

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

www.townscountyherald.net • E-mail: tcherald@windstream.net

Demographics and High School Sports in Northeast Georgia

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

With state tournament play winding down in Georgia and Alabama and about to begin in North Carolina and Tennessee, perhaps readers would have an interest in a look at how a change in demographics in recent years in Northeast Georgia has not been kind to the athletic programs in the small public schools.

Long time followers of the Lady Indians and Indians and the programs at other nearby schools have seen a drastic change from the time when "neighborhood" supremacy in each sport was at the forefront.

The days of looking forward to who would come out on top in a sub-region tournament and which teams would make it on to the region and state tournaments among schools of similar size and composition in a pretty small geographic area here in Northeast Georgia has evolved into the Class A Towns County teams facing mostly far distant private schools in their region with little in common and with little tradition against each other.

And two schools several hundred students larger—Union County and Rabun County—find themselves facing mostly public schools in Class AA in their region but mostly beyond Athens and with no traditional rivalries other than between Union and Rabun themselves included.

Once upon a time, a Class B sub-region tournament would have included various combinations of such schools as Towns, Union, Rabun, East Fannin, Rabun Gap prior to their international turn and to a private school league, Banks, Dawson, and even White and Lumpkin Counties. But East Fannin was consolidated with West Fannin as part of Fannin County High School some forty years ago and the public schools mentioned other than Towns, Union, and Rabun Counties are in either Class AAA or AAAA now.

Towns County sports teams are at a very unique disadvantage, along with Commerce in our region and the small towns of Mt. Zion and Trion in Northwest Georgia, where a similar demographics



The Towns County Lady Indians from Class A square off with the White County Lady Warriors from Class AAAA. The two teams were in the same region (8-AA) as recently as 2002 when Towns chose to move

nearby in North Carolina, the Towns County teams have a perfect setup to face schools of similar size and composition but the Georgia High School Association, in its wisdom, has ruled that games against out of state opponents do not count in determining power points.

The schedule of the recently completed season for the Class A Indians represents a prime example of this situation of having their Class A Public State Tournament status being decided by how they fared in regular season, not against mostly Class A Public schools but in twelve games against Class A Private, eleven games against Class AA, AAA, and AAAA Public Schools, and just two Class A Public.

And the Indians won both games against Commerce, their only Class A Public opponent. As for their not facing other Class A Public opponents, the several closest ones are down near Augusta with Trion and Mt. Zion being located over near the Alabama state line.

After a pretty extensive look at Class A Public schedules for schools located primarily in rural areas of central and south Georgia, it appears that Greenville, with just two losses and both being to Private Class A schools, is

the only other Public Class A School in Georgia with a chance to go undefeated this year against other Public Class A schools if they go on to win the state championship.

This evaluation in no way suggests that the mostly very young Indians—with the eight most productive players being two seniors, five sophomores, and one freshman—would have gone undefeated against Class A Public schools for the full year.

But it does expose what your reporter views as a serious flaw in the otherwise admirable decision as related to small public and private schools being separated for state tournament play as to how teams qualify for the state tournament.

For any who wonder just how difficult a schedule the Indians faced this year in the absence of Class A Public opponents except Commerce, 15 of 17 losses were to teams winning 15 or more games and with four of the losses being to teams winning twenty or more. The only two losses to teams with losing records were to Athens Academy at 12-13 and Lumpkin County at 9-20 but with Lumpkin actually good enough to make it to the Class AAA State Tournament.

In fact, a total of 14 of

the losses were to teams making it to their state tournament with Dade County, winners of an overtime game and a come from behind win in the final minutes of play against the Indians, just missing a Class AA state tournament appearance by losing in their region tournament by just an 85-79 score to Darlington, a private school in Rome.

The most successful Indians opponent in post season play so far has been the Piedmont, Alabama, Bulldogs who broke away from just a 55-49 lead with a 9-1 run the final minute and a half of the game for a 64-50 win over the Indians in the second round of the Battle of the States Tournament.

The Bulldogs have a 22-11 overall record and have won three straight games in the Alabama Class AAA State Tournament in qualifying for a State Final Four appearance on Tuesday of this week.

For the record, the Lady Indians and Indians, both with 9-17 records against such challenging schedules, came well short of enough power points to make it to the state tournament this year with this being the first time since 2006 for the Lady Indians to miss the tournament and only the third time in Head Coach Jim Melton's 17 year tenure.

It would have been interesting, however, to see how both teams might have fared, if able to compete against a significant number of schools of similar size and composition in Class A and whether in or out of state, in determining whether they would be eligible to compete against the same size public schools in state tournament play.

To be certain, the isolation of the Lady Indians and Indians makes it difficult to come up with a solution to the issue at hand but your reporter can see two possible solutions which would fit the Towns County teams but not really Commerce.

The state could leave the regions as they are now with just two public and the rest private in our Region 8-A but count out of state games in the power points system, leaving our teams with the option of playing nearby games against schools in communities of similar size as is available for most of the state. And this advantage could include perhaps Trion and Mt. Zion with likely many small schools from nearby Alabama to compete against.

