

# Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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## Indians drop two of three, visit Lincoln and Hayesville this week

By Todd Forrest  
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After winning four straight, the Towns County men (5-6, 2-1) dropped two games last week, capped off by Saturday's heartbreaking 59-52 home loss to Lake Oconee Academy (LOA) that saw the Indians squander a 14-point lead over the final nine minutes.

**Indians 48, Greene County 41** - Towns County picked up its second region win of the year during Friday night's road trip to Greensboro. "It was a great win," Towns County head coach Brian Hunnicutt said. "Greene was a Sweet-16 team from a year ago and we just gutted it out in a tough, tough game."

The Indians had three players in double figures, led by 12 points from Cruz Kitchens. Freshman Tucker Engert contributed 11 points, with the last two coming via a game-clinching steal-and-score that gave Towns a 47-38 advantage with under 30 seconds remaining. Dustin Barrett added 11 points and, along with Engert, combined for 14 of Towns' 17 fourth-quarter points.

Kitchens opened the scoring with a corner-3 that awarded the Indians their first lead of the night at 3-2 and ended a 2 1/2 minute scoreless drought to start the game.

Up 13-10 in the second frame, Engert picked a Tiger ball handler at midcourt and dropped in a layup on the other end. Moments later, following a Greene County basket, Jonas Rouse knocked down a trey in transition and Kitchens connected again from long distance to open up a 21-12 lead near the halfway point of the quarter.

Following a 21-14 half-



Mason Pierson (1) and Sam Sarafin defend an LOA ball handler during Saturday's 59-52 loss Photo/Lowell Nicholson

time score and a 31-25 edge after three, freshman Samuel Sarafin hit from 3-point range to start the fourth.

Barrett and Engert scored the next 14 points for Towns County as they kept the Tigers at bay in the win.

Rouse finished with 7 points; John Durham had 4 points and Sarafin chipped in three.

**Indians 52, LOA 59** - Engert scored 20 points and Rouse had nine but it wasn't enough as undefeated LOA raced past Towns County down the stretch.

"We got home at 2 A.M. from Greene County and that shows we have some growing up to do, because we let that beat us in this game," Hunnicutt said.

The Indians rebounded from an early 14-9 deficit, clamping down on the defensive end and outscoring the Titans 21-5 over the final 8:51 of the first half and taking a 30-19 lead into the break.

Still leading 34-26 in the third, LOA was hit with a technical foul that resulted in two Engert free throws. Later, Rouse connected from the baseline and Sarafin's dribble drive built a 40-26 lead with 1:09 left in the period.

The Titans closed the third with five straight and scored to start the fourth, trimming the gap to 40-33. Sarafin and Barrett answered to keep the margin at 44-36 inside six minutes.

Consecutive baskets by LOA made it a 4-point game

but Kitchens connected from the corner to increase the lead to 47-40 with 5:07 remaining.

LOA rattled off 13 straight to seize a 53-47 advantage with 1:25 to play, but Engert's 3 and Rouse's layup off a Titans turnover had Towns within a point at the minute mark.

After two LOA free throws made it 55-52, Towns County missed a pair of game-tying treys and the Titans put the contest away by going 4-for-4 at the charity stripe over the final 26 seconds.

"We got tired and I think we started settling on the offensive end a little bit there in the fourth," Hunnicutt said.

"Again, we have some growing up to do, but we'll learn from it and hopefully do a better job

sticking to the gameplan."

Sarafin finished with 7 points; Durham and Kitchens had six apiece; Barrett and Mason Pierson each added 2 points.

**Indians 52, No. 4 Rabun County 77** - Towns County got off on the wrong foot on Tuesday, Dec. 10, falling behind 19-6 after one and 40-17 at the break.

"Tonight was a rough night for us," Hunnicutt said. "We got out of doing what we do didn't trust what we do early. And look, they are a very, very good team. They are ranked in the top-five in the state, and they are deserving of that. They are tough."

"I thought Jonas Rouse had a phenomenal game and John Durham had a very good

second half. Overall, we played better in the second half. Everybody stood up at some point and we played well in spurts, but we have to do a better job of sticking to our game plan and doing what makes us play well."

"We want to pass the ball and cut, and we want our shots to come to the basket on the inside. Early on we were settling for tough 2 and 3 pointers instead of attacking them, trying to get shots from the inside. And then on defense we have to remember it's about crashing the glass and getting rebounds and we didn't do enough of that. On offense we want motion offense cutting to the basket."

"We have a tough road ahead, so we've got to get back to work. Our team is very young. We graduated our top six players last year and we've got 12 freshmen on the team. Two of our top six are freshman, Tucker Engert and Sam Sarafin and we're missing one of our seniors, Connor Williams with an injury."

"We're inexperienced but we're learning every game. We've got to learn to stick to our game plan, even when it's tight. We'll bounce back," said Hunnicutt.

