

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports



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It is official: Bleckley heads to Oglethorpe University!



Ali Bleckley signs with Oglethorpe

By Jerry Kendall
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The last in a trio of talented Towns County Lady Indian basketball seniors has made up her mind.

Ali Bleckley will be a Stormy Petrel in the fall at historic Oglethorpe University.

She signed last week in the Bill P. Kendall Gymnasium like Lindsay Patton and Gabby Arencibia before her.

The Oglethorpe University Stormy Petrels are in Brookhaven in the northern Atlanta suburbs. Oglethorpe head coach Aaron Nester and assistant coach RyAnne Ridge were on hand to welcome Ali on board as a member of the Oglethorpe women's basketball program.

"This experience has been really great," Ali said.

"My team and my coaches have always been really good. We've always been very successful in our careers. We've worked hard for all that we achieved. It's been pretty great. I'm excited to be a part of a new program," she said. "I've always been a part of the same program and the same coaches. I'm really excited to move on to something new and something bigger."

"The coaching staff has always been very supportive in helping us (get) to where we need to be," Ali said. "They've taught us fundamentals for the past four years and helped us have a solid game all around."

Although she was the fourth member of her immediate family to play high school basketball, Ali will be the first to participate in intercollegiate sports. Her mother, the former Cheryl Acree, played basketball

at TCHS and her father, Mike Bleckley, at Rabun County High School back in the 1970s. Her brother John, who was in attendance along with Cheryl and Mike at the ceremony, was then a college capable basketball player for the Indians before graduating in 2010 but he did not continue onto a collegiate career.

Bleckley finished her senior season with 320 points for a 10.7 points per game scoring average on a well balanced team with top players often spending extended periods of time on the bench in the less competitive games. She compiled a 56.8 free throw percentage on 50-88 accuracy at the foul line, including seven for ten in five post season tournament games. She sank thirty eight treys and contributed 4.5 rebounds, 3.6 assists, 0.6 blocked shots, and 2.5 steals per game during her senior season.

One of many admirable traits displayed during Bleckley's career was her ability to take her team on her shoulders and seize control of a close game for her team with two such events most worthy of addressing here. During her junior year, the Lady Indians found themselves in an unexpectedly tough battle at Hayesville and trailed 28-23 before Bleckley struck for twelve points on three for four free throw shooting and three treys during the final three minutes of the first half, including a trey at the buzzer, as the Lady Indians charged out to a 37-32 lead at intermission. They pretty much maintained that lead until breaking away from just a 52-46 advantage early in

the fourth quarter for a 72-49 victory with Bleckley contributing twenty points for the game.

During her senior season, then, the Lady Indians were in a real home court battle with Class AA Dawson County with the score deadlocked at 32-32 near the end of the third quarter. Bleckley struck for 10 straight points on a pair of treys wrapped around a put back basket and a coast to coast drive for two in just 1:10 as the Lady Indians took a 42-32 lead which became 44-37 entering the fourth quarter.

As against Hayesville some 12 months earlier, the Lady Indians used this Bleckley run as a springboard for fourth quarter dominance as they exploded away to a 76-46 victory with Bleckley finishing with 18 points in this game.

The Lady Indians have become known for afflicting destructive scoring runs against their opponents during the last several years and Bleckley has been a major factor in contributing to not only the dominant runs but an outstanding winning percentage for her teams as well. The Lady Indians, who represent one of the smallest public schools in the state, accumulated an overall record of 98-22 in winning three Region championships and one Region runner-up title and making it to the State Class A Elite 8 twice and Sweet 16 twice. Their four seasons ended on two occasions in losses to eventual state champion Wesleyan, once to state runner up Pace Academy, and the fourth time to the highly regarded Darlington School with

both Pace and Darlington falling to eventual state champion Wesleyan.

Bleckley totaled 813 points for her four-year career with the Lady Indians while sharing the stage with a bevy of prolific scorers, including three former teammates—Nikki Winn, Jordan Moss, and Gabby Arencibia—who have all surpassed the 1,000-point barrier to this point. Similarity can be seen when comparing the total of 916 points scored by Lori Barrett (Cunningham) while sharing points with five Lady Indians—Keisha Taylor (O'Hearn), Julie Walls (Giles), Candice Blythe (Thompson), Brandy McNabb (Warren), and Gina Bradshaw (Ditmore)—who all reached the 1,000 mark either prior to or following her graduation in 1998.

