



Towns County Sports

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Elsewhere in post season basketball competition



The Gordon Lee girls won the Battle of the States tournament but lost to Southwest Atlanta Christian in the state playoffs.

By Jerry Kendall
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It's always interesting to follow the results of opponents of the Lady Indians and Indians and the teams participating in the Battle of the States Tournament and the 2012 post season is certainly no exception. A look at the fates of several such teams of perhaps greatest interest with at least some notable success and one with a unique connection to Towns fans will be addressed in alphabetical order as follows:

ATHENS CHRISTIAN BOYS

The Region 8A Champion Athens Christian Boys have won three straight games by three, two, and three points over Hancock Central, Mt. Paran Christian, and Wilkinson County in qualifying for the Class A State Final Four in Macon this Wednesday. They will face a tough task in Turner County of Ashburn a team that has crushed three opponents by an average of 27.3 points in qualifying for the final four appearance.

DAWSON COUNTY GIRLS AND BOYS

The very young Dawson County Girls, who lost three decisions to the Lady Indians this year, came within an eyelash of pulling a major upset over East Hall in the quarterfinals of the Region 8AA Tournament. They had the ball six times late in the game with a chance to take the lead, including when they missed a lay up with three seconds remaining that would have given them a one point victory and a trip to the state tournament. The East Hall girls followed the near loss, which

Photo by James Reese

would have left them out of the state tournament, by defeating Union County by nine points in the region semi finals and North Oconee by one point in the Region 8AA Championship Game.

They then took a ten point decision over Dade County before falling in the Sweet Sixteen Round of the state tournament to Lovett of Atlanta by one point. East Hall finished the season with a 26-4 record with two Division I players on their roster with three wins over Region 8AAA Champion and State Final Four foe North Hall. Three of their four losses were to private Atlanta schools—to the aforementioned Lovett and to all star teams from Class A powers St. Francis and Southwest Atlanta Christian—with the other being a 59-56 home court loss to Lady Indians rival Union County.

The Dawson County Boys proved to be this year's Cinderella story among small community schools in Northeast Georgia. They served as a giant killer in winning four games in six days and taking the Region 8AA Championship with victories over East Hall in the semi finals and Jefferson in the championship game included. They followed that up by defeating highly regarded Calhoun and Buford in the first two rounds of the state tournament before missing the state final four by losing a heartbreaker in the Elite Eight Round to Jordan of Columbus by a 48-47 score.

GEORGE WALTON GIRLS

The George Walton Girls completed a puzzling season in the first round of the Class A State Tournament by falling by a 44-

38 score at Hancock Central after having lost a coin toss and being sent on the road as a second place team under a bizarre setup by the Georgia High School Association in Class A. The Lady Bulldogs were very tough in two losses to the Lady Indians but lost several games, including the one to Hancock Central, one would not have expected them to lose.

GORDON LEE GIRLS AND BOYS

After winning the Battle of the States Tournament for the second year in a row, the Gordon Lee Girls lost just two games in regular season to Darlington but avenged the two defeats with a 74-64 victory over the Lady Tigers in the Region 6A Tournament Championship game. They were rewarded by drawing eighth ranked Pace Academy in their opening state tournament game, coming away with a 52-50 home court victory but not so fortunate in their second game against the metro all star team from Southwest Atlanta Christian, losing a 72-59 home decision the same night the Lady Indians fell to Darlington.

Following an impressive fifth place finish in the Battle of the States, the Gordon Lee Boys finished an impressive third in their region tournament and defeated Commerce 62-50 in the first round of the state tournament before falling hard to Wilkinson County 98-37 in the second round in completing a 20-10 season.

HAYESVILLE GIRLS AND BOYS

The ultra young Hayesville Girls completed a very successful season without the benefit of much height with promise of a great future with their final two losses being to teams making deep state playoff runs. They fell by eight points in their conference tournament semi finals to Cherokee, a state final four team which lost in overtime in that round to six times defending state champion Bishop McGuinness. The other loss was by fourteen points to super tall rival Murphy in the second round of the state playoffs with Murphy falling by just a 57-46 score in the final eight round to Cherokee.

The Hayesville Boys saw a marvelous season come to a heartbreaking close after a 29-0 start with a 49-47 loss to Highland Tech of Gastonia in the final eight round of the North Carolina Class A State Playoffs. Included in the great season were the Battle of the States Championship over Southside-Gadsden, Alabama, and the

Smoky Mountain regular season and tournament championships. Highland Tech went on to fall 54-33 to Winston-Salem Prep in the state semi final round after holding a five point lead at intermission. With Winston-Salem Prep having two 6'7" starters and one of those a highly sought commodity at the Division I level, the school gives the impression of being, like Bishop McGuinness in North Carolina and several such teams in Georgia, a private metro all star team taking advantage of limiting their enrollment on their way to dominating Class A in their state.

