

Towns County Sports

Towns County's Leader In Sports

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Indians win 11th straight, secure home field advantage in first round

TCHS Baseball to host Rec Night on Wednesday; Senior Night set for Thursday

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Towns County (17-8, 10-5) extended its winning streak to 11 games following a three-game sweep of Aquinas, allowing the Indians to leapfrog Lincoln County for the No. 2 seed in Region 8-A (Div. II).

As a result, the Indians will host Mt. Zion-Carroll (8-12, 0-8) in the best-of-three opening-round series on April 27-28. Mt. Zion hails from a three-team Region 7 that features top-seeded Bowdon and runner-up Christian Heritage.

Indians 15, Robbinsville, NC 5 - Towns County opened the week with a 15-0 road victory over the Black Knights on Monday, April 10.

The Indians scored the first 11 runs, then added three in the sixth and one in the seventh after Robbinsville got four in the fifth and one in the sixth.

Connor Chastain finished 4 for 5 with a double and 5 RBIs. Stone Chauncey went 2 for 4 with a pair of runs and an RBI.

Zane Floyd scored three times, drove in two and swiped a bag during a 3-for-5 day. He also earned the nod in the Monday road trip, striking out five over three perfect innings.

Chauncey allowed three hits and three earned runs while walking three and fanning two over two frames. Braydon Barrett tossed the final two innings, giving up three hits and one run.

Senior Layne Rouse tripled, scored and plated one run during a 1-for-4 performance. Cale Kirby doubled during a 2-for-3 game that included a walk, a run and a ribby. Tanner Cunningham scored once during a 1-for-3 day; Kade McConnell recorded 3 RBIs and a pair of runs; Caleb Berrong finished 1 for 5.

Seth Gillis reached on a pair of walks, stole a base and scored two runs. Braydon Barrett added one run.



Senior Seth Gills trots around third following his big fly vs. Aquinas during the first of two games on Saturday. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Indians 8, Aquinas 0 (GM 1) - Pitching against a school located just minutes from Augusta National, McConnell delivered a masterful performance on the mound, firing a complete-game, three-hit shutout during Friday's series opener. The junior right-hander fanned five and didn't walk a batter during his 72-pitch gem while going 2 for 4 at the plate. Gillis scored twice, doubled, stole a base and drove in a run during a 2-for-3 game. Floyd added three runs and two steals during a 1-for-4 day at the plate. In all, Towns County laced four doubles and swiped four bases during the one-sided win.

The Indians jumped ahead with three in the first and were never threatened courtesy of McConnell.

Gillis doubled home Floyd in the first, then came around on a wild pitch. Berrong doubled and scored on a passed ball to spot Towns County a 3-0 advantage.

Cunningham's one-out single brought home Chauncey in the third. Floyd singled to start the fourth and scored on Chastain's sacrifice fly after stealing two bags.

Courtesy runner Ian Wood scored on an error - making it a 6-0 game in the sixth. Later in the inning, an error off the bat of Berrong tacked on two more runs for an 8-0 final.

Berrong finished 1 for 4 with a run and a pair of RBIs.



The Indians celebrate an 11-5 win over Aquinas on Saturday after escaping a bases-loaded, one-out jam courtesy of a game-ending double play. Photo/Todd Forrest

Chauncey scored during a 1-for-4 game; Cunningham walked and scored a run during a 1-for-2 performance; Kirby finished 2 for 3.

Indians 11, Aquinas 5 (GM 2) - Towns County doubled off a runner at second on a line-drive to second baseman Matthew Chastain to end the Aquinas threat in the top of the seventh.

Leading 11-3 entering the final frame, Gillis allowed the first four hitters to reach before punching out the fifth hitter. A walk loaded the bases with one away when Chastain snagged a would-be hit and quickly tossed to Floyd covering second for the game-ending double play.

Fortunately, the Indians

put up a 5-spot in the bottom of the sixth, preventing things from getting especially dicey in the seventh. Towns County took a 6-3 lead into the sixth when McConnell singled home Connor Chastain. An error off the bat of Cunningham plated two more for a 9-3 margin. Kirby brought home Cunningham with a double, then came around on an error.

Up 11-3, consecutive hit batters loaded the bags and put Towns County in position to mercy-rule the visitors with a base hit, but an inning-ending strikeout sent Towns into the seventh with an eight-run cushion.

Floyd tossed five innings in the win, giving up five hits, a walk and three runs while

punching out five. Offensively, he finished 4 for 5 with three runs and a stolen base. Gillis fanned a pair over two innings of relief, allowing three hits, three walks and two earned runs.

Gillis went deep during a 1-for-4 game with two runs and a pair of RBIs. Chauncey doubled, scored and finished 4 for 4 with a stolen base. McConnell went 2 for 4 with one run, an RBI and one steal; Connor Chastain drove in two and added a run.

Cunningham knocked in two and scored once. Kirby went 1 for 4 with a run and an RBI double; Rouse scored once.

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Boys Soccer: Coach Rollie Thomas looks back on 2023 season

Mt. Zion-Carroll's 6-1 win knocks out Towns County in first round of State

By Todd Forrest
Sports Editor
sports@nganews.com

Carrollton - The Towns County Indians suffered a 6-1 loss at Mt. Zion-Carroll in the first round of State, bringing the 2023 season to a close.

