

Towns County Sports

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Indians defeat Piedmont, Hayesville, lose heartbreaker to Lumpkin in Finals

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The Towns County boys with their second place trophy following the Championship Game on Friday. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

The Towns County Indians Varsity Basketball Team came oh so close to that elusive Battle of the States Championship last week in the Towns County Gym by taking victories over Piedmont, Alabama, and Hayesville in the two opening rounds and leading for most of the championship game before falling 70-67 to a 12-4 finish by Class AAA Lumpkin County. This was the third confrontation between the two teams who wound up splitting a pair of three point decisions in the Towns County Gym while Lumpkin took a more decisive victory over an ailing Indians team in Dahlonega just ten days earlier.

Indians 60, Piedmont 55 – The Indians took on the Piedmont Bulldogs, a traditional sports power in Alabama in their opening game of the Battle of the States last Wednesday. The Bulldogs recently celebrated their second straight Class AAA Alabama State Football Championship after finishing as runners up in the Battle of the States behind Hayesville two years ago and then as state runners up later in that season to Madison Academy, a private school from the Huntsville area.

The Bulldogs entered the tournament with a 4-5 record with hopes of using the Battle of the States as a springboard as in past years to continued excellence in basketball.

The game turned out to be a real battle with the Indians leading for most of the game but by just a single point at the first two quarter breaks and the Bulldogs by a point after three quarters with the Indians finally coming away with a hard fought 60-55 victory. There were two lead changes and two ties by the 2:39 mark of the first quarter with a basket by senior Will De Vries at 2:20 giving the Indians a 12-10 lead they would hold with the exception of a brief tie throughout the remainder of the first half, including by a 14-13 score after one quarter. De Vries contributed seven points and junior Zach Davenport four in first quarter play.

The Indians appeared to be taking control of the game at the start of the second quarter with a 10-0 run highlighted by two baskets each by De Vries and senior Major Moss by the 4:20 mark for a 24-13 lead but they went stone cold after that for awhile with the Bulldogs rallying for a 24-24 tie at 1:51. The Indians ended their scoring woes beginning at 1:25 with a 5-0 run for a 29-24 lead at forty six seconds which became just 29-28 at intermission. De Vries and Moss completed the quarter with six and five points respectively.

The Indians opened the third quarter with an 11-5 run highlighted by two deuces and a trey by Moss for a 40-33 lead with 4:13 on the clock but the Bulldogs followed with two treys with the second coming on an inadvertent bank shot

and accompanied by a free throw for a four point play and a 40-40 tie which became a 44-43 Bulldog lead entering the fourth quarter.

Four different Indians put points on the scoreboard in a 9-0 run at the start of the fourth quarter, ending on a three point play by Davenport for a 52-44 Indian lead by the 4:40 mark. But here came the Bulldogs again with the Indians bending but not breaking as a 7-0 run by the 3:34 mark had Piedmont knocking on the door with just a 52-51 deficit.

A basket by sophomore Trent Bradshaw gave the Indians a 54-51 lead but it was matched by two Bulldog free throws for a 52-51 Towns lead at 2:14. The Indians would follow with six straight points on a free throw and field goal by De Vries, a basket by Davenport, and a free throw by Moss for a 60-53 lead by the 4.6 seconds mark and the Bulldogs sank an uncontested field goal at the buzzer setting the Indians' final margin of victory at 60-55. Davenport and De Vries contributed six and five points respectively during the final quarter for the Indians.

Scoring leaders for the game for the Indians were De Vries with 20 points, Moss with 14, Davenport with 11, and junior Logan Cowart with 7 while leaders in assists were Moss with 4 and Davenport and De Vries with 2 each. Leading in rebounds were Cowart with 10 and De Vries and Moss with 7 each. Scoring leaders for the Bulldogs were senior Austin Brazier with 18 points, sophomores TJ Fairs and Carl Myers with 13 and 11 respectively, and senior football star Taylor Hayes who is likely headed to Jacksonville State for football with 10.

Indians 73, Hayesville 61 – The Indians sprang out to 10-0 and 14-2 leads in less than three and a half minutes at the start of the semi-final game against Hayesville on Thursday and responded to a late

second and early third quarter rally by the Yellow Jackets for a near tie with another dominant run leading to a 73-61 victory. The persistent Yellow Jackets would never let the Indians attain a very comfortable margin the remainder of the game but the Indians would have a response each time they received a significant challenge.

