

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Prince Avenue knocks off Indians 40-7 on Senior Night

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Friday night was Senior Night at Towns County High School, and the Indians lost their final home game against Prince Avenue Christian, 40-7.

"It felt good to get some points on the board," said Head Coach Billy Barnhart.

And those seven points were exciting to see.

Right at the start of the fourth quarter, Towns County initiated a fateful drive. A two-play first down thanks to the rushing abilities of Cole Ledford and Kobe Denton led to another first down, as Cruz Shook ate up yardage into Wolverine territory with a reception from cool-headed quarterback Russell Cox.

Yet another first down later and it was first-and-goal from the 7-yard line. But the Indians couldn't capitalize, forcing a field goal attempt.

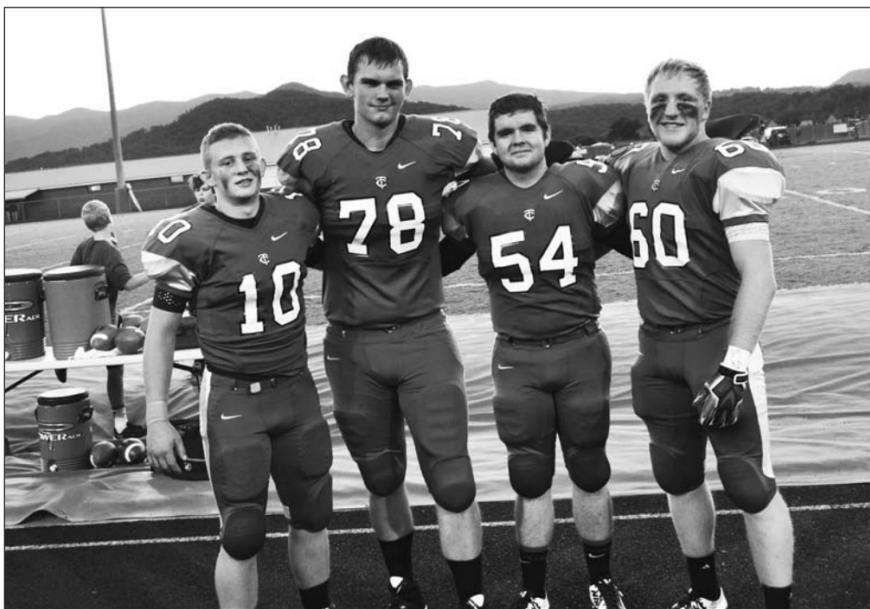
Kicker Shea Underwood lined up and split the uprights, and the scoreboard suddenly had some weight on the home side.

But there was a flag on the play, and Prince Avenue Christian was penalized for roughing the snapper.

Coach Barnhart had a decision to make – decline the penalty and take the late-game three points, or chance a first-and-goal to let the Indians try once more to get it into the end zone.

They went for the touchdown, and Cox was able to muscle up the middle to dive across for a score.

Underwood delivered another perfect kick, and the Indians



Left: Towns County seniors: Cruz Shook, Kevin McConnell, Grayson Carver, and Kyle Davis. Right: Coach Barnhart during the first quarter. Photos/Lowell Nicholson



had increased their score from three to seven.

"We kicked a field goal, and then they got a penalty, and I hate taking points off the board, but I really wanted a touchdown, so that was nice to get, finally, after two or three weeks," said Coach Barnhart.

"Once again, I can't say enough about our guys," said Coach Barnhart. "Like I said, we played one of the better teams in the state of Georgia in Class A, and I thought they came out and played their hearts out and gave everything they've got, and I thought they did a lot of good things. I'm really proud of them."

Towns County had six first downs, with six penalties for 65

yards. After watching the film, Coach Barnhart said that "those chop blocking penalties were terrible calls."

Denton rushed 15 times for 42 yards, and Ledford six for 15 yards. Cox completed 3-10 passes and added the rushing touchdown.

The team found defensive leaders in Kyle Davis, Kevin McConnell, Walker Ross, Grayson Carver and Shook.

"I can't say enough about our four seniors – Cruz, Grayson, Kyle and Kevin," said Coach Barnhart. "I do feel fortunate that I had the opportunity to coach these guys their senior year – great young men, I know they've got great futures ahead of them."

Before the game, friends and family were treated to a special parade of seniors escorted by loved ones for the Fall 2014 Fall Sports Senior Night.

"We would like to recognize these seniors for their hard work, dedication and perseverance throughout their high school career," said Coach Jim Melton.