Bleckley is believed to be the first Towns County athlete to participate in sports at Oglethorpe University. The historic university known for having many of its campus buildings built in a distinctive, picture postcard Gothic revival architecture style with this area of the 100-acre campus being listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Oglethorpe men's programs competed very successfully for years athletically against major universities but the university has settled in more recent years into NCAA Division III athletic competition. The Lady Petrels recently completed just an 8-17 season under first year coaches Nester and Ridge but showed great promise for the future with just one graduating senior. They

won five of seven games during a late season run followed by two season ending losses with one of those having been in overtime.

The Lady Petrels will be changing conference affiliations for the upcoming 2013 season. The Southeastern schools included during the 2012 and prior seasons in the vast Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference (SCAC) are leaving that conference and becoming the Southern Athletic Association. The move will alleviate distant road trips to such locations as Colorado and Texas with flying to conference games having been frequently required.

Schools leaving the SCAC for the new conference will include, in addition to Oglethorpe, Birmingham-Southern College of Alabama, Centre College of Kentucky, Hendrix College of Arkansas, Millsaps College of Mississippi, Rhodes College of Tennessee, and Sewanee from Tennessee. Additionally, Berry College of Rome will become the eighth member of the new conference after having joined the Division III ranks a few years ago.

Sincere congratulations are extended to not only Ali Bleckley but fellow TCHS seniors Lindsay Patton and Gabby Arencibia who will all three continue their basketball careers at the collegiate level. And thanks are especially extended to all three for the memories they have created for themselves and their fans with exceptional performances in representing their home county on high school basketball courts both far and near.

Indians take season finale in double overtime over Bulldogs

By James Reese
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Saturday afternoon the Towns County Indians' soccer team picked up their third win of the season by out dueling

the Georgia Military Bulldogs in double overtime 2-1. Deadlocked scoreless through the first half, the Indians' Sebastian Palomino, who normally suits up as goalie, broke the deadlock connecting 8 minutes into

the second half. It appeared that the 1-0 lead would be enough to claim the Indians win until the Bulldogs tied the game 1-1 with a late goal at the 5 minute mark. The game remained tied until the end of regulation.

One overtime period would not be enough as the depleted teams would need a second overtime to finish this contest.

Noah Calhoun would end the extended play on a dramatic goal with less than 2 minutes remaining in the second overtime, giving the Indians a thrilling 2-1 victory to close the season.

Ride with the Mountain Miatas

Do you have a Mazda Miata? The Mountain Miatas have formed a group right here in the North Georgia Mountains. We ride on the first Saturday of every month and a few rides in between. Come join us. Call Jon or Pegg at 706-897-3784. (N/Apr25/12)CA

Taking Down Hunger 5K and 1 Mile Fun Run/Walk

*Proceeds for the Towns County Food Pantry and TCHS Wrestling
When: Saturday May 26, 2012. **Where:** Brasstown Valley Resort, 6321 US Highway 76.
5K Run/Walk: Course: 5K Road Course starting at Brasstown Valley Stables. Start Time: 8 a.m. Awards: Top 3 in age groups: 6-10, 11-14, 15-18, 19-26, 27-36, 37-45, 46-54, 55 and over. Cost: \$25 adult/\$30 raceday, \$15 students & kids/\$20 raceday. All participants that register by May 16th will receive a Taking Down Hunger 5K T-Shirt. Extra t-shirts can be purchased for \$10.
1 Mile Fun Run/Walk: Course: 1 Mile starting at Brasstown Valley Stables. Start Time: 9 a.m. Awards: Top 3 in age groups: 6-10, 11-14, 15-18, 19-26, 27-36, 37-45, 46-54, 55 and over. Cost: \$10/\$15 raceday. All participants that register by May 16th can purchase a Taking Down Hunger 5K t-shirt for \$10.

Make check payable to: Towns County Food Pantry and mail to: Taking Down Hunger 5K, c/o Jeff Stowers, 1400 Highway 76, Hiawassee, GA 30546. For more information call or contact Jeff Stowers (706) 835-7934 jstowers@towns.k12.ga.us.

Indians drop another close one to Wildcats; rains continue to plague regular season



Dillon Diehl on the hill for the Indians.

Photo by James Reese

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The wet, dreary season of washouts continued Thursday as the Social Circle Redskins were set to travel to Hiawassee. Overnight rains drenched Kimsey Field prompting Indians' Head Coach Chris Vardo to reschedule the region match up.

On Friday, under blue skies, the Towns County Indians awaited the Andrews Wildcats. The Wildcats escaped with a narrow 3-1 victory.

