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 Connor Chastain fin-

ished 4 for 5 with a double and 5 RBIs. Stone Chauncey went 2 for 4 with a pair of runs and 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 Mc-Connell 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

(GM 1) - Pitching against a of McConnell school located just minutes from Augusta National, Mc- Floyd in the first, then came Connell delivered a masterful around on a wild pitch. Berperformance on the mound, fir- rong doubled and scored on ing a complete-game, three-hit a passed ball to spot Towns shutout during Friday's series County a 3-0 advantage. opener. The junior right-hander fanned five and didn't walk a single brought home Chauncey batter during his 72-pitch gem in the third. Floyd singled to while going 2 for 4 at the plate.

Gillis scored twice, doubled, stole a base and drove in stealing two bags. a run during a 2-for-3 game. Floyd added three runs and two steals during a 1-for-4 one-sided win.

The Indians jumped ahead with three in the first and with a run and a pair of RBIs.

Indians 8, Aquinas 0 were never threatened courtesy

Gillis doubled home

Cunningham's one-out start the fourth and scored on Chastain's sacrifice fly after

Courtesy runner Ian Wood scored on an error making it a 6-0 game in the day at the plate. In all, Towns sixth. Later in the inning, an County laced four doubles and error off the bat of Berrong swiped four bases during the tacked on two more runs for an 8-0 final.

Berrong finished 1 for 4



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 put up a 5-spot in the bottom punching out five. Offensively, 1-for-4 game; Cunningham walked and scored a run during a 1-for-2 performance; Kirby finished 2 for 3.

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 ham with a double, then came

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 gameending double play.

of the sixth, preventing things from getting especially dicy in the seventh. Towns County took a 6-3 lead into the sixth Indians 11, Aquinas when McConnell singled home Connor Chastain. An error off the bat of Cunningham plated two more for a 9-3 margin. Kirby brought home Cunningaround on an error.

> batters loaded the bags and put one run, an RBI and one steal; Towns County in position to mercy-rule the visitors with a and added a run. base hit, but an inning-ending strikeout sent Towns into the seventh with an eight-run

Floyd tossed five innings in the win, giving up five hits, Fortunately, the Indians a walk and three runs while See Baseball, Page 3B

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

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. Up 11-3, consecutive hit McConnell went 2 for 4 with Connor Chastain drove in two

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

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

Sports Editor sports@nganews.com Carrollton - The Towns County Indians suffered a 6-1

By Todd Forrest

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.

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,

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

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 **TCH**: After missing out just didn't show up when it get things clicking this year. 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 as a former player, I can and charter schools and they with, but it is what it is. We continue doing the things that had to travel to Augusta to you need to do to be success-

Landon Sprinkles, Connor Williams, Brant Youngblood and Coach Rollie Thomas 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 Unfortunately, this year, 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

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 tougher in that aspect. You never want to concede a goal, relate. But it takes a level of are always tough to compete maturity to move past that and

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 out-

look for next year? RT: We're losing six seniors, but we're still going Brock Murray are two very

ful. As opposed to hanging 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 long. I'm very proud of them. every spot on the field. He's

like my Swiss Army knife.

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

Girls update: The Lady Indians opened postseason Whit Nicholson and play at Portal on Monday after

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Baseball... continued from 2B

Indians 9, Aquinas 5 open a 5-5 tie with three in the fifth and one in the sixth to complete the three-game sweep.

Matthew Chastain fanned six over five innings on the hill, surrendering six hits, four walks and four earned runs. Braydon Barrett replaced Chastain in the sixth and tossed two perfect innings with a pair of Ks.

The Towns County fifth opened when Chauncey reached on an error, and Mc-Connell's RBI double plated the go-ahead run. Kirby put two in scoring position with a one-out double, and Rouse scored both runners with a two-bagger of

(GM 3) - Towns County broke lowed Towns to extend its lead to 9-5 when Berrong singled and came around on Aquinas' costly two-out error.

> Berrong scored three times and was hit by a pitch dur-2 for 3 with a double and a run. Floyd finished 2 for 4 with one run; McConnell scored twice and plated two more while going 1 for 3. Rouse's two-run double headlined a 1-for-4 day at the plate; Chauncey scored and knocked in a run; Gillis scored and drove in one during a 1-for-4 game; Connor Chastain finished 1 of 4 with

Aquinas had no answer Senior Night.

Barrett's 1-2-3 sixth al- on the basepaths for a Towns County team that swiped nine bags. Gillis led the way with three steals; Berrong and Floyd added two apiece. Barrett and McConnell stole one bag each.

Up next: The Indians ing a 2-for-3 game. Kirby went have three tune-up games this week ahead of next week's State Tournament, Towns County visits Rabun County on Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. The Indians return home Wednesday to host neighboring Hayesville, North Carolina for Rec Night at 6 p.m. The JV Indians begin at 4 p.m.

