

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Towns County comes up short during trip to Athens Academy

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Towns County Indians went down swinging in a tough matchup against undefeated 8-A Region rival Athens Academy on Friday, Oct. 2.

Athens Academy scored all 36 of their points in the first half of the game, and the Indians defense held the Spartans scoreless in the second half.

Offensively, the Indians struggled to capitalize on opportunities, such as a first quarter fumble recovery by Dalton Key that ended in a blocked field goal attempt, and a tremendous 47-yard run by quarterback Russell Cox to start the second half, only to end in a fumble recovered by the Spartans the very next play.

The boys, wearing their white jerseys – turned brown on a waterlogged, muddy field – never gave up, however, and their hard work and determination culminated in a scoring drive during the last quarter of the game.

Starting on their own 30-yard line, Cox converted a third down with an 18-yard run.

Kobe Denton ran for another first down, which led to a fourth-and-three on the Spartan 37-yard line.

Denton dragged it up the middle for yet another first down, which was followed by a great 32-yard run from Cox to get the ball into the end zone.

As always, senior kicker Shea Underwood split the uprights for a good point after, and the game ended on Athens Academy's next series, final score 36-7.

"It felt good to get those points," said Indians Head Coach Billy Barnhart. "I'm happy for them that they got back on the scoreboard. I'm really proud of them."

Coach Barnhart was particularly



The Indians captains at Athens Academy. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

impressed with his defense that shut the Spartans down during the second half of the game.

"Athens Academy is much improved over last year, much improved – undefeated, ranked in the state, No. 1 in our region right now," said Coach Barnhart of the Spartans. "All we asked our guys to do was come out and play hard tonight. Come out and play hard and play your best, and I felt that that's what they did tonight, and they gave great effort."

"That team has over 100 formations, and they do all kinds of stuff. And our guys, they did what we practiced on all week. They were lined up for the most part, and they played hard. I know Athens Academy put up 36 points in the first half, but they didn't do all the things that they normally do and that they like to do, because we were in position and we made plays. I'm just real proud of our guys."

Even though the Indians struggled to get into the end zone, Coach Barnhart saw definite offensive improvement on

the field that night.

"The backs ran hard tonight, and I feel we're getting better up front, I really do," said Coach Barnhart. "I'm just real proud of our guys, once again, and their effort and their hard work."

Missing from the sidelines were several players, including a few starters, as some Indians decided the week of the Athens Academy game that they didn't want to play football anymore.

"I hate that those guys decided what they decided, but like I told each one of them, they have to do what they feel is best," said Coach Barnhart.

That being said, the Indians needed to make a few adjustments on the team, with one result being three freshmen on the offensive line.

"Jake Parker, Cooper Moss and Johnny Donnelly all played, I felt, as freshmen playing up there in the middle of an offensive line against a football team of that caliber, I thought they did a great job," said Coach Barnhart. "Of course, you've got to watch the film. I



Towns County running back Kobe Denton (32) powers his way up the middle. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

know they're freshmen, I know they made freshmen mistakes, but I thought they played well for being freshmen and playing against a team like that tonight."

Freshman Trent Bradshaw also stepped up and did a commendable job as nose guard on the defensive line, and the young players were excited to get the opportunity to play the primetime varsity schedule.

Junior Blake Silvers, who has been a defensive constant all year long, got the opportunity to play on the offensive side of the ball.

"I really feel he did a great job for us tonight at defense and at offensive tackle," said Coach Barnhart. "Like I said, I'm proud of the guys who stepped up in their places, and the job they did tonight."

"You're getting guys that are getting game time experience probably a little bit earlier than what they really needed, but that's okay. They stepped up to the challenge, they had that next-man-up mentality, and I felt they did a great job."

After every game, win,



Quarterback Russell Cox brings the Indians offense up to the line of scrimmage last Friday night in Athens. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

lose or draw, Coach Barnhart has his team take a knee on the field, and he takes the time to tell the young men in his care that he's proud of them, of their effort, and he encourages them

to come ready for practice the following Monday. The Towns County Indians play at home against Athens Christian School on Friday, Oct. 9, at 7:30 p.m.

Lady Indians honor seniors following Providence game

By Shawn Jarrard
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Following the Thursday, Oct. 1, game against Providence Christian Academy, two Lady Indians seniors – Alyson Nelson and LeAnn Dean – took their final laps in Lowell Nicholson Field to celebrate Senior Night.

It was an emotional time, both for the seniors and their younger teammates.

"I've played with them since I was a kid, and we're just a big family," said 17-year-old Nelson, fighting back tears. "We're best friends."

