

Towns County Sports

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Lady Indians have roller coaster week; season concludes in Elite 8

By Jerry Kendall
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Anyone would be hard pressed to come up with a more eventful three day period for any Towns County High School sports team of the past than took place last Monday through Wednesday for the Lady Indians.

First of all, they traveled some 125 miles from our Northeast corner of Georgia to Chickamauga in the Northwest corner of the state to face the defending Class A Public State Champion Gordon Lee Lady Trojans on Monday evening and rose to the occasion as a unit in coming away with an inspiring 64-56 victory.

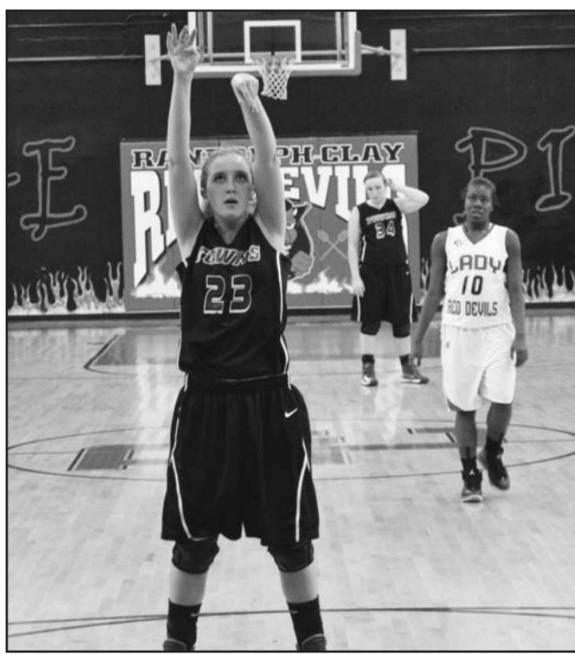
The win at Gordon Lee qualified the Lady Indians for the Elite 8 round of the State Tournament but with a big challenge included with the accomplishment.

They drew the task of traveling more than 275 miles on Wednesday to Cuthbert in the Southwest corner of the state to face the State Tournament's top seeded and defending Class A Public State Runners Up, Randolph-Clay Lady Red Devils on Wednesday evening.

A victory over Randolph-Clay would have sent the Lady Indians to the State Final Four round against Claxton in Savannah in Southeast Georgia on Saturday but they fell short of completing a four corners of the state tour when the Lady Devils used an early scoring surge and held off late threats by the Lady Indians in taking a very competitive 62-48 victory.

The games at Gordon Lee and Randolph-Clay featured remarkable similarities as to how the winning teams achieved their victories and the losing teams refused to give up, battling to the closing minutes of the respective games before falling short of victory.

Just as the Lady Indians used what proved to be a decisive 20-6 run during less than six minutes of playing time in the second quarter on Monday night in Chickamauga, so would Randolph-Clay use a similar 22-6 run the first ten minutes of the game in Cuthbert on Wednesday night with both losing



Senior McKenzi Moss at the foul line in last week's loss to Randolph-Clay. Moss scored 5 points. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Senior McKenzi Moss at the foul line in last week's loss to Randolph-Clay. Moss scored 5 points.

Following the second quarter 20-6 Lady Indian run at Gordon Lee, which snapped a 14-14 tie for a 34-20 lead, the Lady Trojans outscored the Lady Indians 36-30 the final 17 minutes and 30 seconds of the game for a final score of 64-56, while the Lady Indians outscored the Lady Red Devils 42-40 the final twenty two minutes of their game following the 22-6 opening run for a final Randolph-Clay 62-48 win.

The Lady Indians would never lead by more than that 14 points margin with the Lady Trojans able to edge to within three points at the two minutes mark of the fourth quarter but five for six free throw shooting the remainder of the way by the Lady Indians giving them a 64-56 victory.

By comparison, Randolph-Clay managed to extend their initial 16-point lead to very brief 20-point margin on two occasions, late in the second quarter and early in the third, while the Lady Indians were able to reduce the opening deficit much more significantly by closing to within nine points on three occasions in the third quarter and to

eight on one occasion in the fourth but unable to cash in on chances to reduce the eight points deficit further.

For readers content with a very brief summary of the two games, there you have it but for those wishing full details, including individual contributions, they will be provided in the following paragraphs.

Lady Indians 48
Randolph-Clay 64

Cuthbert - Not much went right for the Lady Indians during the first ten minutes of the game at Randolph-Clay as the Lady Red Devils' used their size and quickness in opening the game on a 12-2 run and leading 17-6 after one quarter after a field goal and two free throws by Eryn Cochran kept the two teams on nearly even terms the final 4:21 of the quarter.