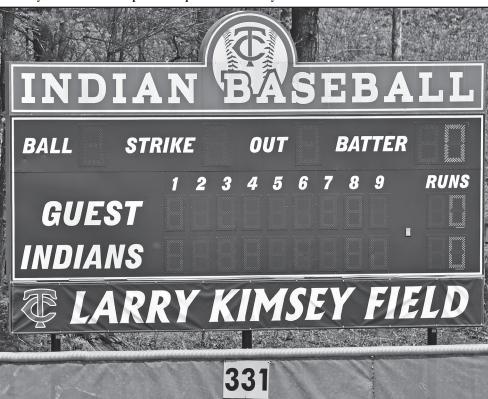
Rabun County visits the newly-minted Larry Kimsey Field at 5:30 p.m. Thursday for



Stone Chauncey makes a diving stab during the second of three games vs. Aquinas. Photo/Todd Forrest



Zane Floyd slides into home plate vs. Aquinas on Saturday afternoon. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



As of this writing, the Indians are undefeated at Larry Kimsey Field. Photo/Todd Forrest

NASCAR 2023 By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

Larson Gets Strong Martinsville Win

Kyle Larson put on a strong performance this past Sunday to win his second Cup Series race of the season, and the 21st of his career. His team gambled on a late race, two-tire pit stop and drove away to a commanding 4.142-second victory over Joey Logano.

"Yeah, just huge congratulations to this whole 5 team and Hendrick Motorsports," said Larson. "I feel like Cliff and everybody did a great job all day on pit road making the right calls, having great pit stops, and then it all kind of worked out for me there at the end.

"We had a great car. That was the best my car had been I think, being able to get out front and manage.

"But, yeah, I had never ever would have thought that I would win here at Martinsville. This place has been so tough on me. Just does not suit my driving

"I like to charge the center. I like to roll momentum, and that's just not what this place is

"I honestly have never thought I would win here so I don't have a spot picked out either for the clock, so I'll have to make some space for sure. Logano was one of four

drivers who did not pit on a caution flag with 56 laps remaining, choosing to take track position instead after having gone down a lap not once but twice earlier in the race. 'Solid recovery for what

the start of the race looked like," Logano said, joking that at one point he would have been happy just to finish on the lead lap. 'Stayed out at the end

when everyone pitted, which put

us on the front row and had a shot to win the race. I tried to hold off Larson as long as I could. But overall there's some days when you're mad about second [place]. Today's not one of those. Joe Gibbs Racing teammates Martin Truex Jr. and

Denny Hamlin finished third and fourth - the first top-five finishes for both drivers this season. Stewart-Haas Racing's Chase Briscoe finished fifth. Aric Almirola was sixth,

followed by Ryan Blaney, Ricky Stenhouse Jr., Bubba Wallace, and Chase Elliott. Elliott, who finished 10th,

was back in the No. 9 Hendrick Chevrolet this past Sunday after recovering from a leg injury.

Elliott, 27, suffered a fractured tibia while snowboarding on March 3 and underwent successful surgery in Vail, Colorado. The 2020 Cup Series champion sonville, Georgia, in late March to continue physical therapy.

After being medically cleared Tuesday, Elliott tested Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning in the Chevrolet Driver-in-the-Loop simulator in Concord, North Carolina, before making the final decision to return at Martinsville.

"It was pretty good, honestly, about what I expected, so that was a good thing," Elliott said of his leg after the long day. "Just it was warm [temperatures] and I've been sitting on the couch for six weeks so that probably hurt me more than any-

Top 10 leaders after 9 of 36: 1. Bell-302, 2. Chastain-297, 3. Harvick-287, 4. Larson-285, 5. Truex-266, 6. Reddick-265, 7. Logano-258, 8. Busch-250, 9. Hamlin-247, 10. Blaney-241.

NEMECHEK DOMINATES XFINITY RACE

John Nemechek led 198 of 250 laps in Saturday's Xfinity Series race to earn his second victory of the 2023 season and first win at Martinsville. His Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Sammy Smith was runner-up, 1.518-sec-

The 25-year-old Nemechek, took the lead for good on a race restart with 32 laps remaining after winning the first



Larson Gets Strong Martinsville Win

two stages of the race. He, Smith and third place finisher Cole Custer were easily the class of the field all night running some version of 1-2-3 for most of the

"I can't say enough about this whole team, if you would have asked me yesterday if we would have won, I thought we were a 10th place car in practice," said Nemechek. "Just grateful the guys made the right adjustments.

Josh Berry, Brandon Jones, Justin Allgaier, Daniel Hemric, Derek Kraus, Brett Moffitt, and Chandler Smith were the remaining top 10 finishers.

