

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Towns County High School honors its athletes at sports banquet

By Shawn Jarrard
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Staff Writer

Towns County High School held its annual Athletic Banquet at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center on Tuesday, April 28.

The event gave administrators, coaches, parents and players a chance to congratulate student athletes for their accomplishments throughout the 2014-2015 school year.

Principal Jonathan Gibson opened the event, giving special thanks to Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall for his accommodations to the school over the year, as well as to the system's School Resource Officer Donnie Jarrard.

"This individual is hard working, selfless, Christ-centered, caring, humble, passionate, serving - I could go on and on, and many of you could as well," said Principal Gibson. "What

a blessing Donnie Jarrard is to our school. We are fortunate, we have the best SRO in the state. I'll miss you."

Ken Edwards, a local leader in the church community and vocal supporter of the school system's sports programs, led the invocation for the evening.

Following the barbeque dinner, the head coaches for each sport announced special recognitions for each member of each team, and awarded special Coach's Awards to outstanding student athletes.

Vice Principal Erica Chastain opened up for the coaches, welcoming those present, and Basketball and Football Cheerleading Head Coach Rachel Pietz kicked off the event.

"I have really enjoyed working with all these girls this year," said Coach Pietz. "I appreciate each of you parents for lending them to me for the seasons. They have grown and gotten much better as the year

has gone on, and I am losing over half of my squad because they're seniors this year, and without crying, I'm going to say I'm going to miss them."

The sentiment remained much the same with other coaches, and for many, dry eyes were hard to come by.

Coach Brett Keller recognized his boys and girls golf teams, both of which have performed remarkably well this season, with both the girls and boys teams headed for state after the boys earned a spot earlier this week at Sectionals.

Coach Brandon Rowland spoke volumes about his softball team, and how his ladies had the winningest season in school history.

Soccer coaches Tucker Blackmon and Michael Huwe congratulated their girls and boys, speaking on the virtues of nearly every player.

Coach Billy Barnhart pulled double duty, presenting

for tennis and football back to back.

"Hi, I'm Billy Barnhart, and I am the head girls tennis coach," said Coach Barnhart, drawing laughter from the packed room.

After Principal Gibson offered him that tennis coaching job, he told Coach Barnhart not to worry, that it wouldn't cause him any stress - a few boys, a few girls, and that's all there would be to it.

"That caused me more stress than 20 years of coaching football," said Coach Barnhart. He bragged on his girls and the leadership of senior Carly Gilfilian.

For football, Coach Barnhart thanked many, including God and his wife, as well as his assistant coaches Huwe and Josh Rider, and commended his student athletes for their hard work and dedication to the sport.

Wrestling Head Coach Jeff Stowers kept things short and

sweet, recounting how Towns County Wrestling won its 120th match this year, and the leaps and bounds the program has grown by, considering it didn't win any matches during its first four years as a program.

"We finished third in the area duals this year," said Coach Stowers. "We had the chance to challenge for a true second and came up just short for the first time qualifying for state duals. Finished in the Top 10 in the state for the second year in a row as a team. Things are looking up for Towns County Wrestling, and we are extremely excited about it."

Coach Jim Melton took the time to comment on many of his Indian and Lady Indian basketball players, and even recognized some eighth-grade Lady Indians who played up on the JV team in conjunction with middle school girls head coach Shannon Floyd.

Cross Country Head Coach Jeannie Ledford, who success-

fully navigated her girls to a third straight State Championship, and her boys to a first ever Runner-Up victory at State, emotionally congratulated her kids on a job well done.

"One great thing that we need to - and every coach has said this, and we're going to reiterate it - this night is about the athletes," said Indians Baseball head Coach Shannon Floyd. "Not only are they athletes, but they are first and foremost student athletes."

"It's a privilege in the classroom, it's a privilege on the field, it's a privilege in the halls. I'm going to quote Coach Rowland, this is one of the greatest jobs in the world, if not the greatest job in the world, and I know it's exactly where God would have me."

Coach Floyd called his baseball team up all at once, and as every other student athlete did that night, his Indians smiled and received their recognition with humility and grace.



NASCAR 2015

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

It's all Earnhardt at Talladega

TALLADEGA, Ala. - The fans at Talladega received the best possible news last Sunday afternoon. Their favorite driver was back in victory lane.

Talladega has been known as Earnhardt Country for over 25 years. First, it was Dale Sr. they cheered on, and when Junior started his career, they adopted him.

"That's why I've been coming here for over 20-years said James Long, a fan from nearby Anniston, Alabama. "That boy drives just like his daddy. They are two of the best drivers we've ever had."

When Earnhardt gained the lead for the first time during lap 12 of the 188-lap Sprint Cup race, all the fans were on their feet cheering and waving flags.

"You know when the crowd goes wild like that Earnhardt has taken over," said one of Ryan Newman's crewmembers.

Earnhardt, who led 6 times for 67 laps gained the lead for the last time after a round of pit stops on lap 162, and led for the remaining 26 laps. There was a series of cars that wrecked on the final lap, but it did not affect the leaders, and the race ended under green.

"Boys, we'll celebrate tonight," Earnhardt said. "I haven't won here in a long time and I'm very emotional right now. There were a lot of people that helped me get here and I really appreciate it."