Nelson plays at first base for the Lady Indians, and she performed exceptionally well during Thursday's game against the Storm, deftly fielding outs from the pitcher's mound, second and third bases, as well as from shortstop.

And she said that her teammates will be her family for life, commenting on how thankful she feels for the friends she has made, and the fact that she's learned the confidence of being able to do anything with her friends behind her.

Like smacking an RBI double in the bottom of the fourth inning to bring home the team's first score of the game in her final matchup at home.

"That was awesome – something that I'll never forget," said Nelson. "I knew I had to do it, and there was no better time than then, for sure."

Nelson was joined by her parents Mandy and Derek Nelson, whom she named her most inspirational people for always being there for her.

During her high school career, Nelson has been in the FBLA, on the All A Honor Roll for four years, and took home First Place as a national winner in spreadsheet applications at the 2015 National FBLA Leadership Conference.

In the fall of 2016, she plans to attend Kennesaw State University to major in accounting, with plans to go into corporate finance one day.

The seniors received flowers, gift bags and many hugs from their teammates that Thursday night following the game, and everyone posed for pictures to remember the special occasion.

LeAnn Dean, 18, also considers her team as being part of her family.

"It's 13 sisters that I gained that I didn't have," said Dean in an outpouring of emotion. "I don't know how I'm going to



Lady Indians seniors: LeAnn Dean and Alyson Nelson along with family were honored at last week's Senior Night. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

make it without them. I'm going to miss them – they're my family."

Dean played solid defense at second base all that last home game, and she singled up the middle in the third inning, which drew cheers from the dugout and the stands.

She has been on the varsity team for all four years of her high school career, and though she is leaving for college after graduation, she said that her teammates "told me I better

come back or else."

Of course, Dean will remember the wins she has been a part of, including last season, which was the most winningest season in Towns County softball history.

"But during the losses is how well we take it, and how we could always just get back up and pick each other up after," said Dean. "We were just always there for each other."

For three years previously, Dean has been one of the girls

holding a bat along the third base line, forming a tunnel with the rest of her team for departing teammates to run their last lap and then slide into home for the final time.

"It's weird being the one running around, running under the bats – it's different," said Dean. "It was emotional, because I knew it was the last time, but it just had to happen I guess. It seemed like yesterday that we started practice in June. I can't believe it's over. I've had fun."

Dean was escorted by her parents, and named her mother her most inspirational person for being "the strong woman I want to become."

During the course of her high school career, she has been an active member in the FBLA, served as vice president and secretary of the FFA for two years, a member of the Beta Club for two years, secretary of the Chess Club for two years and vice president of the United Community Bank Junior Board

of Directors.

Looking ahead, she plans to attend the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega after graduating high school.

"I either want to get my bachelor's in nursing or become a pharmacist, get my bachelor's and move on to a pharmacy college," said Dean.

Both Dean and Nelson are thankful for the time they've had on the team, and for the past two years of leadership by Lady Indians Head Coach Brandon Rowland.

And even though the team ended up losing to Providence 4-2, with the other run being supplied by an RBI single from junior Tatiana Baldwin, Coach Rowland was proud of the way his Lady Indians performed that Thursday.

"We played a lot better than our last couple of games," said Coach Rowland, whose team has struggled this season. "A lot less errors this game. Batting got us. It's bad for them, they hate it, but if it's not one thing it's another. If they can't get their bats going and they're playing a great game, or they're not playing so well but they're hitting like crazy – it's just getting all those components together we've struggled with this year."

"Pitching wise, our junior Kristen Henson did a great job up there. We had a couple of good hits up there. We played great defense, only a couple of balls dropped, but we didn't make the five, six, seven errors that we've been making the past couple of games. I'm proud of them."

And of course, Coach Rowland has been thankful for the leadership of his seniors, and said that their shoes will be hard to fill.

"I couldn't ask for better leadership out of both of those young ladies," said Coach Rowland. "Even when they're not in the game, or if they're doing other things. LeAnn came in and hit throughout the middle of the season that I didn't have her in the field. The leadership there, that's going to be hard to replace."

VFW Golf Tournament

The Veterans of Foreign Wars is having a golf tournament on Thursday, October 8th at 8:30 a.m. Join fellow Veterans and supporters for a day of fun and golf at Chatuge Shores Golf Course. Cost is \$55 per person. Call 404-295-6462 for more info. TOWNS COUNTY HERALD



The remaining members of the TCHS Lady Indians pose for a picture with their departing seniors on Senior Night. Photo/Lowell Nicholson