Top 10 leaders after 8 33: 1. Nemechek-319, 2. Hill-298, 3. C. Smith-285, 4. Herbst-281, 5. Berry-276, 6. Allgaier-267, 7. S. Smith-254, 8. Custer-246, 9. Hemric-233, 10. Creed-229. Results of the Truck Se-

ries race ran Friday night at Martinsville: 1. Corey Heim, 2. Kyle Busch, 3. Zane Smith, 4. Ty Majecki, 5. Tanner Gray, 6. Ben Rhodes, 7. Matt DiBenedetto, 8. Taylor Gray, 9. William Sawalich, 10. Chase Purdy. Top 10 leaders after 7 of 23: 1. Majeski-301, 2. Z.

Smith-275, 3. Rhodes-252, 4. Heim-230, 5. Eckes-229, 6. Enfinger-211, 7. Crafton-209, 8. Gray-201, 9. DiBenedetto-185, 10. Purdy-174. NASCAR Meanwhile.

has announced it will increase the number of its Top 50 Greatest drivers to 75 Greatest drivers. They will announce five drivers per week for the

next five weeks, leading into the throwback weekend at Darlington (S.C.) next month. The first five are: Tony

Stewart, Kasey Kahne, Kyle Larson, Randy Lajoie, and Mike Stefanik. Racing Joke: A ninety-

rehabilitated in Colorado before two-year-old retired race car the drivers nearby, "Boys, pack returning to his home in Daw- driver went to the doctor for up your stuff, we're leaving." a physical. A few days later the doctor saw the man walking down the street with a gorgeous young lady on his arm. He smiled at his patient and walked on. The patient smiled back and went on around the block.

A few days later, the doctor talked to the man and said, "You're really doing great, aren't

The old man replied, "Just doing what you said, 'get a hot mama and be cheerful.

The doctor paused and answered, "I didn't say that! I said, you've got a heart murmur. Be

Weekend Racing: The Cup and Xfinity teams are at the 2.66-mile Talladega Superspeed-

Sat., Apr.22; Xfinity Se-

4:00 pm ET; TV: FoxSports1.

Sun., Apr. 23; Cup Series race 10 of 23; Starting time: 3:00 pn ET; TV: Fox.

Racing Trivia Question: Which Cup Series driver has the most wins at Talladega?

Last Week's Question:
Who won the first Cup Series race at Talladega? Answer. Robert Brickhouse.

The race is primarily remembered because most of the NASCAR stars from the Professional Driver Association (PDA). led by Richard Petty, boycotted the race due to tire failures during tire testing.

During the testing, drivers reported handling problems on their cars. When checking their tires, drivers noticed that the tires were destroyed. The problem occurred throughout the garage. NASCAR was going through a 'tire war" at the time, in which two competing tire manufacturers tried to convince teams and drivers to use their tires because they lasted longer, they gripped firmer, etc. However, on Thursday, the next day, the same issues still happened, and the tires showed no improvements. The next day, on Friday, the drivers were becoming increasingly angry and frustrated. Firestone decided to pull out of the event and let the drivers pull out of their contracts for the race, allowing them to choose whichever tire they wished to run. However, Goodyear decided to stay, hoping to win the war and prove that their tires were better than Fire-

Bill France Sr. was talking to Bobby Allison and LeeRoy Yarbrough, when France said to Allison "I think you're just afraid to race." In an interview, Allison said, LeeRoy came up from behind, swung and hit France in the face, putting him on the ground. LeeRoy would proceed to say to Word quickly spread, and most of the PDA with the exception of Richard Brickhouse packed up

and left. Worried that the boycott would adversely affect the fan attendance, France offered fans free admission to the 1970 Daytona 500, if they bought tickets to this race. France also decided to allow the drivers who ran in Saturday's Xfinity Series race, to run in the Cup Series race.

Ray Fox and Jim Vandiver, whose No. 3 car finished second, were convinced that they actually lapped Brickhouse and won, but Brickhouse's win stood. The PDA was dissolved

shortly after the race.

Gerald Hodges is a syndicated NASCAR writer and author. You may contact him by ries race 9 of 33; Starting time: e-mail at: hodges@race500.com.

Veterans Golf Season now open at Chatuge Shores Golf Course

son has began every Thursday Shores Golf Course. Our under par was: Team Captain League is open to all Veterans or spouses of a Veteran.

Come join us for a day of fun, social and comradery. We play four man best ball so skill level does not matter. We mation. NT(Apr19,Z21)JH

The Veterans Golf Sea- had 40 Veterans tee off on a beautiful spring day. The winmorning at 9 AM at Chatuge ning team with a score of 5 Ray Ide, Mel Halfon, Scott Heggie and L G Taylor.

Please call the Hiawassee VFW/American Legion at 706-896-8387 for more infor-