

# Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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## Indians meet Rabun County for third place at Battle of the States

### Lady Indians bounce back with win over Franklin, face Hayesville for fifth

By Todd Forrest  
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The Towns County Indians split their first two games at the 30th Battle of the States Christmas Tournament, earning a spot in Monday's third-place game vs. Rabun County.

The results of Monday's contest were unavailable at press time.

Towns County earned a berth in Saturday's semifinal round by pulling away from Murphy, North Carolina in the opening round on Friday. However, on day two, Franklin, North Carolina rallied from 11 down, then held off a late Towns surge to punch their ticket to Monday's championship game vs. Union County.

**Indians 73, Murphy 65** - In a game that saw eight ties and 15 lead changes, freshman Tucker Engert scored 15 of his game-high 28 points during the fourth quarter as Towns County used a late 9-0 run to break open a 60-60 tie.

"We finished well and did the things you need to do to win ball games," Towns County coach Brian Hunnicutt said. "Murphy is a big physical team and we just out-gritted them for the win and I'm very proud of our effort."

All tied up with 3 minutes left, Engert sparked the surge with a dribble drive, and then Jonas Rouse's trey made it 65-60 near the 2:30 mark. After Cruz Kitchens' jumper made it 67-60, Rouse delivered the dagger when he laid in a feed from Engert for a 9-point advantage with 1:27 remaining.

A Murphy bucket narrowed the Indians' lead to 69-62, but Engert put the game away with four free throws down the stretch.

While Towns closed with a 13-5 run, it was the Bulldogs that got off to a hot start, racing out to a 7-2 advantage until baskets from Kitchens, Engert and Sam Sarafin pushed the Indians ahead 10-8.

Up 21-20 in the second following Sarafin's bucket, Dustin Barrett and Rouse opened up a 26-22 lead before Murphy stormed ahead 28-26 at the 3:31 mark. Later, still tied at 32, Engert's deuce sent Towns to the break up 34-32.

Murphy raced ahead 42-39 in the third but Engert and Kitchens answered, pushing Towns ahead 43-42. With his team down 48-47, Mason Pierson's drive to the hoop with 15 seconds left in the frame had Towns on top by a point after three quarters.

Three Engert baskets to start the fourth had the Indians up 55-52, but the Bulldogs tied the game at 55-55, 58-58 and 60-60.

Rouse finished with 13 points; Barrett had 11; Kitchens had 8 points; Pierson added seven; Sarafin had 4 points; Durham chipped in two.

**Indians 59, Franklin, NC 67** - A hot-shooting Towns County stormed ahead 13-3 in the first and 22-11 in the second before Franklin closed the half with a 15-4 run to even the score at the break.

"We knew going in we were going to have to limit [Franklin's] transition points, because they like to get out in transition and start hitting 3s," Hunnicutt said.

An Engert trey with 5:50 left in the third awarded Towns County its final lead of the night at 31-30 before Franklin closed the frame with a 23-3 run.

Down 53-34 entering



Tucker Engert scored 28 points in the win over Murphy, NC. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

the fourth, Towns County opened the period with a 9-0 run courtesy of Pierson, Rouse and Engert, but the Panthers stretched their lead to 60-45 with 3:19 to play.

Inside of one minute, free throws by Rouse and Engert kept hope alive for the home team, slicing the gap to 64-57, then an Engert bucket had Towns within 65-59 with 19 seconds left but that's as close as they would get.

"We went back to doing what we do in the fourth, driving and kicking and we were able to make it a game," Hunnicutt said. "But Franklin is a good team and it was a leaning experience for us. You can't play a great team for 3 1/2 quarters and be successful."

Engert finished with 25 points; Rouse had 17; Barrett and Pierson had 5 points each; Sarafin had 3 points; Kitchens and Durham added two each.

"I'm proud of the Towns County faithful for all their support," Hunnicutt said. "I'm very grateful to Jim Melton for this great Christmas tournament."

**Indians 50, Hayesville, NC 43** - Towns County picked up its second win of the year over the Jackets on Dec. 21.

The Indians led 14-10 after one, 24-17 at the break and 49-39 through three.

Engert finished with 18 points; Kitchens had 10; Barrett scored 8 points; Sarafin had seven; Rouse scored four; Pierson had 2 points; Durham added a free throw.

**Indians 55, Lincoln County 53** - In a tightly contested region matchup on Dec. 20, Towns County overcame a 28-26 halftime deficit and a 41-40 third-quarter margin to escape Lincoln with the victory.

Engert scored 20 points; Barrett had 12; Kitchens finished with 8 points; Rouse had six; Pierson ended with 5 points; Sarafin and Durham had two each.

**Lady Indians** - The Towns County Lady Indians dropped the opener of the Battle of the States to Murphy, North Carolina but bounced back with a win over Franklin, North Carolina, setting up a fifth-place matchup vs. Hayesville, NC on Monday.

The results of Monday's game were unavailable at press time.

**Lady Indians 57, Franklin NC 47** - Ava Thompson hit seven 3s and had 22 points as

Towns County stormed back from a 33-28 third-quarter margin, using an 8-0 run to close the frame up 36-33.

Later, clinging to a 41-40 fourth-quarter edge, the Lady Indians outscored the Panthers 16-7 down the stretch to pull away and end a six-game skid.

"We bounced back with a big win vs. Franklin," Lady Indians head coach Alan Rogers said. "The girls played great. They played gritty and they played hard."

Towns County jumped out to a 12-4 lead after one and owned a 20-15 edge at the break. Franklin pushed ahead 24-22 in the third with a trey at the 5:26 mark, followed by another 3-pointer 80 seconds later for a 30-25 advantage.

