

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports



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Lady Indians crush Georgia Military in first round of state tournament

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In the second ever match up between the Towns County Lady Indians Varsity Basketball Team and the Georgia Military Prep Lady Bulldogs of Milledgeville, the Lady Indians came away with a decisive home court victory on Friday night, winning by a 78-27 score over the Lady Bulldogs.

It wasn't a lot different from the first time the two teams faced each other as the Lady Indians of Coach Dion Eller took a 51-20 win in the Macon Coliseum in the very first appearance for a Towns County High School sports team in a state tournament in 1973. Most everything went right for the Lady Indians on this particular evening in a game that, incredibly, wasn't nearly as competitive as the 51-point difference in the score would indicate.

This was the Lady Indians' 12th appearance in the state tournament in 14 years with Jim Melton at the helm. The victory extended their overall record to 23-6 as they prepared to host the Darlington School from Rome at 6 p.m. on Tuesday this week in the Sweet 16. The winner of this contest will qualify for the Elite Eight round at Marietta High School this Saturday, March 3, at 4 p.m. against the Tuesday winner of a game between Wesleyan and Bremen.

The loss ended GMC's season with a 17-11 record with most Lady Indians fans leaving the gym with perhaps misguided low regard for the Lady Bulldogs who fell victim to hot shooting by the Lady Indians similar but even better than against George Walton Academy in the Region Championship game six nights prior.

It had to be a stunning defeat for the Lady Bulldogs who entered the game with a 17-10 record and had allowed as many as 50 points, and no more than 59, on only four occasions in 27 previous games with five of their prior 10 losses being by five or fewer points.

Further, they had lost by double digits on only three occasions with those losses be-



The Lady Indians advance to the Sweet 16.

Photo by James Reese

ing by scores of 57-24 to Class AAAA Tucker, 39-12, to the state's currently 8th-ranked Class AAAAA Lowndes of Valdosta, and 59-45 to Hancock Central of Sparta, against whom they had an earlier win, in their Region 7-A Semi-Finals.

Of perhaps greater significance was just a 35-30 loss by the Lady Dogs to 4th-ranked Class AAA Allatoona of Acworth. Both Lowndes and Allatoona won their respective region championships and have qualified for the Sweet Sixteen in their classifications.

The Lady Indians quite rapidly seized control of the game, beginning with a 3-point field goal by Ali Bleckley just 28 seconds into the game. They brushed aside a game tying trey by Georgia Military just 40 seconds later when a trey by Gabby Arencibia at 6:39 mark triggered a 16-0 run for a 19-3 advantage by the 2:21 mark of the first quarter. Arencibia and Bleckley each added a trey and Eryn Cochran contributed a deuce and 4-for-4 free throw shooting as the Lady Indians led 24-7 after one quarter despite a second trey and a free throw by the Lady Bulldogs.

Arencibia then used two more treys and Kellsie Cowart three deuces for 6 points each in the second quarter while Bleckley added a deuce and another trey for 5 points and Cochran four more free throws without a miss as the Lady Indians held a 48-10 bulge on the scoreboard at intermission.

Stephanie Patton included two treys among 9 points and Bleckley a trey among 7



Ali Bleckley goes for 2 of her game-high 19 points against GMC.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

in the third quarter as the Lady Indians led 71-16 entering the mercy rule shortened fourth quarter before closing out a 78-27 victory.

Scoring leaders for the game included Bleckley with 19 points, Arencibia with 15, Cochran and Stephanie Patton

with 12 each, Cowart with 8, and Dadrian Blythe with 6. Seven different Lady Indians combined for 18 assists with leaders being Cochran with 8, Bleckley with 4, and Lindsay Patton with 2, according to your reporter's unofficial tally.



Emily Anderson fights for a rebound against GMC.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



The Starters came out early after putting Georgia Military out early.