The powerful presence of Logan Cowart inside with eleven first quarter points was supported by a trey each by Will De Vries and Zach Davenport and eight and seven points respectively as the Indians built a 26-14 lead after one quarter. The Indians had a 33-20 advantage by the 4:34 mark of the second quarter as field goals by Major Moss and De Vries and a steal and three point play by Davenport more than matched the Yellow Jackets' third and fourth treys of the game.

The Indians would go ice cold after that for awhile, however, as the Jackets included two more treys in finishing the quarter on an 11-2 run interrupted only by a Moss basket for just a 35-31 deficit at intermission. A quick trey opening the third quarter had the Yellow Jackets knocking on the door with just a 35-34 deficit only to see the Indians respond with another scoring barrage.

Davenport got it started with a trey just fourteen seconds after the opening Hayesville trey as the Indians finished the third quarter on a 21-11 run for a 56-45 lead entering the fourth quarter despite three more treys by the Jackets giving them thirty of their forty five points from behind the three point arc. Highlights for the Indians during the run were seven points by Davenport, five by Cowart, and two reverse layups for four points by junior Cole Ledford the final fifty five seconds on alert passes from Davenport and Moss.

Moss had an answer for two points to the basket for two points when the Yellow Jackets edged to

within 63-56 at the 3:34 mark of the fourth quarter and Davenport used a drive for two points in response to a 65-58 challenge with Moss following with a pair of free throws for a 69-58 Towns lead with thirty five seconds on the clock. The Jackets' twelfth and final trey at twenty eight seconds for a 69-61 score was answered by Moss, Ledford, Davenport, and De Vries all sinking one of two free throw attempts during the final seventeen seconds for a 73-61 Indian margin of victory.

Davenport led the Indians in scoring for the game with 20 points and was followed by Cowart with 19, De Vries with 16, Moss with 13, and Ledford with 5. Moss took the lead in assists with 8 with other leaders being Davenport with 4 and Cowart with 2. Moss also led in rebounds with 10 and was followed by De Vries with 8 and Cowart and Davenport with 5 each.

Lumpkin County 70, Indians 67 – It is a challenging task for your reporter to provide details of a game which saw the Indians come so very close against difficult odds of winning their school's first Battle of the States championship in the twenty three year history of the event only to fall so agonizing short of victory in a loss to Lumpkin County in the championship game on Friday night. But readers may wonder what were the difficult odds the Indians faced to which your reporter made reference.

First and foremost was the absence of the towering presence of the Indians talented senior Adam Barrett who made his presence known during three prior years on the team, including as a starter as a sophomore and junior, before a severe ankle injury suffered in a preseason scrimmage game.

Has had him sidelined to this point in the season. Another factor is the small versus large scenario faced by the Class A Indians with Lumpkin being in Class AAA with more than three times the enroll-

ment at Towns County. And finally, Lumpkin must be given credit for having less challenging victories in reducing their fatigue factor as compared to the two quite challenging opening round games for the Indians as detailed above. Lumpkin took a 57-35 win over Hokes Bluff, Alabama, in the opening round and a shockingly easy 71-47 victory over previously undefeated Swain County, North Carolina, in the second round.

As a matter of clarification, your reporter is not advocating a change in who is invited to the tournament which has proven, with schools of various sizes experiencing great success, over the twenty three years the advantages it provides the Lady Indians, Indians, and other teams in giving them experiences under tournament conditions not made available to many teams around the state. Indeed, your reporter feels that the Lady Indians would probably have not made three state final four appearances between 2000 and 2013 without the challenges of the Battle of the States.

With all this being stated, there were three ties and three lead changes and a 9-9 score by the 2:22 mark of the first quarter before the Indians embarked on 22-8 run for a 31-17 lead by the mid point of the second quarter with their biggest lead being 29-15 on a trey by Colton Shook at the 4:24 mark of that second quarter. Lumpkin responded with a 6-0 run, however, for just a 31-23 Towns lead by the three minutes mark with the same lead of eight points in effect by a 37-29 score at intermission.