It is a fact that Bishop McGuinness has become the "Wesleyan" in their state by winning six straight state championships after being admitted as a private school in Class A in North Carolina. In some thirty years prior to their admittance among the small community schools in Class A, small community schools from Western North Carolina had won eleven girls state titles—six by Hayesville, three by Murphy, and one each by Andrews and Hiwassee Dam—with the newcomers successfully blocking the way of several such teams in recent years with Cherokee and Murphy being victims this year.

LAKEVIEW ACADEMY BOYS

After losing a 73-67 decision to Athens Christian in the championship game of the Region 8A Tournament, the Lakeview Academy Boys faced a tough challenge in Aquinas of Augusta in the opening round of the Class A State Tournament and fell by a 70-60 score. Aquinas went on to take a close win over Mt. Pisgah Christian before losing by a 76-64 score to perennial statewide power Whitefield Academy.

MURPHY GIRLS

The Lady Bulldogs of Murphy High School became the most recent of a long list of Battle of the States participants finishing either seventh or eighth in the tournament but moving on to increasing success as the season progressed. The Lady Bulldogs used the talents of three outstanding six foot seniors in rebounding from a 2-8 record after finishing eighth in the Battle of the States for an eventual 15-15 record after falling by a 57-46 score to fellow Smoky Mountain Conference foe Cherokee in the final eight round of the North Carolina Class A State Playoffs. Cherokee pulled away from a 39-35 lead entering the fourth quarter for the win and then took six times defending state champion

Bishop McGuinness into overtime before falling in the state final four round.

Your reporter just recently became aware that Katrina Evans, one of the three six foot stars for the Lady Bulldogs and twice named to the Battle of the States All Tournament Team, is the daughter of TCHS graduate and former Indian baseball and football player Danny Evans.

NORTH HALL GIRLS

It has been forty three years since the last and very likely only season the Towns County and North Hall teams faced each other on the basketball court but the North Hall teams of the last four years have featured the outstanding talent of Mary Kate and McKenna Rushton. They are the twin daughters of Eddie Rushton, a true superstar in basketball, tennis, and baseball at TCHS for four years through the 1975 season so of interest to many Towns County fans.

The Lady Trojans finished as the top regular season seed in their sub-region and won their first tournament championship in Region 8AAA since 1991 with wins over Walnut Grove, Gainesville, and Chestatee. They have followed up the region championship with state tournament victories over Pickens, Carrollton, and Allatoona in qualifying for the state final four for the first time since also 1991 when their head coach, Kristi House, was a player for the Lady Trojans. They have a tall order this Friday when they square off against top ranked and defending Class AAA champion Washington County, a team which has a 62-0 record for the last two years as they enter the game.

RABUN COUNTY GIRLS AND BOYS

The Rabun County Girls had a disappointing 2012 season when considering that they returned every member from the 2011 Region 8AA Tournament Championship Team and had made the Elite Eight round for three straight years. After winning their first fifteen games, they went just 8-6 after that with two competitive regular season losses to eventual region champion East Hall included and particularly difficult losses in post season tournament play. They fell by a 54-51 score in the region semi finals to North Oconee but rebounded to take the consolation game over Union County, their third win over the Lady Panthers, by a 59-41 score. They then had to travel to Calhoun where it appeared they would escape with a three point victory but

Calhoun banked a desperation 3-point shot off the back board for a tie at the buzzer and used the shocking end to regulation in using a 12-0 overtime period in taking a 63-51 win over the Lady Wildcats.

The Rabun County Boys entered the Region 8AA Tournament with a fine 19-6 record and won their opening game by a 59-49 score but lost three straight games after that, to Jefferson and East Hall in the region tournament and then fell by an 80-58 score at Coosa on opening night in the state tournament.

UNION COUNTY GIRLS AND BOYS

The Union County Girls completed a 21-9 season with eight of the losses being to teams ranked in the top ten in the state in their class for much of the season and they got a win over two of those teams, the Lady Indians and East Hall. They had to win two games to make it to the state tournament and reached that goal with wins over East Jackson and Jackson County but fell to defeat in three straight games after that, including their second loss to East Hall in the region semi finals and their third to Rabun County in the region consolation game. They then had to travel to then top ranked Model where they fell by a 57-43 score with Model displaying poor sportsmanship by appearing to be letting the clock run out but driving for a field goal at the final horn. Model went on to lose a 61-50 Elite Eight round decision to Lovett, a one point victor over East Hall in the Sweet Sixteen round.

