

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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First half difficulties plague Indians in opener at Union

By Shawn Jarrard
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Blairsville - The Towns County Indians fell 35-7 in their season opener against longtime rival Union County High School in Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Friday, Aug. 28.

Despite plenty of intensity and a strong desire to win, the Indians were only able to manufacture two first downs during the first half of the game, in their second to last series of the half.

The Panthers scored two touchdowns straight out of the gate, taking their first play all the way down to the Towns County 1-yard-line for a subsequent score, before returning a punt for a touchdown their very next possession. Union County finished the first half with 5 unanswered touchdowns.

Starting the second half down 35-0, the one big change on the field was of UCHS senior Joseph Mancuso, the Panthers' star quarterback, who had been replaced for the second half after his stellar first half performance - this, in effect, leveled the playing field.

Not only did Towns County keep the Panthers scoreless for the remainder of the game, but the Indians came alive themselves offensively, taking the ball all the way down to Union County's 2-yard-line in its first possession of the second half.

Unfortunately, the Panther defense was able to stop a touchdown, but in the Indians' very next series, which began at the end of the third quarter and finished in the fourth quarter, Towns County successfully strung together a beautiful drive to score.

Starting at the Towns County 30-yard-line, senior running back Dalton Bradley, junior quarterback Russell



Towns' junior running back Kobe Denton. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Cox, sophomore running back Cole Ledford, followed once more by Cox each respectively carried for first downs, culminating in a 30-yard touchdown pass from Cox to senior running back Dylan Roberts with 5:56 left in the game.

A terrific block by junior running back Colten Shook saved Roberts' bacon as he tore down the line and into the red zone, where Roberts continued to outrun a pack of Panthers to make it into the end zone.

Senior Shea Underwood, known for his kicking prowess, surefooted the point after, bringing the score to its final tally of 35-7.

"It was a tough first half, we just got in the hole early letting them score right there off the bat, and then letting them return a kick for a touchdown," said Indians Head Coach Billy Barnhart. "It's just tough against a team of that caliber to get down early like that and give up plays like that. But I felt our guys battled all night long, and I don't think they ever gave up."

Coach Barnhart was particularly impressed with his boys during the game's second

half, when things livened up offensively and defensively.

"In the second half, I felt our guys - they could have come out and laid down and said it was over, but they came out and played," said Coach Barnhart. "I felt we played a lot better defensively in the second half, and we moved the ball well in the second half."

All told, the Indians rushed the ball 41 times for 177 yards, with quarterback Cox keeping the ball and leading the team with 11 rushes for 78 yards.

Cox was 2-for-7 passing for 42 yards and a touchdown, with Roberts catching the ball for the 30-yard touchdown and Underwood receiving for the other 12-yard pass, while Bradley completed two kickoff returns for 44 yards.

Defensively, Cox, sophomore defensive back Andy Chambers and junior linebacker Nick Shook led the team with nine tackles apiece, with Chambers and Shook each causing a fumble.

"This is a non-Region game, and we've just got to learn from it and continue to go forward with it, and get better



Senior Bailey Chastain looks for running room behind the left side of the line. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



Sophomore Andy Chambers stretches out for extra yardage during the first half. Photo/Todd Forrest

each and every week - learn from our mistakes this week and just continue to get better," said Coach Barnhart.

"I know some people say, why do you play teams like this?" continued Coach Barnhart of Union County. "Well, first, it's a rivalry, but it's good to play teams like this and work against teams like this. I'm proud of our guys and proud of their effort, and proud of the way they played tonight."

Towns County plays Mt. Vernon at home this Friday, Sept. 4, at 7:30 p.m.

"We've got to practice better on Monday," Coach Barnhart said after the Union County matchup, looking ahead to Mt. Vernon. "We didn't practice well on Monday, just to be honest. We came out and had a pretty solid practice Tuesday, and then Wednesday I felt we had a decent practice."

"But we've got to practice better. It's the same way we started this game - we started this game kind of slow. We've got to practice hard all week, and we've got to learn to come out from the get-go in a game and start fast, and continue to get better at breaking down and making a tackle."



Russell Cox uses the stiff arm on a Panther safety. Photo/Todd Forrest



Sophomore Cole Ledford pulls a Panther to the turf. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



The TCHS cheerleaders keep everyone fired up. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Rebels outscore Indians' 9th graders 12-0 in second half to break 8-8 tie at the half

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The Towns County Freshman Football team debuted against Fannin County in Frank McClure Memorial Stadium on Thursday, Aug. 27.

Overall, these younger Indians - primarily eighth- and ninth-graders, with two sophomores on the team - displayed remarkable depth in their running game, controlling the ball for nearly three quarters of the game.

Just as an example, the Indians' first possession featured a 15-play drive that took them into the Rebels' red zone, spanning almost an entire quarter of possession and four first downs, though the boys in blue were unable to capitalize on the tremendous effort.

The Indians scored in the second quarter at the tail end of another monster drive at 12 plays long, with first downs from eighth-graders Hunter Barnhart and Dakota Edge, and a quarterback keeper first down from sophomore Dalton Key.

Key's next play as quarterback was to connect with the freshman team's other quarterback, freshman Trent Bradshaw, for the Indians' only touchdown on a fourth down, 23-yard pass.

Freshman Blaine Rogers

made it into the end zone for a successful 2-point conversion, and the Indians went into the half tied 8-8 with Fannin County.