Teammate Jimmie Johnson stayed right on his tail for the final laps, but never attempted a pass, and settle for the runner-up spot.

"I was waiting for some of the cars to spread out near the end, but it never happened," said Johnson. "There were a lot of combinations I could have tried, but I think I took the best option."

Polesitter Jeff Gordon was the early leader, but received a pit road penalty for speeding and fin-



Dale Earnhardt Jr. and crew chief Greg Ives celebrate Earnhardt's Talladega win

ished 31st.

Michael Waltrip, who is running a limited Sprint Cup schedule in the No. 55, saw his chances of winning go south when he ran into a spinning Brian Scott during lap 19.

The big wreck, involving 15 cars occurred on lap 47. Some of the drivers included, Kyle Larson, Trevor Bayne, Landon Cassill, David Ragan, Greg Biffle, Kasey Kahne, Joey Logano, Clint Bowyer, Michael Annett, Kevin Harvick, and Danica Patrick.

The right front brake rotor broke on Austin Dillon's No. 3 as he was entering pit road. The hot fluid ignited, causing Dillon to stop and make a hasty exit. He was not burned, but his car was put out of action.

The remaining top-10 finishers: 3. Paul Menard, 4. Ryan Blaney, 5. Martin Truex, 6. Sam Hornish, 7. Ryan Newman, 8. Kevin Harvick, 9. Denny Hamlin, 10. Josh Wise.

Top-16 Chase contenders after 10 of 26: 1. Harvick-394, 2. Johnson-342, 3. Logano-335, 4. Earnhardt-319, 5. Keselowski-305, 6. Kenseth-292, 7. Hamlin-281, 8. Truex-354, 9. McMurray-297, 10. Kahne-288, 11. Menard-280, 12. Almirola-279, 13. Gordon-277, 14. Newman-271, 15. Patrick-253, 16. Bowyer-249. Note: Drivers with no wins, are ranked lower than drivers with wins. This is NASCAR's unofficial points standing.

LOGANO HOLDS ON FOR TALLADEGA WIN

Joey Logano took the lead from Elliott Sadler a restart with eight laps remaining in Saturday's 113-lap Xfinity race and went on to his third series win in five starts.

"It was cool to win this thing, but it was just having the right people behind you, making the right moves, making the right block and getting that clean air. Then it's all in the mirror," Logano said.

Brian Scott finished .130-seconds behind Logano. Austin Dillon, J. J. Yeley, Joey Gase, Chris Buescher, Elliott Sadler, Ty Dillon, Regan Smith, and Aric Almirola were the remaining top-10 finishers.

About a third of the way into the race, there was an eight-car accident near the entrance to pit road. Two members of Aric Almirola's crew were injured as Brendan Gaughan bounced off the pit wall. Both were treated at the infield care center.

Top-10 points leaders after 9 of 33: 1. T. Dillon-330, 2. C. Buescher-321, 3. Elliott-293, 4. Wallace-293, 5. Smith-287, 6. Scott-286, 7. Sadler-282, 8. Reed-255, 9. Suarez-254, 10. Gaughan-249.

"GoDaddy has been a great partner for us and for the sport overall," said Tony Stewart, SHR co-owner. "There's a lot of season left on the calendar and it would be great to go out with a win ... that would really put the exclamation point on what has been a hugely successful relationship."

The big question is what type company will want to step up and sponsor Patrick. While she would like to stay in her present situation with Stewart Haas Racing, that might not be possible.

A new sponsor might want her with a different team. If a company is going to shell out at least \$20-million, then they are going to make the final decision as to which team she races for.

Danica Patrick might not be setting the track on fire, but she is a very noticeable racing personality, and that is what big-time sponsors look for in a driver. I think she will find a sponsor, but it might mean a team change.

Meanwhile Erik Jones will fill in for Kyle Busch in the No. 18 Joe Gibbs Toyota in the Sprint Cup Series starting at Kansas Speedway on May 9. This will mark the 18-year-old Byron, Michigan native's first official Sprint Cup Series start.

"I'm pretty excited and grateful for the opportunity to drive the No. 18 and make my debut for Joe Gibbs Racing," said Jones. "This is a really good opportunity for me. We are going to try to manage our expectations and if we can go out and get a top-15 run and gain some experience, that would be a great day for us."

Weekend Racing: The Trucks and Sprint Cup teams are at the 1.5-mile Kansas City, Kansas track. The Xfinity Series does not race again until May 17.

Fri., May 8; Truck Series race 4 of 23; Starting time: 8:30 pm ET; TV: FoxSports1.

Sat., May 9, Sprint Cup Series race 11 of 33; Starting time: 7:30 pm ET; TV: FoxSports1.

Racing Trivia Question: Where is Martin Truex Jr.'s hometown?

Last Week's Question: Talladega Speedway was originally known as Alabama International Motor Speedway. What year did it open? Answer: The first race was Sept. 14, 1969.

You may contact the Racing Reporter at: www.hodges@race500.com.



VFW Golf League news

The weather was perfect and the course was in great shape for another round of the Hiawasse VFW Post 7807 golf league. The winning score of 10 under par was turned in by team members Bill Kiser, Mel Halfon, Frank Geddings and Larry Kozloski. Good playing, guys. Congratulations!