Towns County found the net late in the first half when freshman Cruz Kitchens flicked in a header off senior Dren Green's corner kick.

The Indians finish the year at 1-11-1 overall and 1-5 in region play - good enough for the fourth and final seed in 8-A (Div. II). Despite its unsavory win-loss record, Towns County finished among the top-four squads in a brutal region featuring two teams that spent time ranked No. 1 in the State. As of this writing, Georgia Military College (GMC) sits atop the Class A rankings at 12-1-1. Lake Oconee Academy (LOA), the previous No. 1 team, is third at 8-2-3. Sitting in seventh is the region's 3-seed, Aquinas.

Excluding their 10-0 loss to GMC, the Indians were competitive against both LOA and Aquinas - taking a scoreless tie into the 50th minute at LOA and suffering a 2-0 loss at Aquinas.

Last week, the *Towns County Herald* caught up with fifth-year head coach Rollie Thomas to recap a 2023 campaign that saw the Indians return to the postseason for the first time since their 2021 final-four run.

TCH: After missing out on the playoffs last year, what were the expectations entering the season?

RT: We didn't meet our expectations, unfortunately. We had a mostly upperclassmen team this year, so obviously we were hoping to do more than we were able to do. Our defense competed against then-No. 1 Lake Oconee and current No. 1 Georgia Military for long stretches, we just struggled to finish. We didn't have a true goal-scorer this season. Overall, we saw great growth. We improved our fundamentals, skill and under-



The 2023 Towns County High School boys soccer team. Roster: Max Baron, Dustin Barrett, Christopher Bectol, Tyler Blackwell, Zion Calhoun, Justin Cantrell, Ivan Chavero, John Durham, Landon Eller, Dren Green, Jay Grimsley, Michael Houser, Grant Ingram, Caleb Israel, Cruz Kitchens, Curtis Markham, Brock Murray, Whit Nicholson, Landon Sprinkles, Connor Williams, Brant Youngblood and Coach Rollie Thomas.

standing of the game. We just struggled to put the ball in the net, and if you can't do that, it doesn't matter how good your defense is.

Unfortunately, this year, we lost a couple that we could have won and should have won, and that affected our seeding in the State tournament. We had the potential to finish No. 3 in the region, we just didn't show up when it mattered.

TCH: What's your take on the region changes this year? After the shakeup to Class A by the GHSA in the recent realignments, how much did the new-look region impact your season? Do you believe the schedule became tougher or weaker as a result?

RT: Honestly, I thought it made the region a little bit weaker this year. Of course, we had the private schools and charter schools and they are always tough to compete with, but it is what it is. We had to travel to Augusta to

play Aquinas, and I just don't feel that the GHSA is looking out for the smaller schools because there aren't as many of us. I tried finding some tougher competition locally with Rabun, Banks, Franklin County and Gilmer. I was hoping to throw some tough competition at us early to get ready for the region schedule. Unfortunately, we could never get things clicking this year.

TCH: Yeah, I remember talking to you after the LOA game, where you guys were in a scoreless tie with the No. 1 team in the State. Then, after you gave up that first goal, it was like the floodgates opened.

RT: I think that was a testament to our maturity level, and moving into next year, we really need to get it tougher in that aspect. You never want to concede a goal, and as a former player, I can relate. But it takes a level of maturity to move past that and continue doing the things that you need to do to be success-

ful. As opposed to hanging your head and letting it affect you in a way that's going to concede more goals. That's something we need to improve on for sure.

TCH: Another thing I've noticed, soccer is starting earlier than ever before. With basketball reaching the postseason and playing into late February, how did that impact the season? It seems like you're jumping right into region play as soon as you finally return to full strength.

RT: I had a number of starters that came from basketball. But it really doesn't matter if it's a starter or not, it messes with the chemistry and it's hard to start a season without a full squad. It's going to be hard for anyone to deal with, but it's especially hard for a school our size.

TCH: Looking ahead, what's the way-too-early outlook for next year?

RT: We're losing six seniors, but we're still going

to have a lot of upperclassmen next season. We had a lot of youth on our team that saw a lot of minutes this year, and the majority of our team is all juniors. We'll have a lot of returning players and we had a large roster - the largest we've had in my five years. How far we go next season is going to come down to just putting in the reps and getting better in the offseason. If we do nothing between now and next season, it's going to be the same old story.

TCH: Any players we should keep an eye on going into 2024? Is anyone ready to take a step forward?

RT: Some of the upcoming seniors are sweeper Brant Youngblood, he has two years of experience, is a very smart player and he's shown incredible growth. We have Jay Grimsley, who has played every spot on the field. He's like my Swiss Army knife.

Whit Nicholson and Brock Murray are two very

aggressive solid players offensively. Micheal Houser is one of my most solid wingbacks and one of the quickest guys on the team. He's become a vocal leader and that's what we really need.

TCH: Looking back on this year someday down the road, what will you remember most from this group of guys?

RT: Our record is nothing to write home about, but like I told them at the end of the season, you won't find a better group of guys. All season long I've preached that this is much bigger than soccer. I got into coaching to help get young men ready for the real world. I'm big on discipline and I'm big on class, and this was one of the most disciplined and classy groups of guys I've ever been involved with, and I'll take that all day long. I'm very proud of them.

Girls update: The Lady Indians opened postseason play at Portal on Monday after deadline.