The Lady Devils opened the second quarter with two free throws and a three point play in less than a minute of playing time for a 22-6 lead but that would be the end of their dominance of the game.

The Lady Indians outscored the Lady Devils 13-12 the remain-



Senior Bailey Sutton at Randolph-Clay. She scored 14 to help Towns escape Gordon Lee in the opening round. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

der of the second quarter with a big boost coming when they reduced a 34-14 lead to just 34-19 at intermission on a three point play by Savannah Dyer and a Cochran steal and field goal the final forty eight seconds of the quarter. Cochran contributed seven of the Lady Indians' second quarter points.

The Lady Devils opened the third quarter as they had the second on a 5-0 run, on a three point play and a field goal, for their second and final lead of twenty points at 39-19 but the Lady Indians stung the Lady Devils with an 11-0 run between the 5:18 and 3:25 marks for just a single digits deficit of 39-30. The Lady Indians accomplished the run on a trey by Cochran, two treys by Karlie Albach, and a coast to coast run for a pull up jumper by Cochran.

Kellsie Cowart followed by twice matching field goals by Randolph-Clay with field goals of her own for a second and third nine points Towns deficit by the 2:20 mark but it required a late Cowart field goal following a 6-0 Randolph run for a 49-36 score entering the fourth quarter.

The Lady Devils opened the fourth quarter with a free throw

for a 50-36 lead but McKenzi Moss and Albach sandwiched treys around a Randolph-Clay deuce and Moss added two free throws, pulling the Lady Indians to within 52-44 with 6:18 on the clock and the Lady Indians perhaps knocking on the door with the Lady Devils head coach showing much alarm at the ensuing threat.

The Lady Indians had chances to reduce the lead further during a period of more than a minute and a half but the shots wouldn't fall and a 5-0 run gave the Lady Devils a 57-44 lead at 3:17.

A three point play by Cochran at the two minute mark got the Lady Indians within 58-48 but that would be the last Lady Indian points and Randolph-Clay sank four of ten free throw attempts the rest of the way in increasing their final margin of victory to 62-48.

The Lady Devils qualified for the Class A Public State Final Four with the victory but had a long trip themselves of more than 250 miles to Savannah on Saturday to face Claxton who had a break of requiring a trip of not much more than 50 miles.

Randolph Clay took a 45-30 win over Claxton in a game with

similarities to their game against the Lady Indians as they built a 15-4 lead after one quarter and won going away after Claxton closed to within six points in the third quarter.

The Lady Indians were led in scoring by Cochran with 20 points, Albach with 9, Cowart with 8, and Moss with 5 while Cochran also led in assists with 5 according to your reporter's tally. The Lady Devils lost several top players from last year's team but three members of their team combined for 60 of their 62 points against the Lady Indians with leaders being Amanda Buie with 30 points, Kobi Thornton with 22, and Shanice Jackson with 8.

The Lady Indians were already well aware of Buie's talents as she was the star player for Calhoun County when the Lady Indians defeated them in first round state tournament play last year but she transferred to Randolph-Clay for this, her senior season.

It turns out that Jackson also transferred in for her senior season from Eufaula, Alabama, so it takes little imagination to consider how far Randolph-Clay would have gone this year without the two transfers. Thornton, at 6'2" tall, is one of the top players in the state as a sophomore and is accompanied in the starting lineup by her 6'1" older sister Brianna but her team would likely have seen much difficulty competing even in their region this year without the presence of the two transfers.

While disappointed to have their season end at Randolph-Clay, the Lady Indians and their fans will be able to look back with pride at their playing so well on the road in facing what must be considered among the two toughest opening round assignments of this year.

Most teams certainly did not have to face a defending state champion as did the Lady Indians in Gordon Lee and a state finalist this year and last in Randolph-Clay who will play for this year's state title at 3:00 pm on Georgia Public TV this Thursday in Macon. And there will be comfort in enjoying the overall 95-25 record, including 19-11 this year, compiled by the Lady Indians during their four years on the team.

Lady Indians get revenge; bump Gordon Lee in first round

Seniors take three 8-A titles and four trips to State with them as they depart

By Jerry Kendall
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Chickamauga - In the world of high school sports, the significance of events doesn't often get much better than the Lady Indians' win at Gordon Lee.

The two teams have had a high level of competition since the 2007 Battle of the States Tournament when the Lady Indians took the measure of the Lady Trojans by a 62-51 score in the consolation game of the tournament before going on to make it to the Class A State Final Four in March of that memorable season.

