

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Indians send seniors out with a 19-14 win against Providence

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The Towns County Indians won their final game of the season on Friday, Nov. 4, which happened also to be senior night for 11 football players.

It was to be these seniors' last football game as Towns County Indians.

And as it should be, a senior was responsible for every score in Friday night's game.

Senior Major Moss caught a 17-yard touchdown pass from sophomore Trent Bradshaw in the opening minutes of the game, then scored the follow-up point after; senior Russell Cox had a 39-yard rushing touchdown halfway through the third quarter; and senior Colten Shook scored on the tail of a 68-yard punt return red zone setup from fellow senior Kobe Denton three minutes after Cox's touchdown.

The celebration following Shook's score – his second career touchdown – was immediate and intense, highlighting the particularly excited atmosphere surrounding this last game for 11 young men.

All of the Boys in Blue gave it everything they had on Friday, and the team's seniors are as follows: Kendall Barnard, Owen Bouchard, Russell Cox, Kobe Denton, Luke Ledford, Major Moss, Walker Ross, Blake Silvers, Colten Shook, Nick Shook and Cody Williams.

"There were a couple of times this week in practice



An emotional Towns County Indians squad celebrate with their coach following the a win in the seniors' final games of their high school careers. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

that it hit several of them," said Indians Head Coach John Cornett. "There were a lot of tears shed this week, just because I think a lot of them knew that this night was coming. For them to go out with a win means more to me than anything in this world."

Looking back on the season, Coach Cornett said he had two goals he wanted to fulfill that they met this year.

"No. 1, I didn't want any of the boys to quit in any game, and they didn't," said Coach Cornett. "And No. 2, I wanted them to enjoy every moment of

it. On Thursday, our last day of practice, every one of them got up and just said that it was the best season they've ever had, and the most they've enjoyed a football season.

"So, two of those goals were met, and that means a lot to me. There were many week-

ends that ate me up because of games we lost that I felt we could have pulled off, but I think the seniors did establish something this year for those underclassmen to build on.

"There's a lot of fight in these kids, and I would expect every year we will get

better."

These young men started the 2016 season with a win and ended with a win, but what matters most is that, win or lose, they'll always be Towns County Indians.

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team effort to bring home title number five.

Based on the times of only the top two runners, the Lady Indians were tied for second with Commerce (second and 16th place individually), and trailed Seminole County, which placed two runners in the Top Six.

However, Seminole County was unable to place another runner in the top 50, and they fell all the way to 10th in the team standings, leaving Towns, Commerce, and third place Gordon Lee (three runners in the Top 14) to battle it out.

The Lady Indians' Emma Kate Ledford fought her way to a 17th Place finish, which topped Commerce's No. 3 runner by three places, giving her team the lead. Towns' No. 4 runner, Jasmine Miranda, was eight points better than Gordon Lee's fourth fastest girl, but two back of Commerce's fourth best time.

With Towns and Commerce separated by one point and coming down to the fifth-and-final team member, the difference-maker for TCHS was 24th place Tara Lee Arrowood, who outran 27th place Sharon Merlos of Commerce by 25 seconds.

As for Gordon Lee, their No. 5 runner placed 58th, eliminating the Lady Trojans from contention.

The remaining Towns County runners also delivered for Coach Ledford, with Lydia Moss finishing 46th and Hayley Stowers placing 51st. In the event of another tie, those two would have given the Lady Indians the advantage over Commerce, whose final two came in 47th and 64th, respectively.

"That is why all season long, you have to harbor in these kids that every person on the team matters," Coach Ledford said. "And that race wasn't just won by my three-four-five girls, but the six and seven girls have to be ready to break a tie."

Not only did Towns County overcome a loaded field at the Area meet before facing an even deeper field at State, the Lady Indians were forced to confront a plethora of injuries that could have easily been used as an excuse to derail the season.

But Coach Ledford's squad proved why you must never underestimate the hearts of champions – especially four-time champions.