The very young Union County Boys got a 57-56 win over North Oconee on a field goal with some two seconds remaining in their opening Region 8AA Tournament game but fell far short of victory against the powerful East Hall Boys in the quarterfinal round. Still, it was a pretty successful season for the Panthers who suffered heavy losses to graduation from their 2011 team but wound up with a 13-14 season with most of their fire power returning for next year.

This has been a much longer report of post season tournament activity for TCHS opponents and Battle of the States participants than in most prior years but it turned out that there have been a lot of interesting results in post season play this year without even pursuing any results for the Tennessee and Alabama teams. Hopefully the extended summary has proven to be of interest to readers.

Young Diamond Indians showing strides despite 0-3 start

By James Reese
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Blairsville - The 2012 Towns County Indians baseball team opened the new season twice against a familiar foe - the Union County Panthers.

The start of the first game was delayed from 5 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. due to weather and field conditions. When the rain subsided, the windy conditions persisted.

Second-year Indians' Head Coach Chris Vardo fielding a predominately inexperienced team, sent sophomore Harrison Hobbs to the mound opposite senior Daniel Coyne of the Panthers. Hobbs toed the rubber and stepped up to the challenge. He managed to keep the Panthers and their bats off balance for three solid innings.

The Panthers' senior Phillip Stubblefield hit what appeared to be an out of play foul ball but strong left to right wind conditions seemingly pushed the ball into fair territory in front of the left field foul pole. Taking second base, Stubblefield would score on the Panthers' first hit and took a 2-0 lead into the next inning.

With Coyne in his groove on the mound, the Panthers bats came to life at the plate claiming a five-inning 10-0 home field victory.

Rescheduled from Tuesday to Monday due to the Towns County Lady Indians' state playoff basketball game, the Indians baseball game pitted a home opening rematch versus the Panthers.

In the 2012 Indians home debut, Vardo handed the ball to Dillon Diehl.

Diehl was touched up early by Panthers' junior Zach Odom with a leadoff triple. Odom later scored on a sacrifice fly giving the Panthers a first inning 1-0 lead. The Panthers would add another taking a 2-0 lead going to the bottom of the first inning.

Diehl would help his cause with a leadoff single off Panther starting pitcher Calvin Duckworth. Indians' sopho-



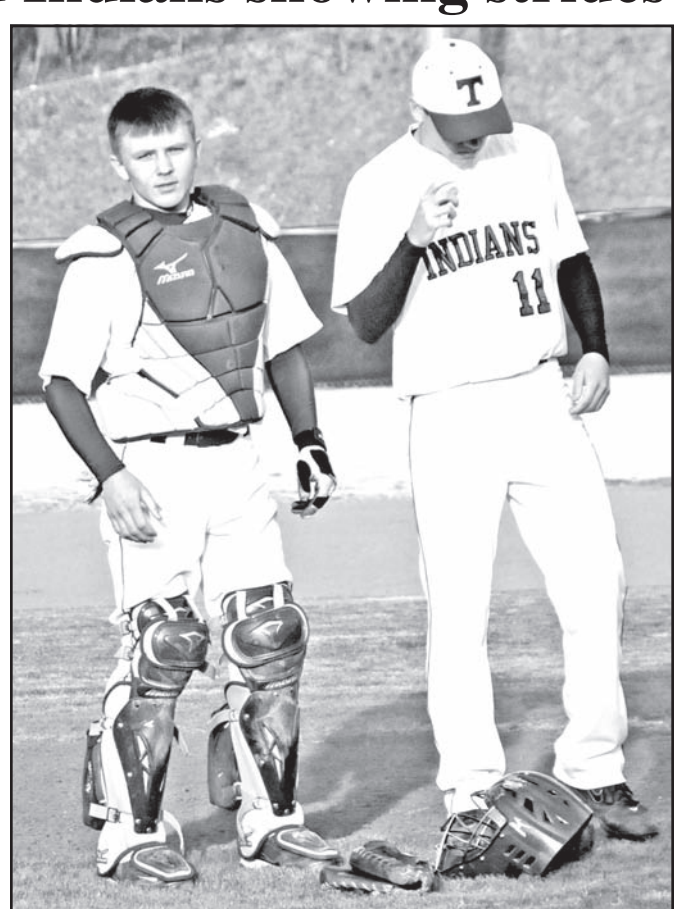
Dillon Diehl aims and fires against the Panthers.