Top individual scoring totals by quarter the first half for the Indians included five points by Zach Davenport and four by Logan Cowart in the first quarter and ten by Will De Vries and five more by Davenport in the second.

With the Indians leading 42-37 by the 5:19 mark of the third quarter, Lumpkin embarked on a

quick scoring surge, outscoring the Indians 14-2 between just the 5:03 and 2:33 marks for a sudden 51-44 advantage. The Indians would bounce right back with a surge of their own, however, finishing the quarter with the final five points for just a 51-49 deficit and continuing with the first seven in the fourth for an overall 12-0 run and a 56-51 lead on two baskets by Davenport and Shook's third trey of the game. This would be the first of five Indian leads of five points between the 6:25 and 2:57 marks when they held a 63-58 advantage on seven straight Indian points by Cowart.

Unfortunately, Lumpkin would strike for a deuce and a trey by the 2:06 mark for a 63-63 stand-off with a free throw two seconds later by Major Moss getting the Indians back in front 64-63. A three point play by Lumpkin got them a 66-64 lead at 1:53 with a free throw by Davenport at 1:29 getting the Indians within 66-65.

After Lumpkin sank a deuce at 1:14 for a 68-65 lead, the Indians suffered a turnover as a result of an unfortunate collision of Indian teammates near mid court at 1:06 but Lumpkin didn't score off the turnover and Davenport came up with a steal near mid court and drive for the basket for two points, closing the gap to 68-67 at forty one seconds. That would be the Indians' final points as it turned out with Lumpkin sinking one of two free throws at both 31.8 seconds and 9.6 seconds for a 70-67 lead with an Indian turnover following the first free throw and a three point attempt for a tie following the second falling short as time ran out.

Although falling short of victory against Lumpkin County, as a close follower of Lady Indians and Indian fortunes since 1959, your reporter could not be more proud of the Indians and their effort and innumerable successes within each game against challenging opponents if they had come out on top and it is hoped that the experience of this and prior years in the Battle of the States will serve them well as this and future seasons progress.

Leading the scoring parade for the Indians against Lumpkin were Davenport with 22 points, Cowart and De Vries with 14 each, Shook with 9, and Moss with 5 while Moss led in assists with 8 and was followed by Davenport with 3 and Cowart with 2. Rebounding leaders were Cowart and De Vries with 10 each and Moss with 9.

Lumpkin was led in scoring by seniors Zach Pulley with 31 points and Jacob Zarate with 13 and junior Austin Black with 11. Nine Lumpkin players were used extensively throughout the tournament with five being seniors, three juniors, and one sophomore while the more youthful Indians primarily used three seniors, three juniors, and two sophomores. The victory gave Lumpkin a five game winning streak and a 9-6 record after a 1-3 start. The Indians finished the week with a 9-4 record, including 2-1 in Region 8A with all remaining games being region contests.

Lady Indians get first win, play well in loss to Hayesville, overwhelmed by Union

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The Towns County Lady Indians All Tournament Team selection Madison McClure. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

The Towns County Lady Indians Varsity Basketball Team rose up and got its first win of the season in the opening round of the Battle of the States Tournament last week in the Towns County Gym. They led for most of the opening game on Wednesday in getting their first win of the season against the Piedmont Lady Bulldogs who entered the game with a 5-3 record. They then played quite well after early scoring woes in a closer than the final score loss to Hayesville in the semi-finals before taking it on the chin for the third time this year to Union County in the third place game on Friday.

Lady Indians 49, Piedmont 39 – The Piedmont game on Wednesday was quite a battle the first quarter after the visiting Lady Bulldogs took an early 4-0 lead with two ties and three lead changes by quarter's end. The Lady Indians got their first lead of 5-4 on a trey by senior Kristen Henson at the 5:54 mark and overcame an 8-6 Piedmont lead on two free throws by junior Madison McClure for a tie at 23.3 seconds and Henson's second trey, this time from some twenty five feet, at the buzzer for an 11-8 Lady Indian lead after one quarter.