Photo by James Reese

Stephanie Patton sets new career scoring record for Lady Indian freshmen

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The beat goes on during a record setting season chock full of noteworthy accomplishments for Towns County High School Basketball. Lady Indians freshman Stephanie Patton has quietly matched the accomplishment of fellow freshman Dallas Manus of the Indians in setting what is believed to be a new all time scoring record for a freshman for the Lady Indians.

Patton actually reached the accomplishment while providing fifteen points in a key role during the Lady Indians' 66-54 Region 8A Championship victory over George Walton Academy but the announcement was delayed in anticipation of making it in front of the home crowd during the opening round of the Class A State Tournament. Due to uncertainty as to whether appropriate to announce a personal achievement at a state tournament game, it is being made now in this newspaper.

As is usually the case, missing score books, from the distant past in this case, prevent considering Patton's achievement as representing an all time school record but there can be no doubt that she holds the record for what might be described as the modern era under full court rules in Lady Indians basketball. Score books are available for the Lady Indians for all except a couple of seasons since "rover" rules allowing limited full court play were implemented during the 1971 season with unlimited five player full court play having been allowed since the 1976 season.

Keisha Taylor (O'Hearn) had set the standard of 287 points scored by a freshman Lady Indian during the 1994 season with Patton asserting that total during the aforementioned region championship game and she has now exceeded the 300 points barrier when including the remainder of the region championship game and last week's state tournament game against Georgia Military. Taylor went on to four years of stardom for the Lady Indians, finishing with a career total of 1,569 points, good for fourth place on the verifiable all time career list behind Nikki Winn's 1,870, Amy Allen's 1,753, and Blair Barrett's 1,699. Taylor followed up the stardom at TCHS with a fine three year career at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia, after missing her freshman year there due

to a knee injury.

Taylor's Columbus State team her senior year of 2001 was undefeated and the top ranked Division II team in the nation by season's end before losing a close battle in the semi finals of the national tournament to eventual national champion Cal Poly Pomona from metropolitan Los Angeles. Another local connection of sorts was present on that Columbus State team as Taylor was recruited for the team by Assistant Coach Jonathan Norton who has since become head coach at Columbus State after very successful stints at Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina, and Berry College in Rome. Norton is a native of Gwinnett County but the son of Towns County natives Junior Norton of Young Harris and the former Peggy Puett of Hiwassee with both being TCHS graduates.

Numerous former Lady Indians have had great "on the record" scoring success as freshmen at TCHS since the 1971 season with six having preceded Patton in scoring more than 250 points as freshmen. Those in addition to Taylor have included Carol Ina Peebles (Ramsack) with 281 points during the 1973 season, Nikki Winn with 274 in 2006, Martha Moss (Hufstetler) with 259 in 1976, Blair Barrett with 258 in 2002, and Sheila Moss (Moody) with 253 in 1972. Amy Allen, who held the Lady Indians career scoring record for well over twenty years missed the 250 total as a freshman in 1983 with 218 points but missed six games due to injury. If scoring anywhere near her 12.1 points per game average for that year would have approached the previous record set some eleven years later by Taylor.

It has been common in articles such as this one to explore the sports careers and connections both past and present in Towns County for players reaching a high level of achievement and Patton and her extended family members have many admirable accomplishments including, perhaps surprisingly, in Towns County when considering a comparatively brief history for the family in the county. Patton and her family followed her paternal grandparents to Towns County as a result of a long tenure of her grandfather, Dr. Rudy Patton, as pastor of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in Hiwassee. They arrived in the county in 2004 from Oneonta,



Stephanie Patton Shoots a free throw against Dawson.

Photo by James Reese

Alabama, the summer prior to Stephanie's entering second grade.

Of course, Stephanie's older sister, Lindsay, has been a member of the starting lineup for the Lady Indians Basketball Team since her sophomore year except for a lengthy absence during her junior year following knee surgery and she has signed to continue her basketball career at Point University in West Point, Georgia. Further, her younger sister, Emory, was a starter as a seventh grader for this year's very successful Towns County Middle School Lady Indians.

