

# Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

www.townscountyherald.net • E-mail: tcherald@windstream.net

## Towns County falls to Lions on homecoming night in Dacula

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Dacula - Towns County faced a tough loss to Region 8A opponent Hebron Christian Academy in Dacula on Friday, Sept. 18.

The game had a promising start, with a terrific hit from linebacker Dylan Roberts to force a Hebron fumble 15 seconds into the game, which was recovered by Daulton Rogers.

But despite playing with plenty of heart and tenacious spirit, the Indians weren't able to muster an offense until the fourth quarter.

On an Indians fourth-and-punt, the Lions were assessed a penalty for roughing the kicker, Shea Underwood, granting Towns County 15 yards for a first down.

From there, the Indians drove the ball up the field and to Hebron's 1-yard line on the fancy footwork of quarterback Russell Cox and running backs Cole Ledford and Dalton Bradley.

In an extremely close call, Cox kept the ball on a first-and-goal run up the middle for a touchdown, but he was covered up by Lions defensive linemen and forced backward, causing a fumble that was unfortunately recovered by Hebron.

The game, which also celebrated Hebron's Homecoming, ended 35-0 in favor of the Lions, in a contest that arguably contained questionable calls - or a lack of calls - by referees of the game.

Indians Head Coach Billy Barnhart at one point vehement-



QB Russell Cox avoids the pressure. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

ly addressed referees who, for whatever reason, couldn't see apparent holding on behalf of the Lions on multiple occasions, especially in the second half.

Even Coach Barnhart received a penalty assessed against his Indians for allegedly standing outside the coaches' area.

"Last week we didn't have to worry about that, because we had a great officiating crew," said Coach Barnhart of the game against Lakeview Academy. "We never yelled or fussed once. And I know people think, hey, he's fussing, but no, we just want them to officiate the game fairly. I don't care what they say, it didn't happen tonight. I had had it, and we're going to stick up for our guys."

Regardless of the officiating, Towns County just wasn't

able to move the ball offensively due mostly to a strong Lions defense, though Coach Barnhart was quick to point out that he was proud of the way his young men played despite the loss.

"The effort is there," said Coach Barnhart. "I don't ever doubt their effort, I really don't. Defensively, they gave great effort. We missed some tackles, but we're in position. We've just got to make better tackles, but as far as effort, the effort is there - I had great effort. We're pleased with their effort."

"Offensively, we knew what they were going to do to us defensively. We thought we could maybe spread them out, formulate them a little bit, maybe get them to loosen up some. But they stayed with what they did, and they did what they do. We just struggled offensively again tonight, and I



The Indians take the field at Hebron Christian Academy last Friday night. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

hate it for our guys and for our team. We're better than what we showed tonight offensively."

For Coach Barnhart, the goal moving forward is to work on capitalizing on offensive opportunities, such as the turnover forced by the Indians to start the game.

"We've got to continue to work hard, and they will," said Coach Barnhart. "They'll show up Monday ready to go and ready to prepare for George Walton."

The Indians play George Walton Academy on Friday, Sept. 25, at 7:30 p.m. in Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

"We've just got to get better, we've got to continue, and they will," said Coach Barnhart. "We get to go back home next week, and I'm looking forward to that. It's been two long weeks on the road."



Dylan Roberts (4) and Shea Underwood lead a host of Indians on the tackle of a Lions ball carrier. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

## Henson homer lifts TCMS to victory

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Kennedi Henson just knew she would hit a home run this season - this was her year to break the record.

She'd told her parents, Chris and Robyn, and even her head coach, Jessica Berrong.

And on Tuesday, Sept. 15, against Prince Avenue Christian in Lowell Nicholson Field, Henson let her bat do all the talking.

That day, the 12-year-old Lady Indian cemented her place in Towns County history, overturning the previous record of 16 years old to become the youngest softball player by a mile to hit a homerun for Towns County Schools.

"We played really well, and Kennedi pitched really well," said Coach Berrong. "It was the first inning - she doesn't ever like to swing at the first strike, and she probably could have done that on the first strike, but she took it. The girl ended up giving her another one, and she hit a homerun. There was somebody on base, so she had an RBI with her homerun."