The other option seen by your reporter would place all public schools in all public regions with the Towns County and Commerce teams being included in a region with the schools near Augusta.

The possibility of not playing a regular season region schedule with such distant trips but the opportunity to be included in that region tournament to try and earn a trip to the state tournament as in other classification in the state could be explored.

Such a region tournament would require a few quite lengthy trips but would perhaps be a welcome trade off in eliminating some of the lengthy regular season trips experienced this year.

Of a certainty, there is no control over the demographic changes placing the small northeast and northwest Georgia schools in a difficult situation for sports activity but maybe this quite lengthy look at the issues, which runs the risk of raising more questions, will help readers understand the circumstances faced by basketball and most other sports at Towns County High School.

Indians 12&U basketball reaches District Finals

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County 12 & Under Midget basketball team advanced to the championship game by defeating White County 50-43 in the semifinals of the District 7 Class C Youth Tournament on Monday, Feb. 23.

The championship game was played against Commerce after press time on Monday, March 2, and results will be available in next week's edition of the newspaper.

White County scored first in the semifinals, and had 5 unanswered points before the Indians could notch the scoreboard.

Collin Crowder started things off for the Indians, scoring a 2-point basket. The first quarter ended with the Indians trailing White County 12-8.

With 4:51 left in the second quarter, the Indians tied things up 15-15, but failed to gain the lead. Towns County took the lead for the first time in the game with 2:49 left in the second quarter, but finished the first half behind White County, 21-18.

Action ramped up in Indian territory after halftime as the boys in blue secured the lead with only 5 minutes remaining in the third quarter, the scoreboard reading 26-24.

The game stayed close, but the Indians kept the lead until the game ended with a final victory score over White County of 50-43.

Leading the team in points scored was young Aiden Berrong, with 17 points.

Mason Thomas scored 10 points in the game, Peyton Barrett 8 points, Collin Crowder 7 points, Kyle Oakes 5 points and Adrian Hooper 3 points.

The entire team put on a valiant offensive and defen-



Towns County's 12&U Indians battle for a rebound during their 50-43 victory over White County in the District Semi Finals. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

sive show of force to attain the victory.

Commerce beat their rival Banks County 61-38, cementing its spot in the championship round of the tournament against Towns County.

Coach John Keister, who coached high school basketball in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., for 35 years, made some adjustments to address the slump experienced by the Indians in the first half of the game.

"I had to make some key changes," said Coach Keister, now in his eighth year coaching youth basketball in Towns County. "We were playing some man to man, but we were playing a 1-3-1, because I like that when a ball goes to the corner, to trap down in the corner. Well, we weren't getting that trap tonight, and they were smart enough, they had a

post man and then they ran two guys down low.

"So, they had us outnumbered down at the block several times down there," continued Coach Keister. "And that's when I called the timeout, and we went with a 3-2 zone, which they hadn't really run all that much. That's when we got some turnovers, and because we were covering guys that were sitting out in that corner, we stymied them right there, we started to roll. And that's when we went ahead and started to roll there the last while."

The winner of the Monday, March 2, matchup between Towns County and Commerce is headed to the midget Class C state tournament.

Coming up this weekend, Friday, March 6, and Saturday, March 7, is the Class C State Tournament for Mite Boys,

ages 9 and 10, to be hosted at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center.

Games will begin at 6 p.m. Friday, with eight teams coming from all over the state. Towns County gets a spot in the tournament as the host team, and the other teams will feature the seven district champions.

Four games will be played on Friday, and seven games on Saturday.

Tickets for the two-day event will be, for each day, \$5 for adults, \$2 for students and seniors (55 and over), and children 6 and under get in free.

The Towns County Mites' first opponent will be Bremen at 6 p.m. on Friday, and the entire community is invited out to cheer on the home team and future of Towns County as they endeavor to win a state title.

Time to say goodbye, part two

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In recognizing relatives of graduating basketball seniors involved in sports activity in last week's Herald, the focus was primarily on appearances of relatives in the now quite distant past of the two Indian seniors, Dallas Manus and Boone Moss, with mentions of other more recent relatives as well.

But your reporter came to realize too late to enter in last week's article that a couple of additional recognitions should have been made.

Lady Indian seniors Karlie Albach and Misty Lindemuth both have brothers who played varsity basketball for the Indians in recent years.

Rylan Albach, who was in attendance at Karlie's final game, saw action in several games as a freshman during the 2010 season. Apologies are extended for failing to include this information in the original article.



Rylan Albach - 2012

years, ending in 2012. He saw lots of action, primarily off the bench as a sophomore and as a starting guard as a senior after sitting out his junior year. And Donald Lindemuth, Misty's brother, saw action in several varsity games as a freshman during the 2010 season. Apologies are extended for failing to include this information in the original article.



2015 Towns County senior Karlie Albach. Photo/Lowell Nicholson