SOCCER TEAM FALLS, BUT LATE FLURRY RESTORES DIGNITY; BASEBALL SQUAD TIES JCS

Above: Cavalier catcher Carter Winders supplied the bulk of the Crockett offense against JCS Thursday with a three-run homer in the 6-6 tie with the Eagles. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

For local high school soccer enthusiasts, it was billed as the irresistible force – Crockett County's unbeaten rising program – against the unmovable object – USJ's vaunted historical excellence.

Except that the irresistible force didn't resist much at all for 70 minutes.
Consequently, the host Bruins were cruising to a 4-0 victory having largely made the Cavaliers look like they didn't belong on the same field.

But high school soccer games are 80 minutes long, not 70. And when sophomore Chris Cerda finally broke through the USJ defense and spoiled its clean sheet with 10:09 to play, at least Cav fans had something to cheer about. And then…

Less than seven minutes later, Cerda scored again. Now it was 4-2 with 3:15 remaining. And then…

A minute-and-a-half later – unbelievably – Cerda scored again. 4-3. 1:36 to go. And after this one, Cerda ran into the goal, retrieved the ball from the back of the net, and personally sprinted it back to midfield to preserve as much time as possible for one more crack at a tie.

It didn't materialize, although the energized Cavs kept the pressure on the suddenly nervous Bruins until the final horn. But while Crockett players – and Coach Stan Jamscek – left the field disappointed with their first loss after an 11-0 start, the final ten minutes of play allowed them to leave feeling like they COULD indeed play with anybody.

Now to figure out what happened in the first 70 minutes. Jamscek said that's what they'll be talking about in practice leading up to a game in Medina Tuesday against South Gibson – which will give the Cavs the top seed and hosting duties for the district tournament if they win.

"Usually if you have a good pre-game warmup, you can tell your team is ready to go," Jamscek said. "We did that. The warmup was good. What happened after the game started is hard to explain. USJ had several players switched around from their normal positions, and maybe that confused us, but where the other team's players are positioned shouldn't affect how we play the game if our heads are right."

So, while Jamscek didn't make any excuses – nor did he give any specific explanation, if there was one – he came away as enthused as everybody else about the final 10-minute flurry.
"For 70 minutes, we just were NOT who we are," he said. "But the last 10? THAT's who we are."

Until those last 10 minutes, USJ was doing to Crockett what the Cavs have been doing to all their previous opponents: beating them to every loose ball, holding their ground, and definitely playing a more physical brand of soccer. Crockett's speed was matched by that of the Bruins, as was their passing ability. It was as if the Cavs' collective aggression cord had been unplugged, compared to USJ's.

The hosts kept the ball on their offensive end of the field for nearly the entire opening half, with Ryan Hutchison scoring with 32:36 on the clock for the game's first goal. Christian Melton headed in another on a corner kick with 21:17 left before intermission, and USJ's lead only remained 2-0 at the half due to a handful of tough saves made by Crockett goalkeeper Alan Marquez.

Playing in a steady and annoying drizzle throughout the contest, USJ tallied again with 32:22 to go when Deuce Davenport took a centered pass from a teammate who was literally falling out of bounds to the right of the net and drilled it home for a 3-0 edge. Melton scored again with 30:40 remaining, and Crockett looked completely demoralized.

But somehow the Cavs rallied to keep competing, and Cerda finally broke through when he raced in from the left side after taking an Edgar Juarez pass, leaped over a sliding defender while controlling the ball, and booted it in to restore Crockett's dignity. Little did anyone suspect what was about to unfold before their eyes.

Cerda's goal seemed to ignite the entire Crockett squad, which began to collectively apply the offensive pressure the Cavs have been known for this entire season. And when the sophomore sensation knocked in another tally from a Luke Carter assist, the score was an even more respectable 4-2.

They weren't done. Shortly thereafter – with the USJ defense suddenly growing more jittery – Cerda took a Braulio Marquez pass and stuck it into the left side of the net on another fast charge to make it 4-3.