"I've never heard of a seventh-grader doing it," Coach Berrong continued. "I've seen eighth-graders do it a couple of times or come close, but I've never seen a seventh-grader. And it was not just barely over - it was one of those that as soon as it came off, you kind of knew it was going to make it."

If that weren't enough, Henson went on to knock an inside-the-park grand slam, launching her team to an even bigger lead for the 15-3 win.

Known as one of the team's dedicated workhorses both offensively and on the mound, the seventh-grader remains humble about her accomplishments.

Henson is able to do this because her natural talent is tempered by her hard work - she eats, sleeps and breathes sports, and is always asking to take extra pitches for batting practice.

Her weekends are filled with travel ball, both softball and basketball, and she plays just as hard for Towns County Middle School as she does abroad.

In short, Henson is an asset everywhere she goes because she knows how to stand out while playing to the strengths of her team.

The Lady Indians are enjoying a winning season heading into the final stretch of the year, with a hard-fought record sitting right at 7-5, and improvement has been the name of the game.

"We're doing well," said Coach Berrong. "Our hitting



TCMS Lady Indians Head Coach Jessica Berrong cheers on Kennedi Henson as she rounds the bases following her record-breaking homer. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

has improved quite a bit from the beginning of the year. They have a lot more confidence. And as far as other teams, Kennedi is pretty much shutting them down in pitching for the most part.

"We're really young in the field, though that's improved with time. We definitely had more errors in the field at the beginning of the year that might have cost us a couple of wins. But as time has gone on, we've improved quite a bit. I'm really pleased with them."

Only two games remain in regular season play, both away, against Athens Christian on Tuesday, Sept. 22, and Oglethorpe on Thursday, Sept. 24.

With the Middle School League Tournament coming up in Commerce on Saturday, Sept. 26, several players have been standing out lately and are likely to shine.

Kaytrie Bradshaw, a sixth-grader, delivered a solid pitching performance in a win against Lakeview Academy last week, and Abby Mauldin has proven herself time and again a force to be reckoned with at bat.

One of the team's core players, Sophia Shook, will move on to varsity ball when she starts high school next year, and will get the chance to play with Henson's older sister, Kristen, who started pitching varsity this season.

Coach Berrong said that Shook's dynamic behind home plate will be sorely missed - especially her rapport with Henson at the mound.

With good reason to believe in ultimate success, Coach Berrong hopes to add two more wins to the team's record this week before going into the tournament, which would bolster confidence that much more to give Towns County the edge toward taking home the big trophy.

"They feel ready," said Coach Berrong. "All of these wins that we've had from the beginning have built their confidence, so they're a little more ready to go up and hit. So, I'm

feeling like that will serve us well in the tournament when we go against some of the faster pitchers."

"I feel like we're going to do pretty well. I feel like we can definitely compete for first place. Even our losses, with the exception of George Walton, which was a doubleheader at the beginning of the year and we've worked out a lot of kinks since then, have all been close. We haven't really gotten blown out. I feel like we're comparable to all of them. It's just going to be who shows up on Saturday."

## Tri County British Car Club meeting

The Tri County British Car Club, will be holding its next luncheon meeting on Sunday, September 27th. Location is Brother's Willow Ranch Restaurant, in Young Harris, at 12:45 PM. If you are interested in classic British cars, you can contact them by email at tricountybritishcarclub@yahoo.com.

Edward Wesson  
NHSep23,219/CA

## McCay Lodge Bass Tournament

The McCay Lodge Bass Tournament will be held on Saturday, September 26th at Lake Chatuge, Ledford Chapel Ramp, beginning at 7 a.m. until 4 p.m. 100% guaranteed based on 40 boat field. Entry fee is \$80 per boat.

First Place - \$1,000; Second Place - \$700; Third Place - \$500; Fourth Place - \$300; and Fifth Place - \$100. Big Fish - \$200 donated by Blue Ridge Insurance and Smallest Fish - Victory Custom Road donated by David Helton.

This is a fund raising project for the Masonic lodges and McCay Lodge. With the proceeds from this tournament, we help support the children's home and other projects.