Down 33-28 with under 3 minutes left in the period, the Lady Indians made their move. Fain scored in the post, then found Kaleigh Beaver cutting to the basket on the ensuing possession.

Fain put Towns on top via two free throws, then she added a second-chance bucket as the horn sounded, sending Towns to the fourth up 36-33.

"Scotlyn Fain stepped up tonight and showed great leadership," Rogers said. "Kaleigh

Beaver came up big in the post and Ava Thompson knocked down some 3s."

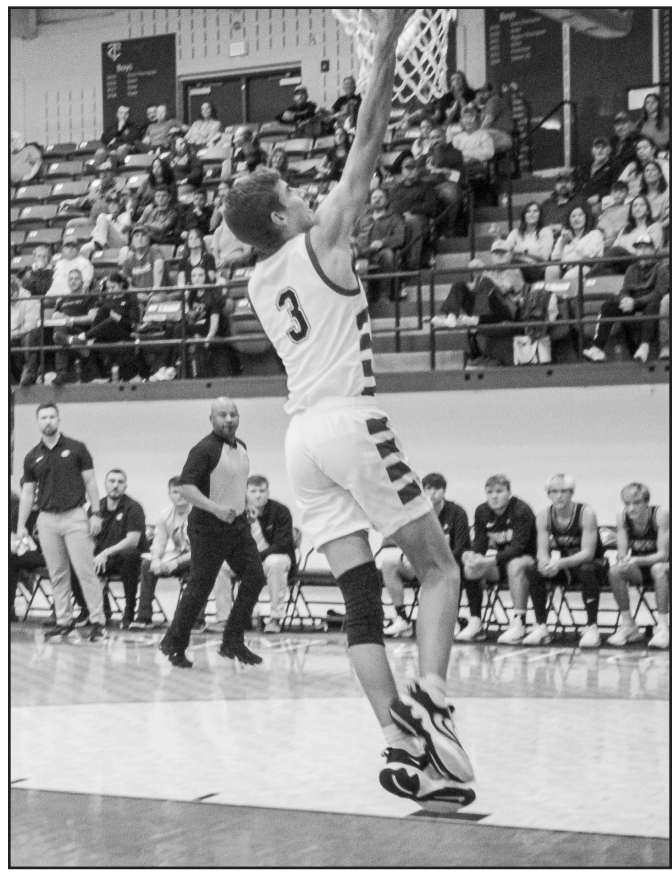
Franklin opened the fourth with a game-tying triple, eventually inching ahead 40-38 near the 6-minute mark, but Thompson's corner-3 resulted in another late lead change. Ansleigh Hardin knocked down three free throws to grow the margin to 44-40 and Thompson hit from downtown on consecutive trips to build a 50-42 margin with 2:50 remaining.

Beaver answered a Franklin bucket with a mid-range jumper, then Towns put the game away when Thompson came up with a steal and fed Beaver under the basket for a 54-46 lead with 1:25 left. Beaver had 18 points; Fain scored 10; Hardin added seven.

"Hardin did a great job handling the ball," Rogers said. "Natalie Barnes and Alaina Murphy handled our defense. It was just a great team effort. I'm so proud of them."

**Lady Indians 48, Murphy, NC 53** - Towns County's late push came up short during the opening round of the 30th Annual Battle of the States.

"We just couldn't get baskets to fall when we really



Jonas Rouse scores vs. Murphy, NC. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

needed them," Rogers said. "But our girls never quit. You can always count on them to always show up and give you their best."

Trailing 12-11 following a back-and-forth first period, Towns County fell victim to a 16-5 second that spotted Murphy a 28-16 halftime lead.

The Lady Indians were able to cut the gap to 38-32 during the third on Thompson's triple, then Fain's free throws kept Towns within 40-34 before a Bulldogs trey ended the frame at 43-34.

Fain countered with a 3-pointer to start the fourth, but Murphy bumped its lead back to a dozen with 4:23 to play.

Fain converted a second-chance basket and Thompson connected from downtown, slicing the gap to 49-42. Towns got within four when Natalie Barnes hit from deep with 1:28 left, but Murphy free throws eventually pushed the margin back to 53-45 with 16 seconds remaining.

Thompson finished with 15; Fain had 13; Beaver scored 12; Hardin had 4 points; Barnes had three; Jaime McCarter added a free throw.

**Lady Indians 29, Hayesville 38** - Towns County

dropped a low-scoring affair at Hayesville on Dec. 21.

"We played hard, we just couldn't put the ball in the hoop," Rogers said. "We got within two [points], but couldn't get over the hump."

Towns trailed 9-5 after one, 17-7 at the break and 22-17 after three.

Fain had 10 points; Thompson added nine; Beaver had five; Barnes scored 3 points and Hardin chipped in two.

**Lady Indians 38, Lincoln County 62** - Towns had no answer during the second half at Lincoln County on Friday, Dec. 20.

The Lady Indians carried a 23-22 lead into the break, but Lincoln's Jannah Norman scored 26 of her 36 points in the second half as the home team outscored Towns County 21-8 in the third frame.

"It was a tough environment, a long bus ride and that girl went off against us," Rogers said.

Beaver finished with a team-high 17 points -- 12 coming in the second frame. Fain had 9 points; Barnes had five; Thompson scored 3 points; Chloe Sutton and Alaina Murphy added two each; Hardin had one point.



Ava Thompson knocked down seven 3s in Towns County's win over Franklin, NC. Photo/Lowell Nicholson