Senior Fast Pitch players Morgan Bradley, Carly Gilfilian, Kristen Goodwin, Emily Ledford, Tori Morgan and Alyssa Pyle were recognized.

Seniors from the Towns County Indian Raider Band who drew hearty applause from the crowd were Corbin Allen, Brandy Collins, Brock Denton, Savannah Holdaway, Arianna Lentini, Kori

Sofield and Bonnie Bennett, who has pulled double duty this year being also a Towns County Football Cheerleader.

Bennett's fellow senior cheerleaders were MegAnn Bradley, Kayla Davis, Mia Manto, Jessie Poole and Alexis Roach.

The Cross Country team will be graduating seniors as well, and Alana Calhoun and Alejandro Lemus-Gomez stood proudly before the crowd.

And last but not least, the high school football seniors enjoyed a warm welcome before the game.

At the game's halftime, the Indian Raider Band performed with the grace and fluidity with which they have conducted themselves all season.

Then, the Towns County Youth Football program got a special introduction, as each player from each team sprinted down the track on the eve of the last youth football regular season game of the year in the Smokey Mountain Conference.

All in all, it was an overwhelmingly positive evening – from seniors and youngsters to band members and cheerleaders, there was something to celebrate. And even though the football team didn't walk away with a win Friday night, Towns County Seniors surely did.

The Towns County Indians face Commerce in their next to last game of the year on Friday at 8 p.m. on the Tigers' home turf.



The future of Towns County Indians football at halftime of the varsity game. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



Towns Seniors Cruz Shook (10) and Kevin McConnell (78) get in on the tackle. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Lady Indians go down swinging

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Towns County Lady Indians finished the year in a hard-fought series of post-season games during the Region 8-A Tournament a couple of weeks ago.

Round one of the tournament saw the Lady Indians facing George Walton Academy in a decidedly close match.

Towns County lost 5-4 in extra innings, but were up 4-2 heading into the bottom of the seventh.

"We couldn't hold on for the win, and they tied it to go into extra innings," said Head Coach Brandon Rowland. "We failed to score, and George Walton knocked in the winning run in the bottom of the 8th."

Tori Morgan went 2 for 4 with three RBIs, including two solo homeruns that were over the fence.

Emily Ledford also went 2 for 4, while Kristen Henson and Alyssa Nelson each went 2 for 3, and Carly Gilfilian, Tatiana Baldwin and Morgan Bradley were 1 for 4 each.

Ledford tossed 14 strikeouts, rocketing 86 strikes out of 109 pitches.

The next game proved fortuitous for the Lady Indians, as they won 6-1 in the first round consolation game against Lakeview.

That game was actually postponed for more than two hours due to a rain delay.

The team had 15 hits on the whole. Bradley went a perfect 3 for 3, sending two runners home. Alyssa Pyle also batted a perfect 2 for 2, while Henson went 3 for 4 with an RBI, Ledford recorded 3 hits out of 4 at bats, Tori Morgan 2 for 4, and Zandra Churchill and Gilfilian each had a hit and an RBI.

Defensively, the Lady Indians proved mightier than the Lions, as Ledford struck



The six seniors on this year's Towns County Lady Indians softball team have laid a solid foundation for the program to build on in the coming years. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

out six batters, but only allowed a single run off of two hits.

Second round consolation play pitted Towns County against Commerce, which ended up beating the Lady Indians 8-0.

It should be noted that three starting seniors missed this final matchup to take the SAT, which no doubt contributed to the shut-out loss, with zero hits and several errors in the field.

The Towns County Lady Indian Fast Pitch team ended the year with a 9-18 record.

"I am very impressed with these 14 young ladies this year," said Coach Rowland. "Many opposing coaches and parents have come up to me and congratulated me on what we have accomplished this year. In our final huddle at the end of the Commerce game, I told them that if there was a title for most improved teams, it would be us hands down."

"I looked as far back as I could, and all I could find is eight wins at the top in a season at Towns County. Going into this year, that was the goal that I set without even knowing who I was going to have show up for tryouts. We got our ninth win in the Region Tournament, and I couldn't

have been happier."

Looking back on the season, it's easy to see why Coach Rowland is proud of his Lady Indians.

Ledford had an astounding 158 strikeouts for the season out of 132.67 innings pitched.

The top six batting averages came from: Morgan, .386; Henson, .364; Gilfilian, .323; Churchill, .312; Ledford, .299 and Nelson, .299.

