

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Indians win 27th Annual Battle of the States Championship

By Jerry Kendall
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Indians varsity basketball team reached a most desirable achievement last week when they defended their home court by sweeping three games and winning the 2021 Battle of the States Tournament. This was their second consecutive Battle of the States championship after defeating Ar-muchee, Hayesville, and Union County in the 2019 tournament, with last year's tournament having to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Battle of the States came into being in 1994 with this having been the 27th tournament.

The Indians captured the tournament championship this year by taking a pretty routine-type victory over Pendleton, South Carolina, and a one-sided victory over Murphy before playing a nearly flawless three quarters and withstanding a last ditch fourth quarter rally by Rabun in taking the championship on the last shot of the game.

Indians 59, Pendleton 49 – In the Pendleton game, the Indians led at the quarter breaks by scores of 14-11, 30-20, and 45-37 on their way to a 59-49 victory.

Senior Collin Crowder led the Indians in scoring with 29 points and was followed by senior Kyle Oakes with 16, junior Layne Rouse with 5, and sophomores Tanner Cunningham with 4, Connor Chastain with 3, and Zane Floyd with 2.

Indians 63, Murphy 49 – After Murphy took an early 5-2 lead in the second game on Wednesday, the Indians took complete control of the game which was not nearly as competitive as the 63-49 final score would indicate.

The Indians led 20-7 after one quarter, 39-11 at halftime, and 55-29 after three quarters before younger and inexperienced Indians players got lots of valuable varsity experience in the fourth quarter with the Bulldogs finishing the game with a 20-8



Towns County coach Brian Hunnicutt breathes a sigh of relief after the Indians survived Rabun's late comeback bid. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

advantage during the final quarter and the Indians completing a 64-49 victory. The Bulldogs' two leading scorers during the tournament combined for 18 of their fourth quarter points in giving the less experienced Indians valuable on-the-court experience as related to what to expect when seeing increasing varsity playing time in the future.

Their experience also provided an opportunity for rest for the most used players for their third game in three days in the championship game.

It is noteworthy that the Bulldogs were a scoring machine in a 78-68 opening game victory over Coosa of Northwest Georgia and an 81-66 win for third place on the final day over East Forsyth of Cumming. The Bulldogs finished the tournament with just a 4-7 record, but four of the losses were by 4 or fewer points and another by 8.

Senior Collin Crowder again led the way in scoring for the Indians with 26 points, and he was followed by senior Kyle Oakes with 12, sophomore Zane Floyd with 11, sophomore Tanner Cunningham with 6, junior Grant Ingram with 4, and junior Lane Rouse and sophomore Gage Rogers with 2 each.

Of note were Crowder scoring 24 of his points the first half before seeing reduced playing time the last half with the large lead, Oakes contributing a massive number of often spectacular assists, and the team sinking 23 of 26 free throw attempts during the game.

Indians 63, Rabun County 61 – The victories over Pendleton and Murphy brought the Indians face to face with the Rabun County Wildcats who were ranked among the Top 10 Class AA teams in the state in at least one poll with a 12-3 record, and they were on a 10-game winning streak.

Two of their losses came while they were a bit shorthanded while their football season continuing, and the third came on Tuesday night following their final football game played just four days prior on Friday with almost no time for the football players to switch gears from one sport to the other.

The opening 11 minutes of the game saw three ties and seven lead changes with a basket by senior Kyle Oakes at exactly the five minutes mark of the second quarter giving the Indians a 25-24 lead they would hold for the remainder of the game with the exception of a single tie in the

closing seconds to be addressed later.

The Oakes basket was the start of a 14-4 Indians scoring run highlighted by three additional deuces by Oakes and a pair of treys by sophomore Zane Floyd for 6 points each as the Indians finished the second quarter with a 39-29 lead at intermission.

Floyd had an amazing first half by including four treys, two deuces, and three-for-three free throw shooting in accumulating 19 points, while Oakes excited the crowd with stunning drives to the basket included among six deuces in leading him to 12 points, and senior Collin Crowder sank four deuces for 8 points.

The third quarter saw the Indians open with an old fashioned three-point play by Oakes extending their scoring run to 17-4 for a 42-29 lead, which became 51-36 on a trey by sophomore Tanner Cunningham at the three minutes mark and 53-38 on a deuce by sophomore Connor Chastain at the 2:25 mark.

After the aforementioned nearly flawless three quarters by the Indians, it was no surprise, however, to long time followers of basketball to see the outstanding Wildcats team make a move of their own after that as they

edged to within 55-43 entering the fourth quarter and continued a last-ditch rally following an opening deuce by Oakes for a 57-43 Indians lead by going on an 18-4 scoring run ending with a trey at the 17 seconds mark for a 61-61 tie.

Indians followers have come to expect the team to rise to the occasion in pressure situations, especially the last two years, and Collin Crowder, as he has done so frequently for the Indians, met the challenge this time by sinking a jump shot from within the foul lane to give the Indians a 63-61 lead at the five seconds mark.

Rabun called a timeout with 4.1 seconds on the clock and sufficient time to get the ball up court and get off a two-point shot for a tie or a three-point shot for a win, but the Indians got a break when the Wildcats got the ball inbounds and made a long pass downcourt where Crowder was the only player there and received the pass and held the ball until time ran out for a thrilling Indians victory.