Photo by James Reese

more Vonya Baldwin would later draw a walk putting two on the base paths. Junior Luke Parker smacked a solid single driving in the base runners and knotting the score at 2-2. Following a Brad Smith single, the Indians would take their first lead of the season on a double by freshman Boone Moss giving Towns 3-2 lead.

The Panthers pushed across a run in the top of the second inning tying the game at 3-3. Diehl settled in and was dealing through the top of the third. In the bottom of the third inning, the Indians managed to load the bases with no outs but were unable to capitalize. The score remained deadlocked until the seventh inning when Odom broke the 3-3 tie with a line drive single scoring an unearned run and giving the Panthers the lead they wouldn't relinquish cruising to a 7-3 road victory.

The Indians will travel to Commerce in an attempt to make up a rescheduled Friday game. Results were unavailable at press time. The Indians hosted the Athens Academy Spartans on Tuesday at 6 p.m. and on Friday travel to Monroe to take on the George Walton Bulldogs in a double header starting 5 p.m.



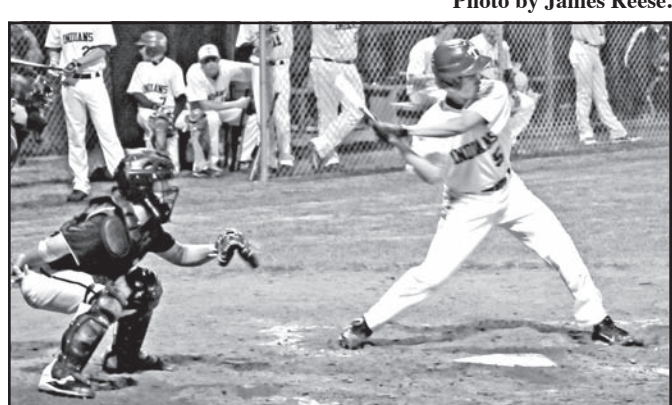
Catcher Vonya Baldwin and Pitcher Dillon Diehl talk it over before the start of the Indians-Panthers matchup.

Photo by James Reese.



The Indians remain optimistic despite an 0-3 start to the season.

Photo by James Reese.



Harrison Hobbs takes a swing against Union.

Photo by James Reese.

NASCAR 2012

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Hamlin wins fuel battle at Phoenix

It looked like the finish of Sunday's Sprint Cup Subway 500 was going to be a nail biter between Denny Hamlin and Kevin Harvick.

With five laps to go in the 312-lap race, Hamlin was leading, but Harvick was getting on his rear-bumper and nearly ready to make a move. With the white flag in sight, Harvick went low to pass, but his No. 29 Chevrolet began to sputter.

His fuel tank was empty. Hamlin went on to his 18th victory, while Harvick, who had led the most laps in Saturday's Nationwide race had to settle for the bridesmaid position.

"At the beginning of the race I would gladly have taken a 15th-place finish," said Hamlin. "The only way we did it was because Darian (crew chief Darian Grubb) and the team kept working on the car."

Grubb was signed on by Hamlin's team after being released by Tony Stewart at the end of the 2011 season.

"We were nervous at the beginning of the race, because we had a 25th-place finish here last year," said Harvick. "We had a good car, things just didn't fall our way."

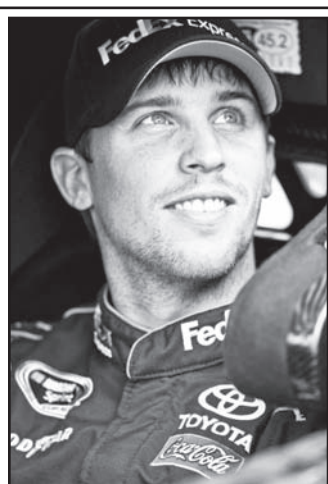
Greg Biffle was third. "We were good at the be-

ginning, but we lost something during the middle part of the race," said Jimmie Johnson, who came in fourth. "We were coming on strong and fighting at the end, we just couldn't get there."

Brad Keselowski, Kyle Busch, Martin Truex, Jeff Gordon, Mark Martin, and Joey Logano were the remaining top-10 finishers.

The track's outside wall received quite a few hits. Casey Kahne, Clint Bowyer, Casey Mears, Paul Menard, and Ryan Newman were some of the drivers that became acquainted with it.

Top-10 leaders after 2 of 36: 1. Hamlin-89, 2. Biffle-83, 3. Harvick-81, 4. Kenseth-79,



Denny Hamlin wins at Phoenix. Furnished by Toyota

5. Earnhardt-72, 6. Truex-71, 7. Martin-71, 8. Logano-70, 9. Kyle Busch-66, 10. Edwards-63.