

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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

Gordon Lee ends Lady Indians' magical season in Semi-Finals

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Fort Valley - It is said that all good things must come to an end and this was the case last Friday afternoon at Fort Valley State University in Fort Valley as the Towns County Lady Indians saw one of their finest seasons come to an end with a 57-49 loss to the Gordon Lee Lady Trojans of Chickamauga in the semi-finals of the Georgia Public Class A State Tournament.

The loss left the very youthful Lady Indians with a fine 26-5 record with two of the losses coming at the hands of the Lady Trojans who defeated the Lady Indians in overtime 70-69 on the last shot of the game in the third place game of the Battle of the States Tournament.

The Lady Indians featured two seniors, three juniors, and three sophomores in the game and the Lady Trojans brought quite a challenge to the Lady Indians or any other team, for that matter, as they not only represent the largest Class A school in the state but featured a seasoned veteran team, starting four seniors and a junior.

And there were additional prominent challenges within that starting lineup.

Senior point guard Kassi Blevins includes, among numerous noteworthy accomplishments on her resume, the Most Valuable Player Award after her team's having won the Battle of the States Tournament her sophomore year and having been chosen to play Division I basketball in the Southern Conference next year for Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. And according to last Saturday's Chattanooga Times Free Press newspaper, the Lady Trojans' 6'4" junior, Katelyn Lee, has been offered a scholarship to play basketball at the Division I University of Alabama, in the prestigious Southeastern Conference.

The Lady Trojans entered the semi-final game against the Lady Indians with a 23-7 record after having faced an often brutal schedule, both within and outside their Region 6-A. They lost three times to top ranked Southwest Atlanta Christian, set for the Class A Private State Championship Game, and once to the state ranked Darlington School within their region while gaining a bit of esteem perhaps by taking a victory over Darlington, a winner in one game over Southwest Atlanta who, in turn, defeated top ranked perennial state champion Wesleyan which is now in Class AA.

The other losses for the Lady Trojans came at the hands of Tennessee power Meigs County, Class AA's Bremen, and



Karlie Albach



Dadrian Blythe



Eryn Cochran



Stephanie Patton

Photos by Lowell Nicholson

Class AAA's Dawson County in the Battle of the States Tournament Semi-Finals.

Among Lady Trojan wins were seven victories over higher classification schools. The Battle of the States Champion Lady Tigers of Dawson County just last weekend earned a trip to the Class AAA State Championship Game to be played on Saturday of this week at 3:00 p.m. in the Macon Coliseum while Gordon Lee will face Randolph-Clay on Thursday at 3:00 p.m., also in the Macon Coliseum. These games may be viewed on Georgia Public Television with all final four State Tournament games, including the Lady Indians' game against Gordon Lee, and other sporting events available for viewing on the Internet on the GHSA Network located at <http://www.playonsports.com/channels/georgia>.

The Lady Trojans entered the game against the Lady Indians on a scoring binge in the state tournament with an 81-55 victory over Greenville and a 73-68 triumph over Seminole County from Region 1-A, the region including both Lady Indian state tournament opponent Calhoun County and top seeded Randolph-Clay, the Gordon Lee opponent in the state championship game.

Scoring points against outstanding teams that know each other quite well often becomes more and more difficult in succeeding games, however, with this tendency perhaps being present in the Friday confrontation between the Lady Indians and Lady Trojans. The two teams had not only faced each other in the aforementioned Battle of the States game back in December, but in the Battle of the States the year before that as well, along with seeing each other play in two other games each during each of the two tournaments.

There would be several striking and interesting circumstances to occur during the game. First of all, a very modest 4-0 start for Gordon Lee literally set a pattern for the first three quarters of the game and an 8-2 run the first two minutes of the fourth quarter set a similar pattern for the remainder of the game. The Lady Indians would actually never overcome, while seriously challenging, that early 4-0 deficit with the Lady Trojans never leading by more than eight points on just one occasion but as few as one on two occasions through the first three quarters.

The Gordon Lee leads at the first two quarter breaks were by the same four point margins of 17-13 and 26-22 as at the start with the Lady Indians edging to within two points at 36-34 after three quarters. The 8-2 run at the start of the fourth quarter giving Gordon Lee the 44-36 lead of eight points likewise varied only slightly the remainder of the game as the Lady Trojans got a single 10-point lead while the Lady Indians twice reduced the lead to seven points and to six points on three occasions.