Oakes led the Indians in scoring against Rabun County with 21 points and was followed by Floyd with 19, Crowder with 15, and Chastain and Cunningham with 4 each.

Oakes and Floyd were selected for the Battle of the States All Tournament Team and Crowder received the Most Valuable Player award.

There are a couple of connections between Rabun and Towns County basketball that may be of interest to Towns County fans. Senior Connor McKay led Rabun in scoring with 27 points against the Indians after having scored 22 against Strom Thurmond, South Carolina, and 26 against East Forsyth in his team's first two tournament games.

The Atlanta Journal and Constitution has listed McKay as one of the Top Five players in Class AA in the state, and he certainly lived up to that tribute during the Battle of the States.

McKay has signed to play basketball in the Peach Belt Conference with Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina, and he will be back in Towns County playing against the Young Harris College Mountain Lions, who are also in the Peach Belt Conference.

The Towns County connection here is that McKay's mother, Kelly Westberg McKay, was a student in Towns County from third through eighth grade before moving to Rabun County, and she still has a number of good friends here in Towns County. She can be very proud of her son and his excellence on the basketball court and as a top-notch citizen.

It may be of interest to Towns County fans to also learn that Indians head coach Brian Hunnicutt is a 1997 graduate of Rabun County High School, where he played varsity basketball for three years, served as head coach for both the girls and boys Rabun County Middle School teams, and as an assistant varsity boys basketball coach prior to coming to Towns County.

He served for a year as assistant Lady Indians coach under Jim Melton during the 2017 season and then as head coach of the Lady Indians the last four years and now serves as the Indians' head coach.

Lady Indians get win over Coosa, finish sixth at Battle of the States

By Jerry Kendall
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The very youthful Towns County Lady Indians varsity basketball team served as hosts of the 27th Battle of the States Tournament last week and got their third win of the 2021-22 season against Coosa High School from Northwest Georgia while falling to strong teams from Pendleton, South Carolina, in the opening game on Tuesday and Polk County, Tennessee, on the final day of the tournament on Thursday.

The Pendleton ladies had to withdraw from the tournament following their win over the Lady Indians due to COVID issues but returned home with an 8-4 record, while Polk County improved to an 8-3 record after suffering a 61-60 loss to East Forsyth in their tournament opener and tracing past Strom Thurmond, South Carolina, by a 61-23 score on the second day of the tournament and defeating the Lady Indians on the final day.

Strom Thurmond entered the tournament with a 6-3 record but had several non-COVID related medical absences during the tournament and finished last in the standings.

Pendleton 56, Lady



The Lady Indians notched a convincing second round victory over Coosa to finish sixth at the Battle of the States. Photos/Lowell Nicholson

Indians 35 – Scores by quarter are not currently available for the Lady Indians game against Pendleton, but point totals are available, with freshman Kaleigh Beaver leading the way with 9 points followed by junior Sarah Shook and sophomore Laura Mauldin with 8 each; sophomore Emma Lalletment with 3; junior Morgan Pierson, sophomore Maycee Garrison, and freshman

Natalie Barnes with 2 each; and senior Emily Vargas and sophomore Halie Arrowood with 1 each.

Lady Indians 39, Coosa 23 – The Lady Indians trailed Coosa by a 5-4 score after one quarter and 15-11 at intermission, but they took control of the game the last half in taking a 24-21 lead after three quarters on the way to a 39-23 victory.



Junior Sarah Shook led the Lady Indians in scoring with 23 points and was followed by junior Tabitha Barnes with 6, sophomore Halie Arrowood with 5, freshman Kaleigh Beaver with 3, and junior Laura Mauldin with 2.

Coosa has won just one game this year, but among eight games with scores available, five losses have been by

six or fewer points.

Polk County 51, Lady Indians 22 – In the Lady Indians' game against Polk County for Fifth Place, they overcame a quick scoring flurry by Polk during the first half in keeping well within striking distance during the first half before falling victim to a last half very similar to last half action in their win the prior day over Coosa.

The Lady Indians were trailing by just an 8-5 score before a trey by Polk in the final seconds of the first quarter had the Lady Cats leading 11-5 at quarter's end, and the Cats struck for a trey and a deuce in the opening seconds of the second quarter for a sudden 16-5 advantage.

But here came the Lady Indians who used a rousing 12-3 scoring run to pull to within 19-17 late in the quarter only to have a late deuce this time give Polk County a still small lead of 21-17 at intermission.

But just as the Lady Indians had rallied from a 15-11 halftime deficit against Coosa for a 39-23 victory, Polk County pulled steadily away the last half, leading 33-21 after three quarters and taking a 51-22 victory with it being noticeable to this reporter that Polk didn't end using full court pressure against their youthful opponents until the final minute and a half of the game.

Junior Sarah Shook again took the lead in scoring and was followed by freshman Kaleigh Beaver with 4, junior Tabitha Barnes with 3, sophomore Laura Mauldin with 2, and junior Brooke Murrell with 1.

Sarah Shook received All Tournament recognition for her fine play in the tournament.