The Lady Trojans had seized the upper hand since that occasion, however, in taking five straight victories prior to last week's state tournament game in Chickamauga. The Lady Trojans took four of the victories in the 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 Battle of the States Tournaments with the most memorable of those games being the championship game in 2010 and the consolation game in 2012 when the Lady Trojans took a 70-69 victory for third place on a last second shot in overtime.

State tournament play came into the picture last year when the two teams faced each other in the Class A Public State Semi-Finals at Fort Valley State University with the Lady Trojans adding to the pain of the Lady Indians' heart breaking overtime loss in the Battle of the States by pulling away from a 36-34 lead after three quarters for a 57-49 victory. Of course, the Lady Trojans went on to defeat Randolph-Clay in impressive style the next game for the Class A State Championship.

With this background, including a 57-44 Gordon Lee win over the Lady Indians in the opening round of this year's Battle of the States, the Lady Indians headed for Chickamauga as the No. 9 seeded team in the tournament to face the No. 8 seeded Lady Trojans. This was the Lady Indians' first ever appearance at Gordon Lee with the Indians having faced the Trojans in Chickamauga in the first round of the state tournament in 2005.

The Lady Trojans entered the game with a 19-7 record with four of the losses coming at the hands of teams winning 20 or more games, two others to teams winning 19 games, and the other to a team winning 17. Further, three of the losses came at the hands of Class AAA and AAAA teams and the other four were to private schools in their Region 6-A, easily considered the toughest Class



Senior Eryn Cochran breaks free for a lay up during last week's win at Gordon Lee. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

A region in the state. And finally, the Lady Trojans entered the game with a 7-1 record on their home court with the loss having been to traditional Class A Private power Southwest Atlanta Christian.

With all of this history in mind, the Lady Indians took a 2-0 lead with 6:31 left in the first quarter when Eryn Cochran came up with a steal and took the ball coast to coast for the field goal. They extended the lead to 7-2 on a field goal and a trey by Karlie Albach by the 5:37 mark, only to have the Lady Trojans use a 6-1 run for an 8-8 tie at 2:29.

That standoff would be one of just two ties, with no leads, for the Lady Trojans throughout the game and it would last for just 11 seconds when Bailey Sutton struck for back to back treys at the 2:18 and 2:03 marks, giving the Lady Indians a 14-8 lead which would become 14-12 by quarter's end.

The Lady Trojans opened the second quarter with a game tying field goal at the 7:47 mark but that tie, like the first, would be very brief, for just 16 seconds this time, as Misty Lindemuth sank a long deuce from just inside the 3-point line at the 7:31 mark for a 16-14 lead the Lady Indians would never relinquish.

The Lindemuth basket triggered a remarkable 20-6 Lady Indian run by the 1:38 mark as the Lady Indians got what would be their biggest lead of the game by a 34-20 score.

A 6-2 Gordon Lee run the final 90 seconds would reduce the halftime Towns lead to 36-26, a margin they would largely hold for the remainder of the game.

There were actually two distinct Lady Indian runs of note within the overall 20-6 second

quarter run as treys by Cochran, Albach, and McKenzi Moss in just a 75-second span between the 6:16 and 5:01 marks gave them a 9-1 run and a 26-17 lead prior to a Lady Trojan field goal.

They followed that Gordon Lee basket on an 8-1 run between the 3:00 and 1:38 marks as Moss drove the lane for two points, Kellsie Cowart sank two free throws, and Sutton and Cochran came up with steals and field goals for the aforementioned 34-20 lead.

A key sequence benefiting the Lady Indians occurred at the 6:52 mark of the second quarter when 6'4" Lady Trojan Katelyn Lee, who has signed to play basketball at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix next year, committed her second and third fouls and went to the bench for the remainder of the quarter. She committed a pushing foul at that point and then fouled Misty Lindemuth on a shot on the inbounds pass that happened so quickly that the clock didn't start.

The third and fourth quarters were a near standoff with the Lady Trojans reducing the Lady Indian leads by a single point each quarter but not without noteworthy events within the quarters.

The Lady Indians led by as much as 44-32 on a Cochran basket at the 2:06 mark of the third quarter but the Lady Trojans closed to within 44-37, ending with a free throw at the 7-second mark.

Cochran responded, however, by extending the Lady Indian lead back to nine on two free throws with three tenths of a second on the clock on Lee's fourth foul.

The fourth quarter would be marked by terrific free throw shooting by the Lady Indians along with one field goal as they bent but didn't break against the Gordon



Senior Kellsie Cowart works her way into the paint. She also played an important role on the defensive end. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Lee strategy of sending them to the foul line in the hope of enough misses for a Lady Trojan victory.