Henson added a deuce for a 13-8 Towns lead less than a minute into the second quarter before the Lady Bulldogs struck for six straight points and a 14-13 lead by the 5:05 mark. Senior Kirsten Ledford tied the score at 14-14 on a free throw and a drive for two points by McClure got the Lady Indians a 16-14 lead with 4:26 on the clock. A trey by sophomore Taylor Cornett at 3:01 gave the Lady Indians a 20-14 lead which would be reduced to 22-20 by intermission.

Early third quarter baskets by Ledford and McClure got the Lady Indians a 26-20 lead before a 7-0 run by the Lady Bulldogs gave them what would be their last lead of 27-26 at 2:31. McClure would respond with a 7-0 run of her own between just the 2:18 and 1:16 marks by wrapping two deuces around a trey for a 33-27 Lady Indian lead which became 33-28 entering the fourth quarter.

When Ledford opened the fourth quarter with two free throws at 7:11 and added an old fashioned three point play at 6:44, the Lady Indians had a ten point lead of 38-28 lead which would range between six and twelve points the remainder of the game with the final margin of victory for the Lady Indians being 49-39. Ledford wound up with a total of nine points in fourth quarter action for the Lady Indians.

Scoring leaders for the game for the Lady Indians were McClure with 15 points, Ledford with 14, Henson with 12, and sophomore Kristin Byers with 5. Five different Lady Indians collected at least one assist with McClure leading the way with 2. Piedmont junior LuLu Jackson led her team in scoring with 13 points.

Hayesville 59, Lady Indians 42 – After the Lady Indians got a quick 2-0 lead on a field goal by Madison McClure against Hayesville in the tournament semi-finals on Thursday, the Lady Jackets appeared to take control of the game by going on a 19-2 run for a 19-4 advantage on a trey by the 7:04 mark of the second quarter. A trey by Kirsten Ledford at the 5:54 mark got the Lady Indians within 19-7 but the Lady Jackets seemed to be in control with a 24-9 lead by the 2:20 mark.

The Lady Indians had other ideas, however, with two treys by Kristen Henson and a defensive rebound and coast to coast run by freshman Sophia Shook providing an 8-2 run and just a 26-17 deficit at the half minute mark.

The Lady Jackets would respond with a trey at sixteen seconds for a 29-17 lead at intermission but the Lady Indians struck for an old fashioned three point play by Henson, a deuce on a runner by McClure, and two free throws by Ledford by the 6:37 mark of the third quarter for just a 29-24 Hayesville lead.

The Lady Indians then responded to a 6-0 run by Hayesville for a 35-24 lead at 5:03 with back to back three point plays on coast to coast runs by Kristen Byers and McClure for just a 35-30 deficit at 3:53. Still another 6-0 Lady Jacket run had them ahead 41-30 by the fifty nine seconds

mark only to have Taylor Cornett come up with a steal and field goal and Sophia Shook sink a basket on great hustle and a pass from sophomore Kenzlee Denton at nineteen seconds with the Lady Indians within 41-34.

McClure, and sophomore Erika Spano contributed 1 assist each according to your reporter's tally. The Lady Jackets were led in scoring by sophomore Savanna Annis with 14 points, junior Kimonta Lloyd with 12, and senior Emma Cox with 10. The Lady Jackets went on to be overwhelmed by defending champion Hokes Bluff, Alabama, in the championship game on Friday, finishing the week with a 5-5 record.

Union County 62, Lady Indians 16 – Although the Union County Lady Panthers took just a 43-40 victory at Hayesville less than two weeks prior and the Lady Indians played quite well against Hayesville the night prior, the Lady Panthers have been a very difficult matchup for the Lady Indians this season and the Battle of the States brackets brought the two teams face to face for the third time this season in the final round contest for third place last Friday.

The Lady Panthers, who sank just two treys in giving tournament champion Hokes Bluff their toughest battle of the tournament sank three in racing out to a 17-2 lead over the Lady Indians by the 2:25 mark of the first quarter and they led 22-4 by quarter's end.

The Lady Indians' best run of the game came between the 5:16 and 2:27 marks of the second quarter when two baskets by Madison McClure and a long deuce by Taylor Cornett accounted for a 6-3 Towns run in reducing a 28-5 deficit to 31-11 but Union led 33-11 at intermission and 51-13 after three quarters in taking a 62-16 victory.