

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Things are looking up as 49 come out for Spring Football Practice

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Indians have been busy with their Spring Practice schedule, donning pads for the first time since the season ended last fall. "My goal this whole spring was really just to get better at the fundamentals of football – blocking, tackling, running and just our base plays," said Indians Head Coach Billy Barnhart. "That was my focus this spring, I felt it's what we needed to do."

So far, the roster numbers are up over last year's team total of 26 players to end the season, with a loss of four seniors to boot.

"We've got 49 out right now, which is tremendous," said Coach Barnhart. "So, we've got a lot of newer guys out, younger guys coming up from the middle school. I just felt like we really needed to focus on just the fundamentals of football."

One thing that's new this coming school year is there will be no more middle school team. The eighth-graders will join freshmen at the high school to form a freshman team and play a six-game freshman schedule.

Seventh-graders, historically playing for the middle school team, will go to benefit rec league football with long-



The sound of pads popping last week at TCHS could only mean one thing: Spring practice is underway. Photos/Lowell Nicholson

time Youth Football Director Jimmy Smith.

"Just after kind of observing the rec league last year and that oldest team, they were sixth graders and that's all they had," said Coach Barnhart. "And they were going against other teams that were sixth and seventh graders and just getting hammered, and it really wasn't fair to them. I just felt that it would

benefit both programs, the rec league and us, if we went ahead and brought our eighth-graders up with us."

With the new setup, seventh-graders will get more play as top dogs of the rec league, and eighth-graders will gain, in effect, a fifth year of high school football. This will allow Coach Barnhart to have kids for potentially five full years, learn-



ing his system and practicing the plays. "We're hoping that they'll stick it out with us," said Coach Barnhart of the new recruits. "And I think they will. I've told our guys they're the best recruiters for this program, and I think it shows that they like what's going on here, they've bought into what we're doing, and they're the ones that have

been recruiting the news guys we've got out here.

"And I just think it shows that the guys that played for us last year, they've bought into what we're doing, they believe in what we're doing, and they're excited about what we have going on here. I am, and I can't wait. I'm chomping at the bit." Not only has the 2015-2016 football team gained

double digit numbers of eighth-graders and upcoming freshmen, it has also taken on about 10 new high school players who chose not to play last year.

"That's huge," said Coach Barnhart. "I think it gives us a lot more depth. Hopefully we can get some people some rest at times next year, and keep people fresh throughout the game and be stronger at the end of the game."

This week will be Coach Barnhart's first Blue and White Scrimmage, which will feature two Indian teams squaring off for gridiron greatness.

The game will take place on Thursday, May 21, at 6 p.m. in Frank McClure Stadium.

"It's always fun, it's always interesting to see how those things work out," said Coach Barnhart. "The great thing about it is, though, you get everybody on film, you get to evaluate everybody and kind of see where we are at the end of spring going into summer."

"That's what I look at more than anything – it's going to be a great evaluation tool, because we will film it. So, we'll evaluate everybody and where they're at right now, so we'll kind of have a picture and idea of where we're going into the fall, of who we've got and who's where, and who's going to be playing what position and what kind of depth we've got."

TCHS hosts spring Towns-Union Special Olympics Spring Games

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The joint Union and Towns counties Spring 2015 Special Olympics took place in Frank McClure Stadium at Towns County High School on Thursday, May 14.

"The kids love it," said Union County High School Principal John Hill. "It's a really big day for them. They look forward to it. They talk about it for weeks before and then afterwards. It's very enjoyable. All the kids in the green shirts are Union County, and then the kids in the red shirts walking around are some volunteers from our high school that came to help with the events."

Overall, Principal Hill was impressed with the turnout of both volunteers and athletes, and he attributed the numbers to the passions of those involved.

"It's the most important thing in my day," said Principal Hill. "We've got a lot of stuff going on with AP testing and End of Course testing, preparation for graduation, honors night, baccalaureate. But this is a priority for me, to be here and support our kids. It's a priority for me, it's the No. 1 thing today. And you can see that Towns County's superintendent is out here supporting his kids. These kids are very important to both of us."

Towns County athletes



Good times and good sportsmanship were the theme of the day at the Special Olympics hosted by Towns County. Photos/Lowell Nicholson

wore sky blue shirts that offset the neon green of Union County, and everyone competed in a show of good sportsmanship and camaraderie.

