

Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports



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Lady Indians win overtime thriller over state ranked Holy Innocents



Lindsay Patton & Jordan Moss attack a Holy Innocents Bear in 76-72 first round state win. Photo by Jim & Lisa Bryant

The Towns County Lady Indians Varsity Basketball Team warmed the hearts of their supporters last Saturday night as they rebounded from a heartbreaking region tournament loss to Prince Avenue five nights earlier with a home court overtime victory over Holy Innocents of Atlanta. The first round Class A State Tournament victory improved the Lady Indians' record to 23-6 and propelled them into the Sweet Sixteen in the state tournament to face Wesleyan in Norcross, probably on Wednesday night of this week. The winner of that game will qualify for the state elite eight and travel to Marietta High School for that game this weekend.

Holy Innocents entered the game as a most formidable opponent with a 24-4 record and with the losses being by just five, nine, one, and two

points in that order with two of these four opponents being state ranked and all four winning at least seventeen games. Further, the Lady Bears themselves were ranked ninth in the state in Class A in the Georgia Prep Country Internet Coaches Poll. And finally they had allowed more than fifty points in only one game, a 57-48 loss to Paidea, until allowing sixty two to the Lady Indians in regulation and seventy six when including overtime.

Although this was the first ever confrontation between the Lady Indians and Holy Innocents, it was not the first appearance in the Towns County Gym for the Lady Bears. They won the 1998 Battle of the States Tournament without facing the Lady Indians and went on to win the Class A State Championship in March of that same season. The Lady Bears were, as in

the case of the Lady Indians against Prince Avenue, unable to take a third win over Pace Academy in the semifinals of their Region 5A Tournament. This left the Lady Indians as a second seed and the Lady Bears as a third for state tournament play, unexpectedly pitting the two teams against each other in the first round of the state tournament.

The Lady Bears stung the Lady Indians in the opening twenty seconds by taking a 5-0 lead, taking the tip and scoring immediately and coming up with a steal and sinking a high bouncing 3-pointer. Just thirty five seconds later, however, the Lady Indians were even at 5-5 on a trey by Ali Bleckley and two free throws by Lindsay Patton. After a Jordan Moss basket gave the Lady Indians a 7-5 lead, Holy Innocents took a 9-7 lead by the 5:32 mark of the first quarter.

A real first half shoot-out continued, however, with the Lady Indians providing more fireworks than the Lady Bears could accomplish. The Lady Indians went on a 12-2 run between the 5:20 and 2:17 marks of the first quarter for a 19-11 lead and held a 23-15 advantage by the minute and a half mark but the lead was just 25-22 at quarter's end. Two free throws by Patton got the Lady Indians a tie at the start of the run and a trey by Gabby Arencibia gave them a 12-9 lead they would hold for the most part until near the end of the third quarter. Patton scored eight first quarter points before

missing much of the remainder of the game in foul trouble while Melissa Conrad included a three point play among seven points overall in the first quarter with Bleckley close behind with five.

Holy Innocents had closed out the first quarter with two free throws and then scored the first four points of the second for a brief 26-25 lead but the Lady Bears struck back with a vengeance. They scored thirteen straight points between the 7:03 and 4:50 marks for a 38-26 lead with Jordan Moss scoring the first eight points of the run and Arencibia ending it with a trey. The Lady Bears avoided disaster by sinking three treys the final 4:13 of the quarter as the Lady Indians took a 46-37 lead to the dressing room at halftime.

The third quarter proved to be a struggle for the Lady Indians as the Lady Bears followed a Patton free throw with eight straight points, largely as a result of Lady Indians turnovers, for just a 47-45 deficit. Dadrion Blythe drove the baseline at 2:39 to give the Lady Indians a bit of breathing room at 49-45 but Holy Innocents continued to rally for a 50-49 lead before an Arencibia basket at sixteen seconds gave the Lady Indians a short lived 51-50 lead.

A Lady Bears field goal with four seconds left in that third quarter gave them a 52-51 lead and, with a single exception, they would lead by one to three points in the fourth

quarter until the final minute of play. Conrad, a senior playing her final home game for the Lady Indians, would leave the home folks something to remember her by, however, by scoring nine of eleven Lady Indian points in the fourth quarter. Her second of four baskets at 5:02 gave them their only lead of the quarter at 57-56 and a free throw at 1:42 and a field goal at forty eight seconds got them a 62-62 tie.

The Lady Bears missed two free throws at 26.6 seconds but the rebound kicked out long with Holy Innocents maintaining possession and getting a late shot off for the win. The shot missed its mark, however, and the game went to a four minute overtime.