Ledford and Morgan were also voted Second Team All Region, and Zandra Churchill received honorable mention.

"Next year will definitely be a struggle for us to fill the shoes of six amazing seniors," said Coach Rowland. "We are graduating our only two pitchers, but we will have back a few that have pitched in the past, so hopefully with a little work over the summer we can get them back into the swing of things."

"We have a lot of speed coming from a few eighth graders, which is one thing that we could really use. I don't think that I have ever been this excited to get to next year – even though we will be building, you can look for some great things in our program for next year."

The Pee Wees are in the playoffs

By Shawn Jarrard
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Regular season play is officially over for Towns County Youth Football, and the scores are in: the Pee Wees are playoff bound.

"Saturday was a great game," said Pee Wee Head Coach Shane Haney. "Both teams were fighting for a playoff spot, but the little Indians did it. With a final score of 14-8, the Pee Wees played great defense, with Franklin running 38 total plays and being held to one touchdown."

Coach Haney told his Indians that they better be ready for practice the following Monday, "because now the season ends and the playoffs begin."

Coach Joey Floyd was certainly proud of both defense and offense.

"We have learned so much these past two weeks, from new positions to about five to six brand new plays to use in the playoffs," said Coach Floyd. "We are ready."

Coach Mitchell shared that he was "proud of the boys and the amount of time they had given and the effort they had given for this entire football season."

Rounding out the coaching talent, Coach Brannon Burnes said that he was "proud of the effort given by all the players in the game, and they played to the last second of the game."

Towns County will be facing Robbinsville in the playoffs, and the game will be held in Swain County at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Oct. 25.

And the Indian Pee Wees are no strangers to Robbinsville, having lost to the Robbinsville Pee Wees earlier in the season.

"They beat us by only eight points, so that's not bad – we should have a good chance," said Youth Football Director Jimmy Smith.

Robbinsville is currently the No. 1 ranked team of the four teams in the playoffs, and Towns County is heading into this Saturday's game ranked fourth.

By a quirk of the rules in the Smokey Mountain Conference, the rank of the four teams was decided in large part by a coin toss.

The Towns County Pee



Wees have a regular season record of 7-2, as does Cherokee. All things considered equal, one would think that the powers that be might appeal to the statistics of each team.

In the case of Towns County versus Cherokee, Cherokee actually lost to Towns County earlier in the season. Logically, one might deduce that Towns County would come out on top of such a ranking contest, given that the two teams' records are tied.

Unfortunately, the bylaws have outlined a procedure of using a coin toss in just such an event, so Towns County placed fourth in the conference on a matter of chance and not its proven record.

Robbinsville and Andrews were in the exact same scenario, where Andrews had beaten Robbinsville previously, but the two teams have the same record of 8-1. A coin flip decided that Robbinsville would take the top seed going into the playoffs.

Director Smith raised concern over this procedure, and the Smokey Mountain Conference plans to change this rule next season.

Also in the Smokey Mountain Conference, first seed plays fourth seed, and second seed plays third seed.

During regular season play, Andrews also beat Towns County, but Andrews lost to Cherokee, and the Indians won against Cherokee.

"I'm hoping Cherokee upsets Andrews," said Director Smith. "I'd rather take a chance on playing Cherokee again than

Andrews."

Termites lost in Franklin on Saturday 38-0, finishing with a season record of 4-5.

"It's been a great season," said Termite Head Coach Joseph Goble. "It was a good ball team – we're going to get better next season."

Indian Mites fell to 5-4 on the season, losing 36-12 that day. The Midget team lost 40-0, and unfortunately was unable to bring a win home after all. One thing to remember, Midgets, is that there's always next year, always room to get better and grow stronger and improve. So, take heart and believe in yourselves.

"I'm proud of those boys," said Director Smith. "They have played tough all season. And I'm proud of my coaches, from the Pee Wees to the Midgets. I'd like to thank them for their time for what they did, being volunteer coaches. They put a lot of time into this youth football program."

The parents and Pee Wee players felt like they had won the Super Bowl on Saturday, and if the Pee Wees win this coming Saturday against Robbinsville, they will get the chance to win the Smokey Mountain Conference Youth Football equivalent in the championship game: the Cracker Bowl.

"The Pee Wees, we've just got to win," said Director Smith. "I feel like we can go down there and play better than we did the last time. We're going to have a good week of practice this week, go down there Saturday, and hope and pray we can do it."