"In the winter, we have the Special Olympics that we hold in Union County, and so then in the spring, we have Union County come over and we host the Special Olympics here every May," said Towns County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Darren Berrong.

"They are competing amongst themselves, for the most part. I think everyone that participates just has a good time, and it's not as much about competition as it is coming out here and having a good time. I personally haven't missed a Special Olympics I don't think since I taught in Union County back in 1998. I absolutely love it, so I'm always here."

Joining the kids from Union and Towns counties were adult ath-



letes from the Master's Program of Avita Community Partners.

Becky Tracy, who is the parent mentor for special education services and the local coordinator for Union County, helped to organize Thursday's event.

"We always try to plan it to be the second Thursday in November and the second Thursday in May," said Tracy. "And then we do the Friday as rain dates for both."

Athletes competed in a series of sporting events, including the softball throw, the 100 meter run, the soccer run and kick, the 400 meter walk and the standing long jump.

Each event was divided into age groups, and athletes competed with their peers for chances to win medals.

Cadence Nichols of Towns County sang the national anthem with Union County athlete Ka-

tie Dyer at the beginning of the games.

Several sponsors came together to make the event a success. McConnell Memorial Baptist Church provided lunch to those in attendance, and Coca-Cola donated bottled water for the day.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and United Community Bank each donated a tent for athletes and volunteers to eat under and rest out of the sun.

Various student groups, such as the Union County FCLA and the Towns County Spanish Club, volunteered for the Olympics.

Towns County had several clubs on campus to assist the athletes. The Pinterest Club handed out stick-on jewelry, the Leo Club and Towns County Cheerleaders painted faces and the Robotics Team held live robot demonstrations.

The cross country and soccer teams, as well as seniors not busy taking End of Course tests, conducted the Olympic events.

"If they're having a good time, we did our job, and that's what it's about," said Towns County Cross Country Head Coach Jeannie Ledford. "And that's the thing with them – we're so competitive. To them, they win every time, and that's really what it's about for them. When they compete, they win. They're just so happy, and it's the true meaning of sport and athleticism."

NASCAR 2015

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Hamlin gets All-Star win

CHARLOTTE, N. C. —Polesitter Denny Hamlin, held off Kevin Harvick to win Saturday night's Sprint Cup All-Star race, and collected the top prize of one-million dollars, despite not having the fastest car.

With three laps to go in the last 10-lap segment, Hamlin, who was leading, changed his racing line and was able to pull away from a fast-closing Harvick.

"I was more defensive there at the end, but it turned into an offense for me," said Hamlin. "He (Harvick) kept getting closer and closer. I was looking in my rear view mirror and I knew it was going to take a defensive move to take his line away and slow him down."

Hamlin had been running low on the track, but once he moved up the track and began racing in the center, it threw Harvick off his pace, and allowed Hamlin to widen his distance.

Harvick, who won the race in 2007, had to settle for his second straight runner-up finish in the annual non-points event.

"I thought we were in a really good spot there at the end," said Harvick. "As soon as Denny (Hamlin) moved up that one time, it kind of took the air off. I had committed to the middle of the corner. Once I got to the middle of the corner the car just washed all the way up the racetrack, and I had to lift way out of the gas to get the car back off the wall."

Kurt Busch finished third, while Jeff Gordon was fourth, and Matt Kenseth was fifth.

The fastest car probably belonged to Brad Keselowski, who won two of the five segments; but he was penalized for



Denny Hamlin collected \$1-million for winning the Sprint Cup All-Star race

speeding on pit road prior to the start of the fifth and final segment and finished ninth.

The race was run in five segments; four 25-lap segments, and the last one of 10-laps.

CHRIS BUESCHER WINS IOWA XFINITY RACE

Chris Buescher won Sunday's Xfinity race at Newton, Iowa. Chase Elliott was second, followed by Erik Jones, Brian Scott, Ryan Blaney, Darrell Wallace, Ben Rhodes, Brandon Jones, Elliott Sadler, and Brendan Gaughan.

Top-10 Xfinity leaders after 10 of 33: 1. C. Buescher-368, 2. T. Dillon-360, 3. Elliott-337, 4. Wallace-331, 5. Scott-326, 6. Smith-320, 7. Sadler-317, 8. Reed-288, 9. Gaughan-283, 10. Suarez-281.