## Towns County Pickleball Complex Ribbon Cutting and Tournament draws crowd

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The first ever Georgia Mountain Pickleball Classic debuted at the brand new Towns County Pickleball Complex & Courts on Friday, Sept. 18, and Saturday, Sept. 19, just across the way from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Preceding the opening of the games in the dedicated 14-court complex, the Towns County Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting, and Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall cut the ribbon.

"Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in America," said Commissioner Kendall. "I see all kinds of potential for these courts, which is why I wanted to build 14 there, because I think this will definitely be a tourism attraction in the future. I want to work with those people to help bring in some tournaments, and I just think it's going to be a great thing for our county and area."

Although invented in 1965, pickleball is relatively new in the North Georgia Mountains, as the Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club, or GMPC, only came to be in 2014.

For those who don't yet know, pickleball is a paddle game for all ages that combines elements of tennis, badminton and Ping-Pong.

Despite its relative newness in the mountains, tournament organizer David Block, a USA Pickleball Association Ambassador, was thrilled with tournament participation, and he couldn't be happier with the new courts.

"It was a huge success. I am actually not just saying that - it was," said Block. "We stayed at local motels, ate at local restaurants, even bought barbecue from Jim's (Smokin' Que) so the folks in Union county could share in the profits. Socially, people renewed old friendships and made new friends."

For Block and other pickleball enthusiasts in the GMPC, the game of pickleball offers Towns County and area residents the unique ability to embrace a sport with active players ranging in ages from youth to retirees.

Many retired individuals in the GMPC played golf before discovering pickleball, and the health benefits of such an active, yet age-friendly sport as pickleball ensures that even players in their 80s can enjoy the game while being all the more healthy for playing.

Furthermore, now that the county has its own pickleball complex, the doors swing wide to future growth on a national, and perhaps international, stage, as future USA Pickleball Association sanctioned



Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall cuts ribbon

events are bound to find their way to Towns County.

"This sport 10 years ago had 50,000 players in the United States," said Bob Dixon, a Towns County resident and GMPC member. "Today, it has probably 750,000 players. This club has 250 players. It's growing at a rate of about two to five players a week in this area. This is a sport unlike any other, because it brings money to the economy in Towns County."

Notice of the Georgia Mountain Pickleball Classic went out to 49 states, and players from as far away as Indiana made the trip to play in the tournament. Several counties from within Georgia were represented, as well as communities in the neighboring states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Florida.

"When they come here, they spend money," said Dixon. "They go to the hotels, they go to the restaurants, they go to the stores. Major tournaments, for example the one in Conyers last year, which had approximately 150 players, brought \$300,000 to the economy."

The courts, installed by renowned court developer Mike Imbornone of Signature Tennis, were completed just in time for the tournament. Funding for the roughly \$65,000 pickleball facility came by way of money previously budgeted by the county for parks and recreation development.

In order to save money on the project, the county road department helped with some of the development, and GMPC

player volunteers pitched in with tasks like fence painting to get the courts ready for the club's first big tournament.

"We got a really good price from Signature Tennis," said Commissioner Kendall. "They were wanting to help develop pickleball in this area, and they did a good job on the courts. They're built right."

The complex completely replaced several tennis courts that had fallen into disuse over the past couple of years, and Commissioner Kendall is keen to take into account not only the economic benefits to the county that will come in the way of tournaments for the fast-growing sport, but also the benefits to the community in terms of youth activity.

"This is something we can probably put into our recreation department and bring in some young people," said Commissioner Kendall, adding that the GMPC could offer clinics to teach county youth. "Eventually, I can see this expanding into the school and being sanctioned by the Georgia High School Association - maybe a few years down the road, but I just think it's the coming thing."

Future plans for the Towns County Pickleball Complex & Courts are to develop the east end of the site, adding picnic tables and perhaps a pavilion, and Towns County's newest advocate Katie Bludworth, the chamber's special events coordinator, will be taking over the production of pickleball tournaments moving forward.



Pickleball Tournament Players enjoy the new complex photo by Lowell Nicholson