

# CROCKETT VOLLEYBALLERS MATCH THEIR BEST STATE TOURNAMENT FINISH



**Above:** Bailey Ann Whitby (13) sets a shot for front-liner Katherine West.



**Above:** Representative of Crockett's all-out play Thursday, Brooklyn Haynes miraculously kept the ball in play with this dive to the floor .

## By Ron Barry

So many times in sports, people judge the quality of a performance simply by the results on the scoreboard. But by doing so, they often miss the spectacular efforts given by the players, the distances (often in inches or less) that affect individual plays, and the ebbs and flows of a contest that features two good teams and develops respect between them.

That is exactly what was on display Thursday morning at Blackman High School in Murfreesboro, when Crockett County's volleyball team went up against perennial powerhouse Anderson County in the TSSAA State Tournament. While the final "score" was 3-1 in favor of the Lady Mavericks, that's just mathematics.

It completely conceals the magnificent effort put forth by Coach Bobby Rawson's Lady Cavaliers, who looked their much taller and stronger foes right in the eyes and made them scratch and claw for every point they could muster in a match that was noteworthy for the total quality of play by both clubs.

Anderson County, a former state champion (1999) and a school with six previous appearances in the state championship game, is an outstanding team. It boasts a 6-3 middle hitter and three other key players who are 5-10, and they're all strong and athletic. It's no surprise the program has been to 19 state tournaments. And – the Lady Mavericks played extremely well Thursday.

Crockett County, on the other hand, would have to pass out shoe lifts to each player to get anyone near the six-foot range. Three of its front line players are still sophomores, meaning they still have some strength and weight to gain before their careers end.

On paper, it wasn't going to be a match – it was going to be a mis-match. Add to that the knowledge that Anderson had already disposed of Dyer County, a team that defeated Crockett four times this season, the previous day in the tournament.

It was the proverbial David vs. Goliath duel – except there was no guarantee God would be helping David out this time.

But nobody convinced the Lady Cavs that they didn't have a chance, so they came out slinging stones straight at the giant's forehead. Bodies were flying everywhere, diving for digs, colliding with each other on occasion, doing whatever it took to keep each point alive. To its credit, the Lady Mavericks were doing the same, which made the match an absolute pleasure to watch in terms of quality play.

Eventually, midway through the first set, Anderson went on enough of a service run to build a slight cushion, breaking a 13-all deadlock to escape with a 25-19 triumph.

If you were expecting Crockett to hang its head and just get the inevitable over with – you don't know this team.

As Set 2 began, a Sarah Cherry kill shot put the Lady Cavs ahead 3-2. A service ace by Cherry followed, and soon thereafter Crockett led by scores of 6-3 and 7-5. Anderson fought back to tie it at 7-7, but Rawson's squad followed with a short run of its own to claim an 11-7 advantage. The entire set featured long, exciting rallies – on at least three points, the ball crossed the net more than ten times. Players were chasing down shots beyond the boundaries, diving for saves, shifting court positions to fill empty gaps, and battling fervently for each tally.

Crockett gained a 17-14 edge when senior setter Bailey Ann Whitby faked a set and guided a quick whip shot past Anderson's surprised blockers. Sophomore Katherine West drilled a kill a few points later to put the Lady Cavs up 20-16. Cherry dropped a deft tip shot inbounds for a 24-21 lead, and after a Lady Maverick score, senior Joy Evans put the set away 25-22 by pounding a winner right down the middle.

David had pulled even with Goliath.

From there, the final two sets featured more of the same: consistent, all-out effort from both teams. The eventual difference was simply Anderson's size and strength advantage. The Lady Mavericks had more weapons upfront, pounding kill after kill, and managing to weather the ones Crockett sent back at them. Anderson won Set 3 by a 25-21 count and Set 4 25-19, but it left the court knowing it had been in a battle.

Rawson, whose club finished its sensational season with a 33-10 record, was beyond proud of the way his Lady Cavaliers performed.

"In my first year here as coach (1998), we actually made it to the state tournament, and we played Anderson County then," he said. "They absolutely embarrassed us. They were blasting shots all over and past us, and we looked like we'd never even seen a volleyball.

"Today (Thursday), we at least made them wear it a few times. Our girls never backed down, they hustled all over the place, and they gave the kind of effort that any coach would desire from his team. I can't say enough good things about them."

With the defeat (on the scoreboard, anyway), Crockett matched its best state tournament finish ever with a fifth-place standing. The Lady Cavs have placed fifth in their last three state appearances now.

The contest also marked the final match for seniors Cherry, Evans, Whitby, Lynden Cole, Brooklyn Haynes, and Kinleigh Lamb. Each one played well in their finale, and while the tears were flowing post-match, Rawson feels blessed by how each one helped advance the Crockett program.

“The team on the court today played a lot differently than the one on the court in 1998,” he said. “This program has come a long way. It’s a credit to these players, and our assistant coaches.”

Those coaches - Andrew Laman, Jeremiah Cavitt, and Hope Owens - were instrumental in this club’s success, as was the play of Crockett’s non-seniors: West, Brennan Morris, Sadie Hoover, Deonna Cole, Keeton Holyfield, Lily Riley, Kylee Garrett, Madi Collins, Khaki Hail, Jorgia Elmore, and Amaria Walker.

Crockett was making its ninth state tournament appearance after finishing as runner-up in both the district and region tournaments.



**Above:** Junior Brennan Morris goes down to one knee to dig a shot as teammates Kinleigh Lamb (5) and Brooklyn Haynes get in position to help out.



**Above:** Senior Kinleigh Lamb was getting on the floor too...



**Above:** A successful kill shot by Deonna Cole (14) gets a rousing reception from Joy Evans (25), Bailey Ann Whitby (13), Brennan Morris (11), assistant coach Andrew Laman (in background), Kinleigh Lamb (5), and Brooklyn Haynes (right).



**Above** A lunging Lynden Cole, kept this play going.



**Above** Great passing allowed Sarah Cherry (8) to hit blasts like this one.



**Left:** Sophomore Keeton Holyfield (left) also got into the winners' circle with a kill.

**Below:** Soph Deonna Cole (14) prepares to lower the boom, mashing this shot off her blocker's hands.



**Right:** It was the final match for six Crockett seniors: Sarah Cherry...



**Above:** Libero Brooklyn Haynes...



**Above:** Middle hitter Joy Evans...

**Below:** Setter Bailey Ann Whitby...



**Above:** Digging expert Kinleigh Lamb (5)...

**Left:** And ever-smiling back row stalwart Lynden Cole.