

Towns County Sports

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Indians defeat Hayesville, face continuing misfortune vs Hokes Bluff, Union

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The Towns County Indians varsity basketball team faced three most formidable opponents on their home court in last week's 24th annual Battle of the States Tournament although not knowing when entering the tournament who their opponents would be in the second and third rounds.

The opening day opponent was preset to be Hayesville on Wednesday with results of the games played each of the first two days determining the opponent for each team for the next day's game.

As the daily tournament results became known, it turned out that the Indians would face three opponents with a spectacular combined record of 28-2 when entering the tournament as will be described in coverage of the tournament in the following paragraphs.

Readers will also learn how an impressive opening day win over Hayesville was followed by a day of misfortune, as would be the case for the Lady Indians on the same day, in a near victory over tournament champion Hokes Bluff in the semi finals.

The misfortune of the absence of key players for the Indians then continued on the final day of the tournament but they and their followers must tip their hats to red hot shooting the first half in a loss to Union County in the consolation game on Friday.

Indians 54, Hayesville 47

The Indians took a 73-61 victory over Hayesville in the semi finals of last year's Battle of the States but with both teams losing key players to graduation and with both having newcomers, including freshmen, coming to prominence and the Indians also recently losing the services of 6'4" inside power player Logan Cowart to injury, there was a different look to both teams when the Indians came face to face with the Yellow Jackets in their opening game on Wednesday.

The Yellow Jackets were one of just two teams, with Union County the other, being undefeated as they entered the tournament with a 9-0 record while the Indians entered with a very impressive 6-3 record against a mostly very challenging schedule.

The Indians got a 2-0 lead on a field goal by senior Zach Davenport just thirty two seconds into the game and a basket by junior Will Travis at the 6:01 mark of the first quarter got them a 4-3 advantage in overcoming the first of just two Hayesville leads during the game. Davenport and Travis each added a field goal and senior Bradley Benson a trey as the Indians held small leads until a trey by freshman Kolby Moss gave them their biggest first quarter lead of 16-11 at quarter's end.

Four different Indians put points on the scoreboard in the second quarter with Davenport leading with a trey and deuce for five points for a 29-16 Towns lead at intermission.

The Yellow Jackets used four treys, including one at the buzzer, in edging to within 39-32 after three quarters with Indian highlights in the quarter including two deuces for four points by Davenport and treys by juniors Trent Bradshaw and Brett Denton.

Yellow Jackets senior Josh Cottrell, who has signed to play basketball next year at Western Carolina University, not only sank the quarter ending trey but added two more treys and then two free throws at the 5:09 mark of the fourth quarter for an 11-0 Hayesville run and a 40-39 lead.

The Indians had endured a long scoring dry spell until field goals by senior Caleb Clark at the 4:58 and 4:18 marks got them a 43-40 lead and when Clark's free throw for a potential three point play missed the mark, Davenport made a put back basket and the Indians had a sudden 45-40 lead less than a minute following the Yellow Jackets attaining their second lead of the game.

A Cottrell runner at 4:01 was matched by two free throws by Moss at 3:17 for a 47-42 Towns lead and a trey by Cottrell at 3:04 was more than matched by baskets by



Senior Zach Davenport (left) soars for two and junior Trent Bradshaw (right) with a put-back during Towns' win over Hayesville. Photos by Lowell Nicholson and Todd Forrest



Davenport and Travis for a 51-46 Indians lead at 2:06.

A drive for two points by Cottrell at 1:54 had the Yellow Jackets within 51-47 but Davenport sank the first of two free throw attempts at 40.4 seconds and Moss not only followed with two more charity tosses at 34.3 but seconds later blocked a trey attempt by the Jackets and came away with the ball with the Indians running out the clock for a hard fought 54-47 victory.

Scoring leaders for the Indians were Davenport with 18 points, Travis with 10, Bradshaw and Moss with 7 each, and Denton with 5 while Davenport also led in assists with 7 and five other Indians added one assist each.

Leading in rebounds were Bradshaw with 9, Davenport with 8, and Travis with 6. Cottrell led the Yellow Jackets in scoring with 25 points and was followed by freshman Hayden McClure with 9.

Both Cottrell and McClure have significant Towns County connections with Cottrell being distantly related through his mother, the former Jenny Ferguson, back to Eller ancestry to innumerable past and present top notch TCHS athletes.

McClure was a star player for the Towns County Middle School Indians through last year and he is the grandson of Charles "Chip" Gribble who was a top notch inside player for the Indians' first state tournament team in 1974 and their region championship team which completed a 24-4 season in 1975.