Stephanie herself has played basketball with distinction for teams of great success at Towns County Recreation Department from the third through sixth grades, at Towns County Middle School in seventh grade, and as the leading scorer on the Lady Indian JV's as an eighth grader. Her 2008 ages 10 and Under Recreation team went undefeated and the all stars for that year finished as state runners up.

They took District Tournament wins over Jefferson, Rabun County, and Union County and then defeated Tattnall County and Ben Hill County in the state tournament before falling by just four points to Putnam County in the championship game. Six additional members of that team continued to represent Towns County with much distinction this year. Freshmen Karlie Albach, Madison Johnson, and Alyssa Pyle and Towns Middle School eighth graders Jocelyn Byers, Savannah Dyer, and Brooke Smith have shown

much promise for the future for the Lady Indians with the JV's completing an 11-2 record and the Middle School a 13-5 season.

Stephanie has further played travel ball since fifth grade with all of her teams qualifying for nationals but choosing to not go until last year. That team was among the top fifty 8th grade teams in the country and finished third in the state of Georgia in AAU Division 1. She also played in AAU Nationals with an 11th grade team as an 8th grader last season and will be playing with the Georgia Metros 15 and Under Nike Elite Team this year.

A more recent addition to Patton's sports plate has been participation in golf. After beginning the sport in 2009, she has been selected for the Grand Champion award as the top overall player age 13 and above the last two seasons in the fall Tri-County Junior Golf Association after winning eight of ten tournaments and finishing second in the other two. She also won one of two golf tournaments played in which she participated in Atlanta last summer.

This report would be incomplete without mention of excellence in athletics for several members of Stephanie's family. Her father, Steve, has served as both a head coach and assistant coach for various local youth basketball and golf teams for several years after having played baseball for one year as a first baseman and left handed pitcher at Furman University Middle School eighth graders in Greenville, South Carolina, and the final three years at High Point University in High Point,



Stephanie Patton goes for two against George Walton.

Photo by James Reese

North Carolina. Prior to that he participated in multiple sports, including basketball, in high school in Newnan, Georgia, for one year and then in Oxford, North Carolina, for three years. Stephanie's mother, Paige, played volleyball in high school and competitive beach volleyball during the summers while in high school.

Both grandfathers, a great grandfather, and a great aunt have all made huge marks in a variety of sports, including at state and national levels. Grandfather Rudy Patton answered the call to the ministry and bypassed a potential career in football at Georgia Tech while maternal grandfather Jim Harrison played high school football and was a two time Virginia State Champion in wrestling in high school in Norfolk, Virginia. He went on then to finish third in NCAA Division 1 in wrestling in 1962 and was undefeated and won the National Championship in the 167 pound weight class at the University of Pittsburgh in 1963. He has served as an assistant wrestling coach at TCHS since the 2007-08 season.

Great grandfather Conrad Rehling was a resident of Towns County for the last several years of his life after having served as head golf coach at both the University of Florida and the University of Alabama with several tour players having played for him, including Jerry Pate, Bob Murphy, and Tommy

Aaron. He is a member of the National Golf Coaches Hall of Fame and the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame and was highly respected by such golf greats as Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer. He wrote a couple of books on teaching the disabled and was the founder of golf in the Special Olympics several years ago and played basketball for Taylor University in Indiana.

Finally, Stephanie's great aunt, Mary Holmes, played golf at the University of Alabama, served as women's golf coach at Louisiana State University, and is currently the men's and women's head coach at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland where Stephanie's father, Steve, serves as an assistant golf coach.

This has been perhaps an unusually long article, even for your reporter, but it has hopefully been of interest to readers to learn of some of the history of this scoring feat as related to the Lady Indians and just a small portion of the widely ranging and ultra noteworthy sports activity of Patton's extended family. Congratulations are extended to Stephanie Patton for setting such a prestigious record by exceeding the accomplishments of now legendary players at TCHS and best wishes are extended for the future from this reporter and the Towns County Herald.