The second half of the game proved less fruitful for the Indians, and the Rebels put up two more touchdowns before the game ended with a final score of 20-8 against the Indians.

"A lot of these guys, they're on the scout team during the week, and they take the brunt of a lot of stuff, but they've worked hard every day," said Head Coach Billy Barnhart. "Most of these guys have been here since spring ball, they've gone through summer with us, through camp with us, and it's just good to see them get out here and get to play, and have fun and get experience."

"That's what this freshman program is all about, to give these guys game experience, and that's what they got tonight, and I felt they had great effort and did a great job tonight."

Coach Barnhart acknowledged that one area in which the freshman team will be looking to improve is finishing drives - especially those in scoring position - with touchdowns.

"That's what we'd like to do and what we've got to do, and what we didn't do here tonight and what we've struggled with on Friday nights - when we get down

inside the red zone, we've got to be able to put it in the end zone," said Coach Barnhart. "We've got to figure that out and work on that, and continue to get better inside the red zone. We're moving the ball up and down the field, we've just got to be able to punch it in and score."

On the defensive side of the ball, Coach Barnhart liked what he saw - for most of the game.

"I thought we blocked really well for three quarters," said Coach Barnhart. "There at the end, they knew what we were doing - they were just bringing the house, and we struggled there at the end with them bringing everybody. But I thought our line blocked well up front, and I thought both quarterbacks played pretty well in the decision making and running the football."

Talent could be seen everywhere on the field that day, and the team's level of cohesion was more than evident, despite this being the first time this group of Indians was able to really play together outside of practicing as the high school's scout team.

"We've got five eighth-graders that have been with us since spring," said Coach Barnhart. "We've had five join us since school started, but those five since spring, they've put in their time and they do a good job for us as eighth-graders. They're getting a lot of good experience, and that what I was just telling them."

"By the time they're sophomores and ready to play on Friday nights, they're going to have two years of freshman football, two years of being in the varsity program - they're going to be ready to step in and go, and that's what's going to help this program in the long run. I think what we're doing here with this freshman program is great."

The Towns Freshman team is set to play Discovery High this Thursday, Sept. 3, at home, with a kickoff time of 5:30 p.m.

Pee Wees romp Hayesville, 30-0

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Towns County Youth Football Indians went one out of four in games against the Hayesville Yellow Jackets on Saturday, Aug. 29.

"We started out good," said TCYFL Director Jimmy Smith. "Our Pee Wees, after getting beat last game - we finally got a team up, and we won 30-0 against Hayesville."

The young team of 5- and 6-year-olds took on five new players the week before being defeated by Franklin 36-6 in the first game of the season, but Head Coach Matthew Goodwin was able to coach his team of 13 to its first victory against Hayesville after last week's bye, improving the Pee Wee record to 1-1.

Tucker Engert scored two touchdowns for his team - one for 70 yard and another for 60 yards - and Aiden Reynolds, who scored the only touchdown against Franklin two weeks ago, scored three touchdowns against Hayesville, going 45 yards, 50 yards and 60 yards in his scoring runs.

Defensively, the Pee Wees refused to allow a Hayesville first down for the entire game, dominating their Yellow Jacket counterparts on the field, with Jaykob Goodwin leading the team on defense with most tackles.

Early Saturday morning before game time, Coach Goodwin was involved in an accident that flipped his truck upside down. Fortunately he was okay, and Coach Goodwin made it on time to the game, coached a win and stayed for the rest of the day to cheer on the other Towns County teams.

The Termites put forth



Towns County Youth football in action. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

a strong effort but fell short of defeating the Hayesville Termites.

Towns Termites that stood out on Saturday were Brett Young, rushing 59 yards for a touchdown, Brody Burke, rushing 40 yards for a touchdown, and Cruz Kitchens, rushing 39 yards for a touchdown.

"Defensively, Jacob Nicholson was in the Hayesville backfield all day," said Termites Head Coach Shane Haney. "The Jackets were up 12-0 at half, and we scored on our opening possession of the third quarter, adding a 2-point conversion to make it 12-8. It just wasn't enough, and Hayesville won 36-20."

The Mites lost 32-6 - Griffin Young scoring - but the young players showed plenty of heart against a really good team from Hayesville.

Towns County suffered another loss when the Midgets, who beat Franklin in the season opener 40-0, lost to the Hayesville Midgets 40-0.

Hayesville Midgets won the Cracker Bowl last year - the Smoky Mountain Conference equivalent of the Super Bowl - and Towns County knew it was up for a challenge that Saturday.

"That is probably one of the best teams I've seen in Midget football," said Director Smith. "You've got to give them credit - they've got an awesome ball team. I think that bye week really hurt us, because we didn't even get to practice but one day that week, and it was in the gym, because it rained all week. Last week, we only got to practice two days and it rained one day out, so we got a total of three practices in two weeks."

Turnout at Hayesville High School was excellent, and Director Smith would like to thank everyone who attended and invite them to see the youth of the county play this weekend.

The Towns County Youth Football League plays against the Robbinsville Black Knights on Saturday, Sept. 5, at home in Frank McClure Stadium, with a kickoff time of 11 a.m.

"Robbinsville has a good ball team, and they're going to come ready to play. I guarantee you that," said Director Smith. "We've just got to be fired up this week. It looks like the weather will be good this week, so we'll get some good practice in and be ready for Saturday."



The Indians offense fires away vs Fannin County. Photo/Lowell Nicholson