One last rush at the Bruin goal couldn't produce the tying score, however, but many Crockett fans left the pitch feeling almost as if the Cavs had won, because of what they showed in the closing minutes.
For his part, Cerda was trying to be philosophically realistic after the game.
"Maybe it was good for us to have a game like this right now," he said. "We believe we can get back to the state tournament, and go farther than we did a year ago. That's where our goals are. So I'd rather lose in a 'friendly' now than in a district or state tournament game later, even though it's disappointing. We showed what we can do in those last 10 minutes. We need to carry that over to South Gibson."

Crockett's scheduled match with TCA for Friday has been canceled, so Tuesday's showdown at South Gibson is next up for Jamscek's crew.

"That becomes the biggest game of the year now," he said. "If we win, we're the regular season champs, and we get to host the district tournament. That's where our focus needs to be now."

Through their 12 games this season, here are the statistical totals for Crockett players:

GOALS – Luke Carter 23, Christopher Cerda 15, Edgar Juarez 10, Eddy De La Rosa 7, Braulio Marquez 5, Angel Garcia 3, Leo Arreola 2, Angel Martinez 1, Jathen Young 1, Mason Wood 1;

ASSISTS – Edgar Juarez 13, Christopher Cerda 9, Braulio Marquez 8, Luke Carter 6, Angel Garcia 4, Eddy De La Rosa 4, Adrian Calderon 1, Santiago Santos 1, Leo Arreola 1, Eduardo Galvez 1, Camden Martin 1, Ossi Sanchez 1, Noah Mayfield 1.

BASEBALL: Playing in the Jackson South Side tournament, Coach Brent Fronabarger's Cav baseballers overcame a six-error performance to fight to a 6-6 tie with Jackson Christian School.

Crockett put five runs on the board in the third on RBI singles by Blaine Nichols and Brady Fronabarger and a three-run homer by Carter Winders. In the fifth, trailing the Eagles 6-5, the Cavs tied it back up on consecutive singles by Callan Wiilis, Joseph Gould, and Landon Wicker.

Neither team scored over the final two innings. Gould pitched the final 4.1 frames for Crockett, allowing two earned runs in relief of starter Cade Freeman and reliever Preston Lambert.

Nichols, Grayson Lambert, and Winders all had two hits for the Cavs, who are now 11-9-1. Crockett will host Dyersburg in a district game Saturday at noon.

Above: Crockett coach Stan Jamscek looks on in the steady drizzle as he attempts to figure out what has caused his club's slow start in the contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: So dominant was USJ's soccer team in the first half that this shot by Braulio Marquez (21) was the only one Crockett had that even sniffed the net. Marquez got it past two defenders, but the goalkeeper made the save. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: On the other end, there was a lot of this: USJ applying constant pressure, such as this corner kick which Crockett's Angel Garcia (8) and Angel Martinez (17) try to deflect away from leaping Bruin Christian Melton, who scored two of the USJ goals. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Above: The day was looking like a total defeat until Crockett's sensational sophomore Chris Cerda -- here battling with USJ's Deuce Davenport for control of the ball -- turned the last 10 minutes into a personal highlight reel, scoring three times. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: Crockett defenders Daniel Grajeda (6), Angel Martinez (17), Angel Garcia (back to camera), Max Utley (5), and Jose Martinez (4) work to keep this ball from descending into Bruin control. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Above: Chris Cerda's first goal came as he leaped over a sliding defender, kept possession of the ball, and bore down on the Bruin goalkeeper before ramming his shot into the net. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Eddy De La Rosa (2) tries to snake a pass around USJ's Ryan Hutchison (10). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Above: Crockett's Edgar Juarez, who earlier took a kicked ball directly in his face, returned to play and slide-pokes this ball away from USJ's Solomon Pela (18) as Cav teammates watch in the background. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Above: After Chris Cerda's third straight goal in that final flurry, he ran into the goal to personally retrieve the ball and sprint it back to midfield to set it up for the next play. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Above: Once Crockett began its improbable flurry in the final 10 minutes, Luke Carter (1) picked up an assist after he maneuvered past a fallen Bruin defender. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: After an indirect kick was awarded to USJ in the fading minutes, Crockett's Angel Martinez (left) and Angel Garcia line up to provide protection for Cav goalkeeper Alan Marquez (in the background). (Photo by Ron Barry)