The Lady Bears sank a trey at the 3:20 mark for a 65-62 lead but that would be their last lead of the game as it turned out. Arencibia, just a sophomore, responded with a trey of her own at 3:04 for a tie and added another at 2:26 for a 68-65 Lady Indian lead. A Conrad free throw at 1:45 made it a four point lead of 69-65 but the Lady Bears tied the score with four straight free throws by the 1:20 mark.

The Lady Indians then broke through the Lady Bears' defense, however, with Conrad assisting Brittany Walls for a lay-up and a 71-69 Towns lead at 1:10 they would not relinquish. Moss sank a free throw at 33.7 for a 72-69 Towns lead and two more at 25.2 seconds after claiming a defensive re-

bound following a Holy Innocents miss for what seemed to be a safe 74-69 lead but more drama was to follow.

At the ten second mark, the Lady Bears threw up a prayer and it was answered as a 3-point attempt from near the baseline glanced off the backboard and into the basket for just a 74-72 Lady Indian lead. Patton was fouled immediately after the ball was inbounded by the Lady Indians and the cool sophomore sank two free throws at 9.4 seconds for a 76-72 lead which held up when the Lady Bears missed a trey attempt and Patton claimed the rebound as time expired.

Missed free throws were costly for the Lady Indians in their 56-53 loss in the region championship game to Prince Avenue but they sank twenty one of twenty six attempts in this game with Patton providing nine for ten accuracy and Moss sinking seven of eight attempts. When all was said and done, the Lady Indians had survived a difficult third quarter by outscoring the Lady Bears in the first, second, and fourth quarters and also in the overtime period.

The Lady Indians had great scoring balance in the game with Conrad leading with 21 points and other leaders being Moss with 17, Arencibia with 14, Patton with 11, and Bleckley with 7. Moss, Arencibia, and Conrad led in assists according to your reporter's tally with 5, 4, and 3 respectively. T(Mar.3, TchSpts)Jac

Losing a big lead in postseason tournament play is not uncommon

By Jerry Kendall

As a close follower of Towns County High School basketball for more than fifty years but missing the semi-finals and finals of this year's region tournament while actually out of the country, your reporter shares the disappointment experienced by those in attendance when the Lady Indians let a big lead slip away in the championship game. The years of observing Lady Indians basketball bring the loss into some perspective, however, with the knowledge that this was not the first such loss involving Towns County teams and certainly won't be the last in post season tournament play.

In fact, when considering numerous times for the Lady Indians to win huge games in such a manner might bring one to believe that the law of averages simply caught up with the team. Maybe a look back at some of these games might help put the loss to Prince Avenue in perspective as well as be of interest to those who have enjoyed prior trips down memory lane.

The Lady Indians of Coach Dion Eller in the 1970's made great comebacks in no less than three post season tournament championship games and escaped a big comeback with a win in another ultra important situation. The escape came during the 1973 season when the Lady Indians were in search of the school's first ever trip by any sports team to the state tournament. The site was Truett McConnell College in Cleveland with Jackson County standing in the way of that trip in the semifinals of the region tournament. The Lady Indians rallied from an early 8-0 deficit with a 42-15 run for a 42-23 lead entering the fourth quarter.

Holding a big lead late in a game is often harder it seems than perhaps having a close game with continuing intensity and this perhaps being a factor in the game with Prince Avenue. Whatever the reason, however, the Jackson County girls outscored the Lady Indians 23-8 in that fourth quarter with the Lady Indians barely holding on for that first trip to state by a mere 50-46 score.

As a bit of clarification, sub-region tournaments are no longer held but they were a really big deal until around the year 2000 as evidenced by their often being referred to as "the tournament". For decades, the Lady Indians faced rivals such as Union County, Rabun County, Banks County, Dawson County, and others for what might be described as champions of the "neighborhood". Further, these tournaments were the manner teams had for earning an often elusive chance at being one of usually just two teams to make it to the region tournament. Then, just two teams would survive the region tournament for a state

berth.

The 1975 Sub-Region Championship Game pitted the Lady Indians of Coach Dion Eller against Union County on the Lady Panthers' home court. The Lady Indians entered the game with a 19-5 record with two of the losses having come at the hands of the Lady Panthers who entered with a 22-2 record. The Lady Indians found themselves trailing 30-16 at the half and, after reducing the lead to eight during the third quarter, again trailed by fourteen by a 39-25 score entering the fourth quarter, only to outscore the Lady Panthers 21-6 in the fourth quarter for a 46-45 victory.

In 1977, the Class B Lady Indians faced the mighty Buford Lady Wolves in the region championship game at Johnson High School with Buford entering with a 23-5 record and the south sub-region championship. They included wins over Region 8AAA Champion South Gwinnett and Region 8AA Runnerup Norcross while winning the prestigious Gwinnett County Christmas Tournament. The Lady Indians, who entered the game with a 22-5 record, came up with numerous steals in exploding from a 37-23 deficit around the mid point of the third quarter for a 49-49 tie at the end of regulation and a 54-51 region championship victory.