Most even casual observers of the game probably came away thinking of "what might have been" in relation to cold Lady Indian "inside" shooting around the basket, largely perhaps as a result of the imposing shot blocking and intimidating presence of the 6'4" Lee. On the other hand, the Lady Indians provided "red hot" shooting from fifteen feet beyond the basket with that being at the foul line, in sinking 25-of-32 attempts for stunning 78.1% accuracy in remaining within six points and a two possession game into the final minute of the game.

It was not an uncommon occurrence throughout the season, by the way, for the Lady In-

dians to receive and make many more free throw attempts than their opponents with another example being the first meeting between the Lady Indians and Gordon Lee with a different officiating crew. In that game, the Lady Indians were 34-for-43 at the line for 79.1% accuracy compared to 11-for-21 for the Lady Trojans. It's unknown whether it was typical for Gordon Lee to attempt and make far fewer free throw attempts than their opponents in other games this year but it is truly remarkable that the Lady Indians could have scored exactly half of their 118 total points scored against the Lady Trojans in two games at the foul line.

On still "another hand", the Lady Trojans had some contrasting shooting difficulties and successes of their own on Friday, sinking just 9-of-22 attempts at the free throw line but showing far more impressive accuracy from behind the 3-point line at nineteen feet and nine inches with six treys after sinking just one in the Battle of the States game against the Lady Indians. The unexpected Gordon Lee treys, with four coming in the first half, were perhaps more than anything the key to the Lady Trojans holding their early lead and their eventual victory.

In first quarter action, the Lady Trojans extended their initial 4-0 lead to as much as 7-2 on a trey at the 5:54 mark and to 14-7 on a trey at 2:31. The Lady Indians rallied after that with a 6-0 run on a field goal and two free throws by Kelsie Cowart sandwiched around a coast to coast run and field goal by Stephanie Patton for just a 14-13 deficit with thirty six seconds on the clock. The Lady Trojans responded, however, with their third trey of the quarter just 13 seconds later from some 22-feet and they had the aforementioned four points

lead of 17-13.

Eryn Cochran contributed 4-for-4 free throw shooting in the early stages of the first quarter in helping keep the Lady Indians within striking distance of the Lady Trojans.

Cowart continued her good work in the second quarter with two baskets and a free throw for 5 points as the Lady Indians edged to as close as 18-17 on the Cowart free throw at 5:15 but trailed by as much as 24-18 on Gordon Lee's fourth trey at 4:39 and then 26-20 at 1:44. Two free throws by Cochran at the 1:05 mark closed out first half scoring and had the Lady Indians again back within the four points margin of 26-22 at intermission.

The Lady Indians edged to within 26-24 on two more Cochran free throws just thirteen seconds into the third quarter but the Lady Trojans lengthened their lead to 36-28 despite a pair of Cochran baskets by the 3:09 mark. The Lady Indians struck for six straight points the final three minutes of the quarter, however, on field goals by Karlie Albach and Dadrian Blythe and two free throws by Patton for just a 36-34 deficit entering the fourth quarter.

Blevins proved to be the nemesis for the Lady Indians in the fourth quarter, however, as she did what outstanding players, especially as seniors, often do and took her team on her shoulders. She followed first quarter foul problems and just two points in the first half by scoring seven points in the third quarter with sixteen more coming in the fourth. She included a trey among all of Gordon Lee's points in the aforementioned 8-2 opening fourth quarter run which had the Lady Trojans ahead 44-36 by the six minutes mark.

The Lady Indians would close to within 44-38 on a bas-

ket by Blythe at 5:41 but two baskets by the Lady Trojans gave them their biggest lead of 48-38 with 4:06 left. A field goal by Cochran at 4:08 got the Lady Indians off on a modest late run aided by just seven for thirteen free throw shooting by the Lady Trojans the rest of the way while the Lady Indians thrived at the foul line during the same period in sinking nine of ten attempts.

They got as close as 56-44 on two free throws by Patton, to within 52-46 on a pair by Blythe, and 54-48 on two more by Patton between the 1:29 and 33.5 marks but ran out of time as the Lady Trojans closed out the 57-49 victory.