**Up next:** Towns County visits Lincoln County on Friday before traveling to Hayesville, NC on Saturday.

"Lincoln County is always a tough place to play," Hunnicutt said. "They are a State playoff team and we expect a tough, physical game."

"We'll probably get back at 2 A.M. again then get ready to face a rival on Saturday. We have to go in with the same mentality we had Friday [at Greene], then hopefully do things a little different when we go over to Hayesville."

*Shelly Knight contributed to this article.*

## Lady Indians drop to 3-8 heading into final week before Christmas break

By Todd Forrest  
Sports Editor  
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The Lady Indians dropped to 3-8 overall and 1-2 in region play following three losses last week to No. 6 Rabun County, at Greene County and Lake Oconee Academy (LOA).

**Lady Indians 51, Greene County 53** - Towns County led 29-22 at the break and 42-39 after three but fell short in Friday's road trip to Greene County.

"We didn't have our best night," Towns County head coach Alan Rogers said. "We might have had tired legs from the bus ride. We couldn't get anything to fall and [Greene County] did."

"But at the end of the day, we didn't perform the way we needed to perform to win a basketball game in a tough region."

Down 14-5 early, Kaleigh Beaver's steal and score sparked a 5-0 spurt to close the quarter within four, then Ava Thompson's 3-pointer in the second had Towns within 16-13.

Later, with her team up one, Natalie Barnes hit from behind the arc for a 22-18 advantage, and then two steals by Ansleigh Hardin resulted in a pair of buckets and a free throw, sending Towns to the locker room up seven.

Barnes and Thompson knocked down treys to keep the margin at 38-32 in the third.

Up three to start the fourth, Towns County went cold over the final 8 minutes, eventually falling into a 51-46 hole until Thompson connected on her team's only 3 of the fourth.



Junior Scotlyn Fain's free throw puts Towns County on top 17-15 late in the second quarter of Towns County's loss to Lake Oconee Academy. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Beaver led the way with 15 points; Scotlyn Fain and Thompson had 9 apiece. Barnes had six, Hardin scored five, Jaime McCarter added three, Chloe Sutton and Alaina Murphy finished with 2 points each.

**Lady Indians 35, LOA 40** - Tied at 20-20 in the third, LOA outscored Towns County 13-4 over the final 5:41 of the quarter, putting the home team in a deficit they didn't recover from.

"We let them get loose driving the basketball a bit too much there in the third quarter," Rogers said. "But I feel like it was one of our best defensive efforts. I'm very proud of the

girls and our upperclassmen really stepped up."

The Titans built a 37-27 lead at the 5:31 mark of the fourth when Towns started chipping away. Hardin scored on consecutive trips to move the Lady Indians within six, and following an LOA basket, Beaver split two free throws for a 39-32 score with 2:08 to play.

Beaver connected on a turn-around jumper with 1:30 left, then Thompson hit 1 of 2 at the line, making it 39-35 at the 45-second mark. Unfortunately, that's as close as they would get as the Lady Indians missed two free throws and a 3-pointer before LOA split two free throws

with 14 seconds left.

"One thing about this group is, they never quit," Rogers said. "They're going to battle hard every night."

After taking a 10-9 edge into the second quarter, Thompson connected from deep and Fain scored inside to build a 17-15 lead before LOA tied things up at halftime.

Fain had 13 to lead the Lady Indians; Beaver had 10; Hardin scored 6 points; Thompson had 4 points; Murphy added 2 points.

**Lady Indians 44, No. 6 Rabun County 57** - Towns County fell into a double-digit hole in the first half and couldn't

recover in last week's home contest vs. the Lady Cats.

"Tonight, we got a little bit out played," Rogers said. "We got outrebounded. And that was the big thing that I took away from tonight. We showed great effort, we hustled, we got after it, but we just didn't rebound."

"Toward the end of the second quarter, we were down about 12 points and we cut that to just 8 before halftime. All we needed was just one more stop like that and I think it would have been a whole different game. We fell a little short on getting that stop back and let them have their second chance against us."

"Scotlyn Fain had a massive 3 pointer right at the buzzer and that gave us a momentum

for a little while. We rode that but then they got a couple of stops and we couldn't match those stops. All the girls had great moments. I mean they have a great team they work hard they get after it. We just didn't handle our business as well as we should have."

**Up next:** Towns County visits Lincoln County on Friday before heading to Hayesville, NC on Saturday.

"We have a tough, physical game on Friday, then we have to turn around and play a big rivalry game on Saturday," Rogers said. "We got them in a close win over here, and [Hayesville] will be looking for revenge."

*Shelly Knight contributed to this article.*

## Nicholson honored Saturday



Towns County Schools honored Debbie Nicholson, who passed away March 1, 2024, for 31 years of bookkeeping for Towns County Basketball. TCHS dedicated the scorekeeping table to her memory and Athletic Director Jim Melton presented an appreciation plaque to her husband Ollie Dee Nicholson and daughter Misty Nicholson Kerr at Saturday's game.