The Yellow Jackets went on to fall 82-72 to red hot first half shooting by Polk County, Tennessee, in second round action despite 43 points by Cottrell after Polk fell by a 72-68 score to eventual tournament champion Hokes Bluff in first round play.

The Yellow Jackets then followed the lead of 22 points by Cottrell in taking their third round game by a 58-47 score over two time defending Battle of the States champion Lumpkin County.

Hokes Bluff 70, Indians 65 (OT) – The Indians entered their second round game against Hokes Bluff with concern about a strong inside presence for the Eagles in view of the absence of the injured Logan Cowart who had averaged 15.1 points per game and was the Indians' leading rebounder in seven games prior to his injury.

Little did they know, however, that the loss of inside strength would take a further downward turn during first quarter action when junior Trent Bradshaw, their leading rebounder in the victory over Hayesville, became ill and had to leave the game and also miss the third round game against

Union County as well.

And the addition of the loss of junior Will Travis, the Indians' third leading rebounder against Hayesville, on fouls near the mid point of the fourth quarter would prove to be just enough to deprive them of a victory and a trip to the tournament championship game against Murphy as will be described.

Of course, the capabilities of the Eagles team was a tough issue to face as well as they entered the tournament with a 10-2 record with the two losses having been an early season loss to their neighbor and fellow Battle of the States participant Piedmont and a loss on a last second shot just six days prior to Oneonta, Alabama's top ranked Class AAAA team which improved to a 15-0 record with the win over the Eagles.

At any rate, the Indians proved that they had come to play as did the Eagles with an awesome battle the first half involving seven ties and nine lead changes. Five different Indians would put points on the scoreboard in each of the first two quarters with senior Zach Davenport including a trey among five first quarter points and five for six free throw shooting among seven points in the second.

Senior Bradley Benson contributed a trey in each of the first two quarters, senior Evan Berrong and Travis a deuce in each quarter with Travis adding two free throws in the second, and freshman Kolby Moss a trey in the second quarter. Of great significance in the first quarter, however, was the loss of Bradshaw to illness after his having contributed a field goal for two points and two rebounds before departing.

The Indians had completed second quarter action with a 7-0 run the final 2:22 of playing time on two free throws and a field goal by Davenport and a trey by Benson and they would maintain their lead throughout the third quarter and more than a minute into the fourth.

Davenport contributed six points, Berrong four, and junior Brett Denton two with all of the points coming on deuces during third quarter action with the Indians' biggest lead being 39-32 on Berrong's second basket of the quarter at the 5:38 mark.

The Indians held a 45-42 lead entering the fourth quarter but two putback baskets by the Eagles got them a 46-46 tie at 6:41. A trey by Moss at 6:26 gave the Indians a 49-46 lead but a field goal and two free throws had the Eagles ahead 50-49 at 5:19 with this being the first of four lead changes between that point and the 4:17 mark. A drive for two points by Davenport at 5:06 gave the Indians a 51-50 lead and Moss

struck for his second trey of the quarter and third of the game for a 54-52 Indians lead at 4:17 following an Eagles putback for a 52-51 advantage at 4:35.

A free throw following Travis' fifth foul at the 3:59 mark was matched by one by Moss at 3:15 for a 55-53 Indians lead but a turnover and tip in following a missed shot got the Eagles a 55-55 tie at 2:44.

Neither team could put points on the scoreboard after that until Moss sank a short jumper at fifty three seconds for a 57-55 Towns with the basket by Moss giving him nine points in the quarter, a remarkable total for a freshman against a top notch team but especially when considering that each of the three field goals gave the Indians a lead.

The lead held up until the closing seconds when the absence of Cowart, Bradshaw, and Travis proved to be too much for the Indians to prevent several putback attempts by the Eagles who got a trip to the foul line with 6.7 seconds on the clock and sank two free throws for a 57-57 tie.

Davenport was able to drive the length of the court and get off a quick shot which fell off the rim at the buzzer, sending the game to a four minutes overtime.

The Eagles would sink four of six free throw attempts, ending at exactly the two minutes mark for a 61-57 lead. The Indians would reduce the Eagles lead to two points on three occasions on two free throws by Davenport at the 1:48 and 1:11 marks and a field goal by Denton at forty four seconds but the Eagles would match the Indians points with putback baskets on all three occasions for a 67-63 lead at thirty eight seconds and sink three of four free throw attempts for a 70-63 lead by the 11.1 mark. Moss was fouled on a trey attempt at 7.1 seconds and sank two for three attempts in setting the final score at 70-65 in favor of the Eagles.