A year later in the sub-region championship game against Rabun County on the Lady Wildcats' home court, the Lady Indians overcame still another fourteen point deficit, this time from late in the second quarter in charging from behind for a 49-43 championship victory. This was likely the then Class B Rabun Girls' best team ever until the outstanding squads of the last two years as they entered the game with a 19-3 record as compared to 20-4 for the Lady Indians. The two teams had split two regular season games with each winning at home and Rabun's only other losses being to the defending Class AA state champion Franklin County girls who would finish as state runnersup in an overtime game that year.

The 1986 season brought one of the most stunning post season wins for the Lady Indians with Dion Eller still at the helm. The site was again Union County with the Lady Indians facing the Lady Panthers but this time in the sub-region semi-final game with the Lady Indians in search of their fifteenth straight trip to the championship game. Union entered the game with a 21-1 record and ranked sixth in the state with the only loss having been an eight point loss at Pickens but later avenged by some sixteen points at Union. Pickens went on to make it to the elite eight in Class AA that year and missed making the final four in a 52-50 loss to Grady High School of Atlanta.

The Lady Indian rally in this game was in the third quarter and the lead not as large as for the Lady Indians against Prince Avenue but it clearly decided the game. The Lady Indians had fallen from a surprising 30-28 halftime lead to a 40-33 deficit near the mid point of the third quarter when they applied a recently developed, very aggressive full court press against the Lady Panthers. Union hardly got the ball across the center line the remainder of the quarter with the lady Indians scoring the final fifteen points of the quarter for a 48-40 lead at quarter's end. The Lady Panthers resorted to fouling the Lady Indians in the fourth quarter to try and catch up but to no avail as the Lady Indians sank one field goal and made fifteen of twenty one free throw attempts in taking a 65-58 victory. The victory ended the Lady Panthers' season without a trip to the region tournament.

The Lady Indians of current Head Coach Jim Melton have had several rousing comebacks go their way in post season tournament play with none more important than a 2000 contest with Landmark Christian at Rome Junior College. The elite eight game decided who made it to the state final four and the Lady Indians found themselves not only trailing 42-29 midway through the third quarter but 50-38 after three quarters and 52-47 with just over a minute left in the game. They outscored Landmark 8-2 the final sixty nine seconds, however, for a 55-54 victory and their first trip to the state final four.

It would require too much space to give complete details of these and other such examples of teams losing large leads but hopefully the accounts of these games can bring a bit of perspective to how suddenly a top flight team can fall victim to a great rally by their opponent. Indeed, the Prince Avenue Ladies have made a habit this year of finding a way to win close games but especially in post season play against not only the Lady Indians but Athens Christian and Whitefield Academy as well. They overcame an eleven point third quarter deficit in winning their opening region tournament game in overtime over Athens Christian when a loss would have ended their season. They then overcame a twelve point deficit near the end of the third quarter

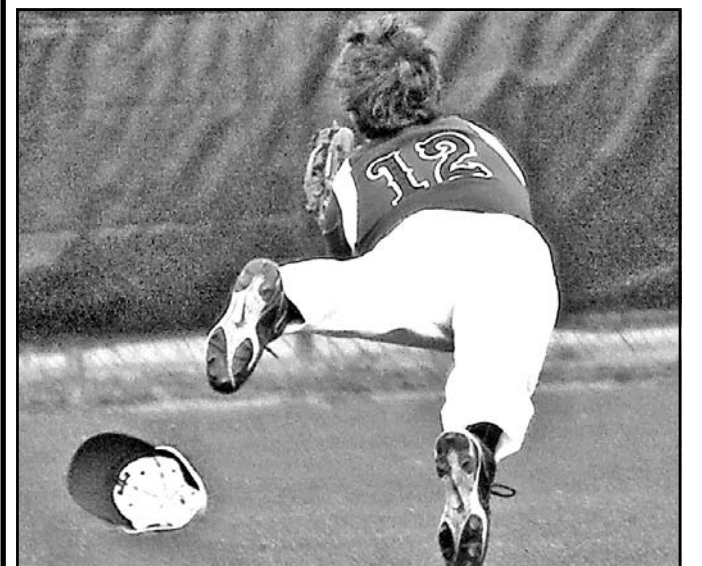
in taking a 51-46 overtime win over Whitefield in the first round of the state tournament last Saturday on their home court when, again, a loss would have brought their season to a close.

While not able to address full details of the above games, it seems appropriate to mention those players providing vital roles in these games who have children and in at least one case grandchildren attending Towns County schools with most being heavily involved in athletics. Melba Hunter (Blythe) was a senior in her fourth year as a starter for the Lady Indians in the 1973 game with Jackson County while Junior Doris Moss (Welch) and Freshman Janine Galloway (Gillfilian) played vital roles in the 1977 win over Union County as did Juniors Galloway and Susan Waldroup (Devries) in the 1977 win over Buford.