Scoreless moving into the top of the fourth inning, Wildcat pitcher Chandler Gunter helped his own cause with a leadoff single off Indians' ace starting pitcher Dillon Diehl. The Wildcats plated two runs which would prove to be enough for the win. The Wildcats added another run in the top of the fifth taking a 3-0 lead. Diehl pitched out of the threat with runners on first and second.

The Indians plated a run in the bottom of the fifth following two strikeouts to start the inning. Payton Chambers drew a two-out walk; Boone Moss singled giving the Indians



Boone Moss swings the hot bat.

Photo by James Reese



Cruz Shook drives in a run for the Indians.

Photo by James Reese



Payton Chambers comes across to score for the Indians.

Photo by James Reese

runners at first and second. Cruz Shook followed with a solid base hit to drive in Chambers cutting the Wildcats lead 3-1.

Jake Mullins came in to relieve Diehl and managed to hold the Wildcats to their two-run advantage in the top of the seventh. The Indians were un-

able to score in the bottom of the seventh dropping the decision 3-1.

The Indians played the Commerce Tigers on Monday. The Tigers made a meal out of the Indians in a 14-1 triumph over the Tribe.

Lady Indians live to play another soccer match

By James Reese
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They did it. The Towns County Lady Indians soccer team made it to the play-in game of the first round of the state playoffs.

It was Saturday morning, a steady rain was falling and the visiting Georgia Military Academy Lady Bulldogs were no match for the Towns County Lady Indians soccer team.

The less than desirable field conditions left Towns County Athletic Director Kyle Langford to proclaim it "a miracle" to get the game in. To add insult, overnight lightning struck the scoreboard leaving it inoperable for the day.

With the GMA Bulldogs traveling from Milledgeville, the Indian braintrust found it necessary to move forward with only a slight delay from the scheduled 1 p.m. kickoff.

On this TC Senior Day, Ali Bleckley would score a pair leading the Indians to a 6-1 playoff clinching victory over the GMA Lady Bulldogs.

Kayla Reece kicked in the initial go ahead goal early in the contest. Mackenzie Moss followed shortly thereafter with the Indians second goal. Senior Ali Bleckley kicked a pair of back to back goals, two of her three on the day. Reece fired another goal prior to the half giving the Lady Indians a commanding 5-0 halftime lead.

Returning from the break, the Lady Bulldogs were awarded a penalty kick and successfully converted. The goal would be the only one allowed by Indians' goalkeeper Alex Fagin on the day. Fagin would deny all other shots on goal. Bleckley would boot one passed the GMA goalie at roughly the 8-minute mark remaining in the contest giving the Lady Indians the 6-1 victory and insuring them a spot in the state playoffs.

As of press time no date or opponent has been etched in stone, marking for the fourth-seeded Lady Indians which will face another four seed opponent for a play-in game to be determined.

Head Coach Peter Byrne said he felt like the team stepped up for their seniors.

"They really played hard and gave a little extra. We came out really fast. We pretty much won the game (today) in the first half," Coach Byrne said. "We came out strong, the passing was really nice," he said. "We had a lot of adversity, one of our best players that contributed three quarters of our offense Faith Robinson was missing due to illness."

"We had a couple other players missing but everyone that played stepped up and was fantastic," he said. "It was a great game all around.. Makayla Underwood has played in the back all season, is playing really well."

"We pretty much shut it down all year because she was fantastic today. Ali Bleckley played a great game. It was her last game as a senior. I feel she was fantastic. You couldn't ask



Kayla Reece heads toward the goal for the Lady Indians.

Photo by James Reese



Ali Bleckley races toward the Georgia Military goal.

Photo by James Reese



Taylor Vardeman takes control against Georgia Military.

Photo by James Reese



Alex Fagin clears out the goal for the Lady Indians.

Photo by James Reese

for more. She played her heart out," Byrne said.

Kayla Reece played fantastic. She struggled with injury early in the season, but the last couple of games she's been coming into her own and play-

ing fantastic. She's moving the ball around really well. She's moving off the ball well; she's getting in really good position and putting it away when she gets there. That's all you can ask," Coach Byrnes,

Community Night to benefit Cross Country teams

Mark your calendars to come eat with the Towns County Cross Country teams. We will be having Community Night at Brothers at Willow Ranch in Young Harris, Georgia on Tuesday, April 24 from

4:30-8:30 p.m. Coach Ledford and the runners will be on hand as table assistants. Brothers will donate a monetary portion of each meal tab to the Cross Country teams. Thank you for your support. (T/Apr25/12)SH