

# TOURNAMENT ELIMINATION A MICROCOSM OF 2024 BASEBALL SEASON FOR CAVS



**Above:** Grayson Lambert gave the Cavaliers a pitching effort worth praising and also delivered a sixth-inning hit that allowed Crockett to tie the game back up at 3-3 in the sixth. Lambert posted the team's best earned run average for the season among the hurlers used the most. (Photo by Ron Barry)

## By Ron Barry

So many games in the 2024 Crockett County baseball season came down to a final at-bat – and as often as not, ended in Cavalier frustration.

Who expected the District 13-AAA Tournament in Newbern to be any different? (Hoping against the frustrating part this time.)

On Saturday afternoon – facing elimination in the losers' bracket for the second straight day – the Cav diamonders had the game-winning runner in scoring position in the bottom of both the seventh and eighth innings, but couldn't get them home in a heart-crushing 4-3 defeat to Dyersburg.

And this one will sting for a while, not just because it ends the Crockett season – and the high school careers of a few seniors – but because it came despite one of the most monumental at-bats possible in the sport to put the Cavs in position to win the contest.

Senior Joseph Gould – in what would turn out to be his final plate appearance as a Cavalier – stepped into the box in the bottom of the eighth with one out and runners on first and second, after Carter Winders had been hit by a pitch and Callan Willis had drawn a four-pitch walk from an obviously nervous Brady Byars. He'd entered the game to begin the eighth in relief of Trojan starter Will Leonard.

Dyersburg had taken the lead in the top of the extra frame on a double, a groundout, and an infield single against Crockett reliever Tyler Rathbun after Grayson Lambert had given the Cavs an outstanding seven-inning, three-hit performance. The three runs charged to him – as has been another staple of this weird season – were unearned, having all scored in the top of the sixth inning on three Cav errors.

Gould, knowing his team must score at least one run to keep its season alive, fouled off the first three pitches he saw and then took ball one before fouling off three more pitches. Gould took two more wayward tosses to work the count to 3-and-2 and then fouled off another pitch – his seventh foul of the duel with Byars. The next pitch was ball four to load the bases – and now Crockett not only had the tying run at third, but the winning run at second.

It appeared that the season of snake-bit finishes was about to even out a little bit, thanks to Gould's perseverance.

But Byars got the next man to ground a ball back to him to get a force at home plate for the second out and then struck out a pinch-hitter on a 2-and-2 pitch – and Crockett's season was over.

The game could have ended in the Cavs' favor in the seventh. Lambert had gamely pitched around a one-out triple in the top of the frame, so Crockett came to bat tied 3-3 and needing just a run to keep its hopes alive.

Senior Landon Wicker reached on an infield single to the shortstop to get things going and then moved to second on a sacrifice bunt by another senior, Blaine Nichols. But Dyersburg escaped by turning a sharp line drive by Reed Ingram into a double play as Trojan shortstop Jordan Williamson speared it in the air and completed the twin killing before Wicker could get back to the base.

The seventh-inning heartbreak came after Crockett had overcome the horror of the three-error occurrence in the top of the sixth by tallying a two-out run in the bottom of the stanza. Willis hit a one-out double to center but was still at second after a strikeout until Lambert – determined to help his own cause – smashed a full-count, ground-ball single into right field. Anticipating the impending play at the plate, Dyersburg outfielder Makhi Wooldridge bobbed the ball for an error, allowing Willis to tie the game at 3-3.

Crockett had carried a 2-0 lead into the sixth, having scored single runs in both the first and second frames. The Cavs struck in the first on singles by Nichols and Brady Fronabarger, followed by a run-scoring double by Winders. In the Crockett second, Cade Freeman singled, took third on an error by pitcher Leonard, and raced home on a groundout by Wicker.

Disaster struck in the Trojan sixth, however. An infield error and a single were followed by a bunt which was booted to load the bases. Lambert struck out the next hitter and then induced a pop fly for the second out, but then all three Dyersburg baserunners scored when an ensuing fly ball was misplayed for yet another error.

Crockett's diamonds finished the campaign with a 12-11-1 season record. The complete 2024 season batting statistics for the Cavaliers:

**Batting Average:** Fronabarger .386 (27-for-70); Willis .377 (23-for-61); Winders .366 (26-for-71); Nichols .355 (27-for-76); Ingram .338 (24-for-71); Wicker .297 (19-for-64); Gould .294 (20-for-68); G Lambert .247 (19-for-77); Freeman .241 (7-for-29); Vasquez .115 (3-for-26); (less than 25 plate appearances) Proctor .333 (1-for-3); Ray .300 (6-for-20); Rathbun .286 (2-for-7); P Lambert .111 (2-for-18); Rawson .000 (0-for-1); Austin .000 (0-for-1); Vance .000 (0-for-3); Maddox (no official plate appearances).

**Runs Scored:** Nichols 31, Ingram 19, Fronabarger 17, Wicker 14, P Lambert 11, Willis 10, Gould 8, