



Towns County Sports

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Tough Competition Builds Strong Teams

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It's a very tough assignment to win a tournament such as the 18th Annual Battle of the States at Bill P. Kendall Gymnasium.

But beyond winning such a tournament, the tough competition enables teams to get a learning experience for the remainder of the season. In looking at details from earlier tournaments, it may seem strange to look at some of the seventh place games of the past, but a close look at the teams who appeared in some of these contests gives perhaps the most interesting insight into how tough the Battle of the States Tournament can be.

In 1994, the Cherokee County (Alabama) Girls appeared in the first Tournament with a 7-1 record and ranked Second in Class 4A, with 6A being the highest classification, in their state after having won State Championships in two of the three previous years. They proceeded to lose three straight games to eventual Tournament Champion Smoky Mountain (North Carolina), Polk County, and Walhalla, with the latter two games going into overtime, for an eighth place finish. Of course, the Cherokee County Girls appeared in many subsequent Battles of the States and acquitted themselves well, including finishing second in the 2001 tournament.

In 1995, the Lake Weir (Florida) Girls appeared in the Tournament with a fifth place ranking in Class 6A, with 6A being the highest classification, in their State. Although playing without an All American Player who was injured, they were defeated by Hayesville and Smoky Mountain before pulling away in the final quarter of their game with Walhalla for a seventh place finish.

Although the significance was not known at the time, perhaps the Seventh Place game eventually creating more discussion than any among close observers of the Tournament was the Boys contest in 1996. Polk County defeated Hayesville 50-48 in one of the most intense and interesting games of any year the Tournament has been held. No one could have anticipated it at the time, but the eighth place Hayesville Boys won the Battle of the States and would become almost invincible in future weeks and play in the Dean Dome in Chapel Hill and earn a State Runner-up Trophy in Class A in North Carolina for the year.

More recently, the Pisgah (Alabama) Boys, a very impressive seventh place participant in the 2003 Battle of the States, made it all the way to the Class AAA State Final Four in Alabama that season where they lost by just three points to the eventual State Champion. Further, the Towns County Girls finished eighth in that 2003 Battle of the States but rallied as the season progressed to a 16-12 record and an appearance in the State Tournament, including in the Georgia Class A Sweet Sixteen.

The Towns County Girls finished eighth again in 2004 but again qualified for the State Tournament for the sixth time in seven years under the direction of Head Coach Jim Melton. Melton, by the way, has been a moving force of the Battle of the States for many years as the Chairman of the Tournament Committee who contacts the teams, assures that the vital volunteers are available for service each year, makes lodging arrangements, and much more.

And seventh place games in the 2005 and 2008 tournaments also proved to gain significance as participants from those contests entered post season play. The seventh place Hayesville Boys from the 2005 Tournament made it to the second round of the North Carolina Class A State Tournament and the seventh place Pendleton Girls from 2008 especially surprised observers of that tournament. The Lady Bulldogs battled their way through a third two team field to the state Class AA finals in South Carolina before losing by just a 58-54 score to Marion.

EXCELLENCE IN THE BATTLE OF THE STATES AND CONTINUING - Success in post season has, of course, not been limited to the teams competing for seventh place in the Battle of the States although perhaps more striking. The 1997 Battle of the States featured three teams who would make huge marks in their states during post season play.

The Cherokee County Girls entered that Battle of the States with a 12-0 record and finished fifth by taking nine and five point wins over Frank-

lin (North Carolina) and Polk County following an opening night eight point loss to fourth place Towns County. The Lady Warriors went on to win the Alabama Class AAAA State Championship for the third time in the 1990's.

The Cherokee Ladies were under the direction of Head Coach Jason Shields who currently serves as head coach of the Hokes Bluff Girls who will be making their fourth straight appearance in the tournament this year. The Paideia Boys of Atlanta finished third in that 1997 Battle of the States and went on to become State Runners-up in Class A in Georgia while the Paideia Girls, who finished second in the Battle of the States the same year, made it to the State Final Four in Class A.

The 1998 Battle of the States Girls Champion, Holy Innocents' of Atlanta, won the Class A State Championship in Georgia later that school year and at least two teams from the 1999 Battle of the States went on to prominence in post season play. The Towns County Lady Indians, who finished second to Polk County in the 1999 Tournament, compiled a 24-6 record in winning their sixth consecutive Sub-Region 8A North Championship and making it to the 2000 State Final Four in Class A in Georgia. Meanwhile, the 1999 Battle of the States Boys Champion Andrews Wildcats finished their season with a 24-2 record in winning their Smoky Mountain-West Conference Championship and finishing in the Final Eight in Class A in North Carolina.

Both Union County Teams from the 2000 Tournament went on to excellence in both regular and post season play as both won their Sub-Region 8AA North Championship and had very successful postseason runs as well. The Lady Panthers, who finished fifth in the Battle of the States, made it all the way to the State Finals before losing to fellow Region 8AA foe Greater Atlanta Christian while the Battle of the States Champion Panthers made it to the Elite Eight in Georgia.

The Towns County Lady Indians, who finished sixth in the Battle of the States that year, were no slouches either in regular season and post-season play. They finished just one game behind Union County in their Sub-Region after having handed the Lady Panthers a defeat in the Union Gym. The Lady Indians qualified for the State Tournament for the third straight year and outplayed Greater Atlanta Christian for more than three quarters, leading 33-28 through three quarters, before falling in the Region Tournament to the soon to be State Champions. The GAC Lady Spartans of that year featured front line players measuring 6'4", 6'2" and 6' along with Superstar Sherrill Baker, a four year star guard for the nationally prominent University of Georgia Lady Bulldogs.

The 2003 Battle of the States featured another team in addition to the aforementioned Pisgah Boys and Towns County Girls which made strong showings in post season play. The unranked Battle of the States Champion Fannin County Girls, who had won two State Championships in the 1990's under legendary Head Coach Johnny Farmer got stronger as the season progressed. The Lady Rebels completed a 25-8 season by finishing second in the Georgia Class AAA State Tournament, falling to fellow Region 7AAA foe Gainesville, which featured 6'3" Superstar Tasha Humphrey, later a four year sensation with the University of Georgia Lady Bulldogs.

Although the neighboring North Carolina Class A State Champion Hayesville Boys of 2004 didn't participate in the 2003 Battle of the States, they did encounter strong battles with two tournament participants. The Sixth Place Battle of the States Robbinsville Boys handed the Yellow Jackets one of just two losses, their only home court loss for the season. Further, the Third Place Battle of the States Towns County Boys were within one point with four minutes to go at Towns County and the Indians led Hayesville by a point with two minutes to go at Hayesville before the Yellow Jackets pulled away for seven point victories in each game.

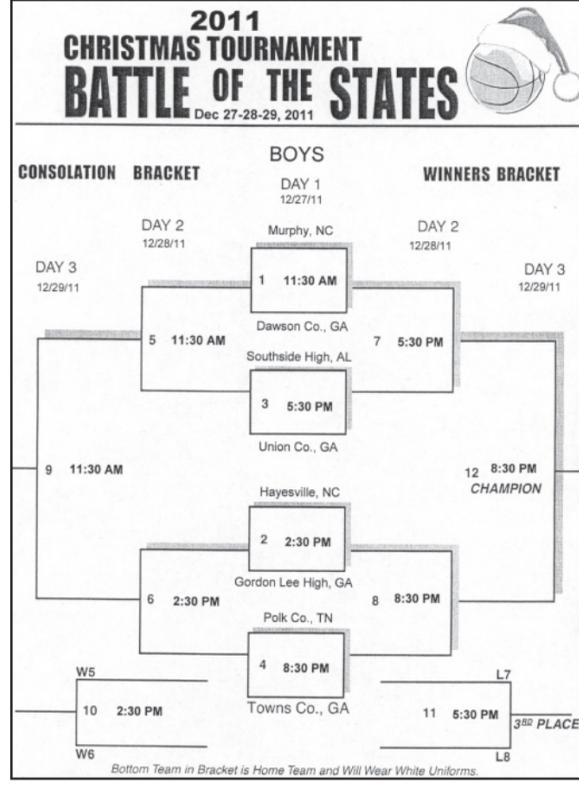
And the Towns County Lady Indians, who finished third in the 2007 Battle of the States, went on to a record setting season, finishing with a 28-4 record and making it to the Georgia Class A State Final Four for the second time in nine years. They trailed by just five



Dallas Manus plays in his first Battle of the States. Photo by James Reese.



The Indians are primed to upset someone at the Battle of the States. Photo by James Reese.



points near the three minute mark before falling in the state semi-finals by a thirteen point margin to eventual state champion Calvary Day of Savannah.

The Lady Indians then followed up runner-up finishes to Polk County in the 2008 and 2009 tournaments with a Region 8A Championship and as region runners-up. Their records for those two years were 25-6 and 23-7 respectively and it required a team of metro all stars from the Wesleyan School in Norcross to eliminate them in the Elite Eight and Sweet Sixteen rounds respectively. The Wesleyan Girls went on to easily win their sixth and seventh state championships, split between Class AA and Class A, in the last nine years.

The Lady Indians continued their stellar run last year, finishing second in the Battle of the States to Gordon Lee but completing a stellar season with a 27-2 record and their second Region 8A Championship in three years. This time they fell in the sweet sixteen round of the Class A State Tournament to Pace Academy of Atlanta, the eventual state runner up to Wesleyan. Pace used incredible runs at the start and end of the game in taking the victory. They sank thirteen of their first twenty shots for a 27-8 lead and, after the Lady Indians battled back for a 45-44 lead, hit their next eight field goal and their next four free throw attempts with three of the field goals being 3-pointers in taking a 69-54 victory.

The most competitive grouping of teams to date in the Tournament would have to be the Boys field in 1995 when five of a total of twelve contests were decided in overtime and four other games were decided by seven or fewer points. A comparison of results of some of the contests reveals the competitiveness of the 1995 Tournament from top to bottom. Tournament Champion Walhalla was taken to three overtimes in the semi-finals by Fourth Place finisher Towns County who was taken to overtime by Seventh Place Gilmer (Georgia) who was taken to overtime by Eighth Place Polk County during the course of the tournament.

Further, the competitiveness of the four games among the top four finishers in 1995 is just as striking when including Second Place Franklin and Third Place Hayesville in the comparison. Franklin won in overtime in the semi-final game over Hayesville while the Championship game between Walhalla and Franklin and the Third Place Game between Hayesville and Towns County were decided by four and two points respectively.

PLAYERS FROM TOURNAMENTS PAST ACHIEVING CONTINUED SUCCESS

individual performers from the Battle of the States who have pursued their basketball careers and some in other sports as well with great success in college, including in Division I, through the years. It would be impossible to list or even know of all the performers who have continued their careers in college but several will be identified here.

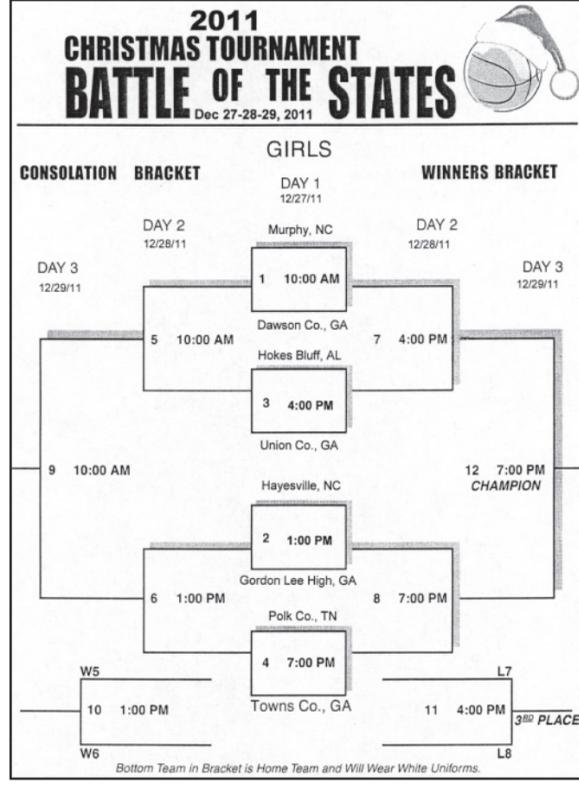
Some of the more notable among the Division I signees are Lee Scruggs, a 6'10" three year starter in the Tournament for Franklin, who went on to stardom for three years at Georgetown University in Washington, DC; Angelina Miller, also a three-year starter in the Tournament for McEachern (Georgia), who was a top player for four years at Georgia State University in Atlanta; and Megan Isom of Paideia, a two-year starter at Georgia Tech. Wynter Whitley of Holy Innocents' finished her career several years ago at Duke University as did Andrea Neeley of Union County at Georgia State University.

Of more recent vintage, two all tournament players from previous Battles of the States both battled injury but had significant success at Division I Kennesaw State University. Nikki Gurley of Union County earned all tournament honors in the Battle of the States three times during her career while Stephanie Scearce of Fannin County made the all tournament squad in her only appearance in 2003. Kennesaw State, by the way, is coached by Colby Tilley who directed Truett McConnell College to a Junior College National Championship in 1980 with Towns County's own Martha Moss being a superstar on that team.

Two other Division I players to mention are all tournament player Matt Womack of North Forsyth from 2003 and Union County's Candace Williams, a three time all tournament selection through the 2008 tournament, who each participated for a year as walk on players at the University of Georgia. Kori Penland of Gordon Lee, a 2007 Battle of the States all tournament player, completed two seasons of basketball at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga before leaving after limited action, in part due to injury, to spend more time working with faith-based groups.