It's a tribute to the Indians' defense to report that, according to your reporter's notes, seventeen of twenty eight Hokes Bluff points, ten in the fourth quarter and seven in overtime, came on putback field goals or free throws resulting from putback attempts.

One certainly can't fault the Eagles for enjoying the advantage of the Indians being shorthanded on rebounding strength due to injury, illness, and foul trouble. But one can't fault the Indians and their followers for thinking of what might have been when considering the 70-67 loss without the presence of the injured Adam Barrett in last year's Battle of the States championship game and under the circumstances described affecting their failure to get to the championship game this year.

Davenport took the scoring lead for the game with 24 points with other leaders being Moss with 14, Berrong with 9, and Benson and Travis with 6 each while Davenport again led in assists with 9 and four other Indians contributing one each. Leading in rebounds were Travis with 7 and Berrong and Davenport with 6 each. The Eagles were led in scoring by their two inside power players, junior Hayden Lipscomb with 24 points and senior Landon Johnson with 21 while junior Donovan Greaves added 11, including the game tying free throws with 6.7 seconds left in regulation.

The victory by the Eagles qualified them for the Battle of the States championship game with the loss by the Indians sending them to the third place game against the Union County Panthers who saw their 10-0 start come to an end when they fell in the other semi final match up to Murphy by a 79-72 score.

Union County 82, Indians 59 – The aforementioned unavailable Logan Cowart having contributed 22 and 18 points and Trent Bradshaw having scored eight and seven points in two earlier seven and eight point losses to Union County, most any observer might not be surprised for the Panthers to have quite an advantage in the third place game in the Battle of the States Tournament on Friday but not quite in the manner that took place in the game.

The Indians came out as against Hokes Bluff ready to play with two treys by senior Bradley Benson giving the Indians 3-0 and 6-4 leads by the 6:14 mark of the first quarter and a trey by freshman Kolby Moss giving them a 9-6 advantage at 5:14.

One would probably not, however, expect an avalanche of points by the Panthers who went on a 25-3 run between the 4:53 mark of the first quarter and 7:01 of the second for a 31-12 bulge.

The Indians recovered a bit the remainder of the quarter with senior Zach Davenport contributing a trey and two deuces for seven points and Moss a trey for three and senior Evan Berrong a field goal and free throw for three but the Panthers still extended their lead to 54-25 at intermission.

The Panthers included seven treys in first half action while sinking an incredible eighty percent of their field goal attempts according to Indians statistician Kendall Floyd.

The Panthers extended their lead to 78-41 after three quarters despite all Indian sixteen points by Davenport before the Indians closed the final margin to 82-59 by game's end with Benson and Davenport contributing five

points each, senior Caleb Clark four, and senior Cole Ledford and junior Trevor Bradley two each. It was the first varsity appearance for Bradley who is a regular member of the Indians JV team.

Davenport took scoring honors for the Indians with 29 points with other leaders being Benson with 11 and Clark and Moss with 6 each. Seven different Indians combined to contribute ten assists with Davenport leading with 3 and followed by Clark with 2.

Leading in rebounds were Davenport and junior Will Travis with 5 each and Moss with 3. Davenport was named to the Battle of the States all tournament team on the strength of 71 points, 19 assists, and 19 rebound during the three games.

The senior laden Panthers team was actually led in scoring in this game by sophomores Sawyer Drake and Pierson Allison with 20 and 19 points respectively along with senior Patrick Baggett with 11. The Panthers completed the 2017 portion of their season with an 11-1 record while the Indians finished at 7-5, including 2-1 in Region 8A.

With the Murphy Bulldogs having ended Union County's undefeated 10-0 opening season run by a 79-72 score in the semi finals of the tournament and Union taking the decisive victory over the Indians in the third round, most observers probably expected Murphy to handle Hokes Bluff pretty easily in view of the Eagles having all they could handle in defeating the Indians one night earlier.

But wait, that was not to be the case as Hokes Bluff exploded out to a 21-4 lead after one quarter and never looked back in leading 30-13 at intermission and 50-27 after three quarters in coasting to a 63-33 championship victory.

Many have tried but likely no one has fully succeeded in explaining such unexpected turns of events in sports activity but a few valid reasons include the issue of who is hot and who is not, difficult match ups against some teams but not others, and injury and illness.

TCHS basketball scheduling alert

Decisions about rescheduling the home games against Lakeview Academy and Southeast Whitfield County postponed by snow have been completed. The Lakeview Academy games have been rescheduled for Saturday, January 13 while the games against Southeast Whitfield County which were rescheduled for this Thursday, January 4, have now been canceled and will not be made up.