Cochran led the Lady Indians in scoring for the game with 16 points and in assists with 4 with other scoring leaders being Patton with 12, Cowart with 9, and Blythe with 8. The Lady Indians had admirable rebounding totals when considering the presence of the 6'4" Lee and that of her 6' sister, Madelyn, who replaces her when she is removed for a rest period. Leaders in rebounds were Cowart with 9, Blythe and Cochran with 8 each, Patton with 6, and Emily Anderson with 5.

The Lady Indians had ten steals with Cochran and Patton leading with 4 and 2 respectively but their aggressive defense, aided immensely by the constant pressure of Albach and Bailey Sutton, resulted in many additional Gordon Lee turnovers not credited as steals.

Cochran also led in a fourth statistical category with 2 blocked shots.

While disappointed in their season ending just one game short of the championship game, the Lady Indians and their fans will be able to look back through the years with great pride in an ultra successful season with a 26-5 record, a region championship, and just the third ever state final four appearance in basketball at the school.

In fact, this is the first time for the Lady Indians to capture the region championship and make it to the state final four in the same year. The 2000 and 2008 Lady Indians finished second in their region tournaments, to Buford in 2000 and to Social Circle in 2008, but outlasted the Lady Wolves and Lady Redskins by two rounds in the state playoffs in the respective years.

A wrap up basketball article is planned for next week's Herald with a look at how this year's Lady Indian and Indian opponents and Battle of the State participants fared in post season play included.

For now, congratulations to the Lady Indians for a great season and thanks for the memories you have created for yourselves and your fans.

Cowart propels Lady Indians into third Final Four in 14 years

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Last Tuesday, The Towns County Lady Indians reached a milestone previously achieved on only two prior occasions when a field goal by Kelsie Cowart as time expired put them in the Class A Public State Final Four Tournament in a home court victory over the Claxton Lady Tigers.

The Lady Indians escaped a late run by the Lady Tigers with Cowart quickly giving them a lead on two occasions following tying Claxton baskets in the final 2:42 of the game.

With the victory, the Lady Indians earned their first trip to the state final four since 2008 with the only trip prior to that having occurred in 2000.

The win set the stage for a rematch with the Gordon Lee Lady Trojans of Chickamauga in the State Semi-Finals on Friday at Fort Valley University in Fort Valley near Macon. The Lady Trojans took a 70-69 victory in overtime over the Lady Indians on the last shot in the consolation game of the Battle of the States Tournament back in December.

The small town of Claxton in Evans County has been known far and wide for many years as the fruit cake capital of the world but they proved to have an excellent high school girls basketball team as well. The Lady Tigers entered the game with a 21-8 record after having finished second in the Region 3-A Tournament in a 35-33 loss to Calvary Day of Savannah and then defeating fellow Region 3-A foe Treutlen 46-



Kelsie Cowart came up big with clutch baskets for the Lady Indians vs Claxton. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

tournament. Four of their losses came at the hands of Class AAA, AAAA, and AAAAA teams with three having been to Calvary Day and the other to Treutlen. On the other hand, six of their victories came at the expense of Class AA and AAA teams.

The Lady Tigers opened the game with a trey and a deuce for a 5-0 lead less than a minute into the game before a trey by Eryn Cochran and a deuce by Stephanie Patton got the Lady Indians even at 5-5 at the 5:25 mark of the first quarter. A drive for two points by Cochran at 4:51 matched a similar basket by the Lady Tigers for a 7-7 standoff but the Lady Tigers would lead for most of the remaining minutes of the first half.

They held a 14-9 lead after one quarter and sank a field goal just eleven seconds into the second for what would turn out to be their biggest lead of 16-9.

Here came the Lady Indians after that, however, as they went on one of their extended scoring runs lasting until near the end of the third quarter.

The Lady Indians finished the quarter on a 16-9 run with Cochran beginning the run with two free throws and a field goal after coast to coast runs. She also finished the run with a steal and coast to coast run for the Lady Indians' first lead of 23-22 at 2:12 and two free throws following a Claxton trey for a 25-25 standoff at intermission. In between Cochran's heroics, Dadrian Blythe got the Lady Indians within 16-15 on a field goal and Patton and Karlie Albach sank treys in reducing Lady Tiger leads to 20-18 and 22-21.