And it just came to light upon his playing in an overtime loss at Young Harris College recently that 2006 Battle of the States All Tournament selection David Pruett of Lakeview Academy (Georgia) is a star player at Division II Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina.

Locally, 1997 Towns County Graduate Keisha Taylor was a top player for NCAA Division II Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia, with the Lady Cougars being the top ranked team in the na-



tion for much of the 2001 season. The Lady Cougars made it to the National Final Four for the second year in a row before being upset in a close decision for their only loss of the season by Cal Poly-Pomona, the eventual National Champion, in the Semi Finals.

Three vital members of the Towns County Lady Indians Class A State Final Four Team in 2000 completed successful four year college careers. Brandy McNabb (TCHS Class of 2000) completed her career in 2004 at LaGrange College as did Olivia Swanson (2001) in 2005 while Candice Blythe (2000) completed her career in 2004 at Piedmont College under the late Head Coach Charles Cooper, the 2001 Battle of the States Breakfast Banquet Speaker. McNabb and Blythe were two year starters at Truett McConnell Junior College before moving on to their respective four year schools. Blythe returned to Piedmont for the 2005 season as an assistant coach and recently served for two years as the top assistant for the Towns County Lady Indians.

Further, Heath Hooper of Towns County made the 2004 Battle of the States All Tournament Team and continued his basketball career at Reinhardt College, now Reinhardt University, in Waleska. He battled injury throughout his four years at Reinhardt but saw some quality playing time, including several starting assignments as a freshman, when able to play. He has followed up service as an assistant coach at Reinhardt

to become a valued assistant coach for the newly revived Young Harris College men's basketball team which holds an impressive 6-2 record at this writing.

Five members of the 2008 Towns County State Final Four team have gone on to play college basketball with Amanda Irwin being the first at Division II Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville for three years. Nikki Winn, Ellie Parton, and Missy Conrad then played basketball during the first year of the revived basketball program at Young Harris College last year with Winn being at or near the top in several statistical categories. Conrad saw lots of action last year, including as a starter, and she has returned and been joined this year by Moss who has seen limited but quite successful action as a freshman. Conrad, Irwin, Moss, and Winn all received Battle of the States All Tournament recognition on at least one occasion while Parton was an All Region performer in Cross Country as a freshman at Young Harris during the school's last year in junior college prior to recently being approved for Division II status.

Three Battle of the States participants appeared in the starting lineup in a game last year at Young Harris between the Lady Mountain Lions and Tennessee Wesleyan. In addition to the presence of Winn and Conrad, former Polk County Wildkitten Candace Cain, a former Most Valuable Player in the tournament, led her team in scoring in a 76-68 victory.

MAC track Holiday closing

The First Methodist MAC walking track and gym will be closed the week of December 26th. It will re-open on Tuesday, January 3rd. NDDec21ZS/CA

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Basketball Individual Scoring

RIVERSIDE MILITARY ACADEMY	Indians (Grade)	
Indians (Grade)	Dallas Manus (9)	13
Ryan Tallent (11)	Ryan Tallent (11)	12
Ryan Tallent (11)	Brandon Henderson (12)	9
Dakota Barrett (12)	Ryan Albach (12)	5
Grant Arencibia (9)	Stetson Hedden (10)	4
Brandon Henderson (12)	Grant Arencibia (9)	2
Stetson Hedden (10)	Brett Barrett (10)	1
Indian JV's (Grade)	Lady Indian JV's (Grade)	
Grant Arencibia (9)	Misty Lindemuth (9)	12
Jordan Jacobs (11)	McKenzie Moss (10)	12
Cruz Shook (9)	Alyssa Pyle (9)	9
Boone Moss (9)	Destiney Blythe (10)	6
Aaron Dodson (10)	Madison Johnson (9)	4
Trace Moss (9)	Bailey Sutton (10)	4
Adam Plott (11)	Karlie Albach (9)	3
UNION COUNTY	Indian JV's (Grade)	
Lady Indians (Grade)	Boone Moss (9)	10
Gabby Arencibia (12)	Grant Arencibia (9)	8
Stephanie Patton (9)	Austin Wood (11)	8
Dadrian Blythe (11)	Jordan Jacobs (11)	6
Eryn Cochran (10)	Adam Plott (11)	3
Lindsay Patton (12)	Cruz Shook (9)	2
Emily Anderson (11)	Brett Barrett (10)	1
Kellsie Cowart (10)		2