According to Ledford, Whitehead competed with the worst case of shin splints that she had dealt with all season.

Cornett was struggling with knee issues and underwent therapy to alleviate enough pain so she could participate.



Towns County Cross Country photos by Todd Forrest



Miranda also suffered an injury earlier in the season and she was able to fight her way back to the team.

Stowers and Moss were two more runners that have battled injury, with Moss falling victim to a second injury late in the season when she turned her ankle and was unable to compete at Area.

"She rehabbed, she cross-trained, we triaged, we did anything to get her back well enough to compete, and that was her goal, to make it back (for State)," Ledford said. "Basically our entire team, with the exception of two, have suffered major injuries. They fought through a level of pain (on Saturday) that I don't think people really understood."

Another testament to the will of the Lady Indians was the fact that as the race wore on, and the pain became greater, the Towns County runners somehow managed to get stronger. As each mile passed,

all of the Lady Indians climbed their way up the standings, continuing to pass opposing runners, even as late as the final 100 meters.

"We worked on a theory because of the injuries," Ledford said. "I didn't care who led the first mile, but I needed them to lead in miles two and three. So basically it was just making sure that they had enough gas left in (miles) two and three to really put it out there as that pain began to come on."

Not only did Ledford have to coach through injuries to her top runners, she also claims that the 2016 season forced her to change her coaching philosophies after almost 20 years in the business.

"They literally made me come out with an entirely different coaching profile," Ledford said, when asked what she learned about both teams over the course of the season. "In 18 years I've always been

able to read my kids and know how to motivate the masses, but this has been a year where I've had to break it down and try to reach each individual child, and they are all so different.

"This has been the most intrinsic motivated team that I've ever been around. They are not very vocal but they are geniuses. It was so different because I'm used to them having that direct edge on race day, so I had to get into their heads this year. But it was all mental, never physical. I had to coach them mentally, from the inside-out."

The Lady Indians should be the favorite to repeat in 2017 with Emma Kate Ledford being the only senior among the top seven. Other seniors on the squad were Sierra Oakes, Amaira Barrett, and manager Hannah Greene.

Finally, after overcoming adversity and leading the Lady Indians to their fifth State Championship, everyone has

been asking Coach Ledford what magic words she said to the girls, or what special button did she push, and Ledford proudly reveals her secret.

"Everyone always asks me, 'what did you say,' or 'what did you do,' and basically, it just comes down to, we all need someone to believe in," she said. "You have to believe in shutting up that little voice inside of your head and persevering no matter how bad it looks."

"These girls had every reason to buckle, but to push through the pain like we did, this (state championship) has taken every emotion that you can feel as a coach. It takes the courage to persevere, the courage to keep your faith right."

"Your faith in God, your faith in your teammates, and your faith in yourself. And for these kids to believe in me, there is no greater honor that you could ask for."

The final times for the Lady Indians were: (8) Whitehead 23:32, (10) Cornett 23:46, (17) Ledford 25:00, (23) Miranda 25:55, (24) Arrowood 25:58, (46) Moss 28:02, and (51) Stowers 28:33.

Towns boys: The final times for Towns County's boys were: (33) Tyler Grimsley 20:33, (35) Blythe Smith 20:34, (49) Kaine Hoffman 21:07, (52) Corbin Henderson 21:17, (64) Marshall Ledford 21:40, (76) Caleb Ledford 22:12, (85) Ryan Tyler 22:44.

Team Standings: (1) GMC - 41, (2) Seminole County - 53, (3) Gordon Lee - 93, (4) Drew Charter - 133, (5) Atkinson County - 190, (6) Commerce - 210, (7) Towns County - 217, (8) Baconton - 234, (9) Telfair County - 241, (10) Terrell County - 253.

The remaining teams: Marion County, Washington-Wilkes, Montgomery County, Treutlen, Trion, Mt. Zion - Carroll.