The Lady Indians continued their good work in the third quarter when baskets by Blythe and Cochran got them ahead

29-25, Cowart matched a Lady Tiger goal for a 31-27 score, and they followed a Claxton trey at 4:35 for just a 31-30 lead with a 7-0 run for a 38-30 lead by the 2:03 mark. Two field goals by Cowart and one by Patton highlighted that run and the Lady Indians appeared on the verge of taking total control of the game with a 29-14 run since the 7:12 mark of the second quarter.

But the momentum swung toward the Lady Tigers after Cochran, who had played outstanding basketball under the cloud of three fouls since the six minutes mark of the second quarter, was charged with her fourth at the 1:04 mark and went to the bench for awhile. The Lady Tigers sank a trey at thirty five seconds for a 38-33 score entering the fourth quarter and they then sank a deuce at 7:32 of the fourth in edging to within 38-35.

Patton drove the lane for a three point play at 7:18 to give the Lady Indians some breathing room with a 41-35 lead and they had chances for additional points over a period of nearly five minutes but the shots wouldn't fall in the basket despite the return of Cochran to the lineup at the 5:54 mark. In the meantime, the Lady Tigers sank a field goal at 4:47, two free throws at 4:03, and another field goal at 2:42 for a 41-41 tie.

The tie wouldn't last long, however, as Cowart sank two clutch free throws at 2:22 for a 43-41 lead the Lady Indians would hold until the half minute mark when a final Lady Tiger field goal tied it again at 43-43. The Lady Indians then chose to hold the ball and go for the win on one shot.

Following a Lady Indian

time out with 6.4 seconds on the clock, Cowart inbounded the ball from the side line to Cochran and quickly moved toward the free throw lane with Cochran passing the ball to Blythe near the foul line and Blythe following with a pass to Cowart who was right in front of the basket. Cowart lifted the ball just over the front of the rim and softly into the basket with the Lady Indian celebration beginning by a large crowd in support of the Lady Indians, even while the last couple of seconds clicked off the clock.

The Lady Indians had earned their third Final Four berth in 14 years with the winning basket bringing memories to long time followers of the team of the even more dramatic circumstances of that first trip in 2000 and the presence of a common name involved in the two finishes.

While the winning basket this year came on a Dadrian Blythe assist to Cowart, the winning three point play in a truly heart stopping 55-54 Lady Indian victory over Landmark Christian of Fairburn came that year with 4.1 seconds on the clock on a Brandy Mc-

Nabb (Warren) assist to Candice Blythe (Thompson), Dadrian's older sister. That victory took place before a packed house at Floyd College near Rome.

And for those who enjoy occasional distant trips down memory lane, this year marks the fortieth anniversary of the first trip by any TCHS sports team to the state tournament, courtesy of a 50-46 Lady Indian victory over Jackson County in the 1973 Region 8B Tournament at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland. Melba Blythe, the mother of Candice and Dadrian, was a vital starter on that Lady Indian team of Head Coach Dion Eller and she scored 12 points in that victory under her maiden name of Melba Hunter.

Cochran led the Lady Indians in scoring against Claxton with 16 points, in assists with 6, and in steals with 5 while claiming 7 rebounds.

Cowart and Patton followed Cochran with 10 points each with Cowart taking second honors in rebounds with 8 and Patton adding 3 assists, 3 rebounds, and 3 steals. Blythe took the lead in rebounds with 9 while adding 6 points and tying Patton for second in assists with 3.

2013 Co-Ed T-Ball and Farm League

The Towns County Recreation Department will be holding registration for T-Ball and Farm League the week of March 11th thru March 23rd.

Co-Ed T-Ball is for boys and girls ages 4 and 5. Co-Ed Farm League is for boys & girls ages 6, 7 and 8. The age control date will be prior to May 1st for boys and girls. Boys and girls ages 6 may play

in either the T-Ball or the Farm League programs.

Cost for these programs will be \$35 per participant. All registration will be held at the Recreation Department. Our hours of operation are: Monday thru Friday 9 a.m. til 8 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. til 4 p.m. For more information please call the Recreation Department at 706-896-2600.