The Lady Trojans opened the fourth quarter with a 5-1 run for just a 47-42 deficit with 5:27 on the clock but two free throws each by Sutton and Cochran and a steal and field goal by Lindemuth had the Lady Indians leading 53-44 with 4:18 left.

A Gordon Lee trey triggered a 12-6 Lady Trojans run between the 4:08 and 1:59 marks, however, as the Lady Indians sank an excellent six of eight free throw attempts during the run but held just a 59-56 lead. The Lady Trojans would not score again, however, and the Lady Indians extended their lead to a final margin of victory of 64-56 as Cochran sank a free throw at 1:22 and two more at 44.1 seconds with Kellsie Cowart adding two more at 13.8 seconds.

The Lady Indians wound up sinking 16 of their 20 free throw attempts the last quarter with Cochran contributing 8-of-12 attempts, Sutton 4-of-4 and Albach and Cowart two of two each.

Scoring leaders for the game were Cochran with 20 points, Albach and Sutton with 14 each, Lindemuth with 7, and Moss with 5 while Cochran led in assists with 3 and Lindemuth and Sutton followed with 2 each according to your reporter's unofficial tally. Unofficial leaders in rebounds were Cochran with 12, Cowart with 7, Lindemuth with 5, and Albach with 4.

The loss marked the final basketball game in Class A for the Lady Trojans as they will move up to Class AA next year as a result of an increase in enrollment after being the biggest Class A school in the state the last two years. For those

who may wonder how impressive the win at Gordon Lee may have been, this was the Lady Trojans' first loss to a public Class A school since losing to Social Circle in the Class A State Tournament on March 3, 2009.

Further, a regular season loss to Trion on January 29, 2008, was their only other loss to a Class A team since falling to the Lady Indians in the aforementioned consolation game in the Battle of the States on December 29, 2007. This gives Gordon Lee just four losses to Class A Public School in seven seasons from the 2008 through the 2014 season with two of the losses coming at the hands of the Lady Indians.

Perhaps the most difficult moment for any athlete at the high school or other level of play is the realization that their career has come to an end.

The Randolph-Clay game marked the final basketball appearances for the Lady Indians for seniors Eryn Cochran, Kellsie Cowart, McKenzi Moss, and Bailey Sutton. Much appreciation is extended to these young ladies who have provided countless hours of hard work in serving their team and school on the basketball court.

In reality, the often intense action fans see on the court during games represents just a tiny percentage of the time and effort to achieve various accomplishments along with much time and monetary expense required for their families for many years, including prior to their high school careers.

The accomplishments have been numerous for this senior class which has enjoyed three region tournament championships and four trips to the state tournament with a State Final Four appearance

last year and an Elite Eight appearance this year included.

Individually, Cochran has been a prime varsity contributor for all four years with Cowart and Sutton seeing increasingly significant and quality playing time from their sophomore seasons forward and Moss emerging as a prime contributor this year. Each of the Lady Indians have provided varying talents in helping their teams achieve the great success they have accomplished.

Cochran has provided all purpose play from her point guard position in ranking high in most statistical categories and earning a basketball scholarship to Columbus State University while Cowart has provided excellent scoring, rebounding, and defensive play at her post position against often much taller opponents such as in last week's state tournament games.

Sutton and Moss, on the other hand, have specialized in providing vital defensive pressure in forcing numerous turnovers in support of the Lady Indians' very effective style of play while also being capable scorers as evidenced in the state tournament games addressed above.

As is often the case at TCHS, second and sometimes third generation players have seen action for the Lady Indians and Indians with Cochran and Moss being prime examples. Cochran's father, Shell, provided a remarkable three games detailed in an earlier article this season during an outstanding senior season in 1975 when he led the Indians to their only region championship to date.

It has been just over 50 years since Kyle Moss came on the scene as one of the Indians' most gifted athletes and numerous Moss family members have contributed greatly to the Lady Indians and Indians fortunes through the years with Mckenzi being related to all of them. Her father, Ketron, was one of the school's all time top rebounders and a capable scorer who graduated in 1981 after playing on one of just four Indian state tournament teams with other close family members providing varied and vital contributions including sister Kinsle and her current freshman brother Major along with her uncle Kevin and first cousins Jordan and current junior Boone.

Many thanks are extended from the Towns County Herald and this reporter to Eryn, Kellsie, McKenzi, and Bailey for their many hours of dedicated and highly regarded service to their school and teams and best wishes are extended to each of them for the future.