so many girls that play multiple sports.

A lot of the private schools had girls that played travel ball and focused on just one sport."

Speaking of Region 8-A Public, Towns County will no longer compete against the plethora of private schools that littered the conference.

"We never like to make excuses and our goal is to go out and compete every single day, but we're still going to face some challenges in this new region," Livingston said. "Whenever we lose, we don't complain about the team we had to play. We look within ourselves to see what we can do better."

This fall, the Lady Indians join Commerce, Greene County, Social Circle, Lake Oconee Academy (LOA), Lincoln County and Washington-Wilkes in the region.

Commerce placed third in Class A Public last fall and will likely be the early favorite in 8-A.

Traditional powerhouse Social Circle was the Class AA State Champion in 2018 but fell off a cliff last year, missing out the playoffs with a 5-19 record.

Washington Wilkes placed sixth in a very deep Region 7-A last season. LOA was seventh in 7-A with an 11-10 record. Greene County, meanwhile, continues to struggle, posting another winless season with an 0-13 mark in 2019.

The Lady Indians finished last season with a 5-13 record after sitting at 5-5 on Sept. 7.

"Things were going well, then we lost two close games to Chestatee and Elbert County and it went downhill from there," Livingston said. "But I think we learned from those close losses and we'll start to win those one-run games this year. Coming off the way we ended last season, I think our girls are really motivated."

"This year, the top-four teams (in region) go to state and we don't have to worry about power rankings anymore. We never like to set too high of expectations, but this year, being one of those top-four teams is definitely one of our expectations."

Tuesday's scrimmage will get underway at 5 p.m. and Thursday's visit to West Hall is scheduled for a 5:30 p.m. first pitch.

Towns County's Saturday games at Fannin have been canceled but Livingston is hoping to add a game with Murray County. Unfortunately, the game was yet to be confirmed by Monday's deadline.

Region action will get underway on Tuesday, Aug. 11 when the Lady Indians host Commerce at 5 p.m. with the JV to follow.

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Photos: Football practice underway; Union scrimmage set for Aug. 21

Photos by Lowell Nicholson