All six of the top contributors to the 1986 win over Union County have children currently attending our Towns County School System. Included are Seniors Amy Allen (Silvey), Tonia Haney (Anderson), and Angela Rogers (Kendall) who were all four year starters along with Junior Lana Brown (Parker), Sophomore Tracy Barrett (Moss), and Freshman Rhonda McConnell (Garrett).

It's easy to think of what might have been if the Lady Indians had made just another free throw or two or had avoided just one or two turnovers in the loss to Prince Avenue but the same could be said by all the above and countless other teams of the past when a late lead slipped away. When looking back at this season in future years, the Lady Indians and their supporters will hopefully be able to focus more intently on the many positive accomplishments of a most inspiring season than the one disappointing outcome against Prince Avenue. Indeed, the win over Holy Innocents provides a big step in that direction. T(Mar.3, TchSpts)Jac

Panthers rally for 3-1 season opening win over Indians



Second baseman, Alan Turpin lays out and makes a diving catch in right field against the Union County Panthers.

Jim Bryant

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It was the opening game for the Indians after a 6-0 defeat in a scrimmage game against Rabun County. The Tribe squared off on the YHC field against the AA Union Panthers and for four full innings nothing crossed the plate. Opening hurler for the Indians was Taylor Denton and supported by a cast of experienced players. Several time the Indians put runners on the diamond by failed to plate any runners. Matt Beni singled to right in the first inning and Jimmy Pearce sent a shot up the gap in the third but the Tribe just could not push across a run. On defense, the Indian made several outstanding catches in the outfield, causing Coach Shannon Moss to say after a catch by Alan Turpin, "he does that all the time." The purple Cats put the game in jeopardy in the bottom of the fourth when they got runners on the corners but Billy Meier rifled a throw from third to home and James Mullins put the boink on a Panther runner trying to slide in for a

score. The Indians were still not out of trouble as the Cats loaded the diamond and the Indians made their first of four pitching changes in the game. After moving Alan Turpin to the hill, Denton shifted to right where he hauled in a long fly ball to end the inning, still 0-0.

In the fifth, Taylor Denton walked to first, stole second and motored to third off a single by Jake Mullins. Denton then took off home on a passed ball for the first score of the game, 1-0. Outstanding catches by Denton, Bleckley and Beni kept the game in favor of the home team but in the bottom of the sixth, things changes quickly as a sprinkling of snow began to fall. The Cats tied the game 1-1, also on a passed ball at home. An RBI double plated another feline then an over-throw at first scored the final 3-1 run of the game. Matt Beni was called in relief and was followed in the seventh with another pitching change to John Bleckley who ended the game with a 3-1 win for Union County. Photos By Jim/Lisa Bryant

BASKETBALL INDIVIDUAL SCORING	
Holy Innocents	
Lady Indians (Grade)	
Melissa Conrad (12)	21
Jordan Moss (11)	17
Gabby Arencibia (10)	14
Lindsay Patton (10)	11
Ali Bleckley (10)	7
Dadrion Blythe (9)	4
Brittany Walls (11)	2

TCHS Tennis Schedule

Tues. Mar 2	4 PM	Rabun County	Home
Mon. Mar 8	4 PM	Athens Christian	Home
Tues. Mar 9	4 PM	Woody Gap	Home
Mon. Mar 15	4 PM	Banks County	Home
Thur. Mar 18	4 PM	Tallulah Falls	Away
Fri. Mar 19	4 PM	Hebron Christian	Away
Mon. Mar 22	4 PM	Athens Christian	Away
Tues. Mar 23	4 PM	Commerce	Home
Wed. Mar 24	4 PM	Banks County	Away
Thur. Mar 25	4 PM	Lakeview Acad.	Away
Mon. Mar 29	4 PM	Rabun County	Away
Thur. Apr 1	4 PM	Commerce	Away
Mon. Apr 12	4 PM	White County	Away

by Jim Bryant

State Wrestling Championships
TCHS Timmy Collier 5th (125lbs)

1st Round Class A State Basketball
TCHS 76 Holy Innocents 72

Prep Baseball
TCHS 1 Union County 3

Collegiate Baseball
YHC 12 Potomac State 8
YHC 7 Cleveland State 10
YHC 4/2 Sinclair 3/5

Collegiate Fastpitch Softball
YHC 1 Wallace State 7
YHC 1/2 Cleveland State 4/3 (8)

Women's Collegiate Tennis
YHC 0 Berry College 9
YHC 1 Lander University 8

Men's Collegiate Tennis
YHC 0 Lander University 8