KAHNE WINS TRUCK SHOOTOUT

Kasey Kahne beat Eric Jones to the checkered flag by just five-thousandths of a second in Friday's Truck Series race at Charlotte.

The margin of victory was the second closest in the series history. Only the 2010 Talladega finish in which Kyle Busch beat Aric Almirola by two-thousandths of a second was closer.

Jones who led four times for 88 laps of the 139-lap race had to settle for second after a late caution came out that set up the green-white-checkered finish.

Jones was within sight of the white flag when Daniel Hemric wrecked, bringing out the caution, and setting up the two-lap

shootout.

For the restart, Jones chose the outside lane but was not able to clear Kahne, who raced hard all the way to the finish line.

It was the second time in two weeks that Jones had seen a win slip from his grasp late in the race. Two weeks ago at Kansas, Jones was leading the rest of the field by a large margin, when he ran out of fuel.

"It's really a shame that we couldn't bring this one home," said Jones. "I really wanted this one, and it's hard to come home second after leading so many laps."

The remaining top-10: Matt Crafton, Tyler Reddick, Brad Keselowski, John Wes Townley, Timothy Peters, Matt Tifft, Justin Boston, Spencer Gallagher.

Top-10 leaders after 5 of 23: 1. Crafton-217, 2. Jones-201, 3. Reddick-199, 4. Sauter-182, 5. Townley-160, 6. Peters-158, 7. Hayley-153, 8. Boston-149, 9. Gallagher-145, 10. Hemric-136.

Sprint Cup Chase Grid Outlook after 11 of 26: 1. Johnson-389 (3 wins)-2. Harvick-437 (2), 3. Logano-375 (1), 4. Earnhardt-360 (1), 5. Keselowski-342 (1), 6. Kenseth-331 (1), 7. Hamlin-284 (1), 8. Truex-391, 9. McMurray-328, 10. Gordon-317, 11. Kahne-313, 12. Almirola-312, 13. Menard-306, 14. Newman-306, 15. Bowyer-272, 16. Patrick-270.

Note: This past weekend's Sprint Cup races were all non-points events.

Racing Trivia Question: Kyle Busch is returning, and NASCAR has ruled that he is Chase eligible as long as he stays in the top-30 and wins a race.

Is this the right call for a driver who has missed 11 races, nearly a third of the season? Give us your thoughts. If we use your opinion in our column, we'll send you an 8X10 photo of your favorite driver.

Last Week's Question: How did the Darlington race, "Rebel 300", acquire its name?

Answer: The Rebel 300 was a NASCAR Convertible Series race first held in Darlington, South Carolina on May 12, 1957, which eventually became absorbed into

what is now known as the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series.

This race was held in violation of South Carolina blue laws; hence the "hidden" meaning of the Rebel 300 name. Track President Bob Colvin was fined \$58 for the violation (\$487.02 when adjusted for inflation). Tickets for this event sold from anywhere from \$5 (\$41.98 when adjusted for inflation) to \$8 (\$67.18).

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

Scottish Festival 12th Annual Kilted Golf Classic

Sign up now for the Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games 12th Annual Kilted Golf Classic on Friday, May 29, where 20 teams will vie for 1st place. The tournament will be held at the Old Union Golf Course with an 11 a.m. registration and lunch and a 1 p.m. shotgun start.

The \$75 per golfer registration includes a catered lunch and great prizes. Cash prizes will be awarded for Low Gross, 1st, 2nd and 3rd places. Closest to the hole and most accurate drive winners will also receive prizes. Adding to the fun, golfers wearing Scottish Kilts will get a \$10 discount.

Blairsville's Sears has donated a Lawn Tractor for the "Hole in One" winner.

Bring your foursome, or sign up as an individual and you will be grouped in a

team. The teams are forming quickly so send your entry to Scott Carter at scottc9292@gmail.com. Entry forms can be found on the BSFHG website, BlairsvilleScottishFestival.com or by calling Scott at 706-745-7359.

"This is always such a successful and fun golf tournament full of Scottish humor. The funds raised at the Classic support the festival and games which bring locals and tourists to one of the top twenty events in the Southeast. Our original goal was to help the economy in Union County and to show off this wonderful area. We feel that our 12th year will continue to do just that," said Golf Chairman, Scott Carter.

The money raised at the tournament supports the Scottish Festival and Games. For further information, see the website BlairsvilleScottishFestival.com. N(May20,21)9CA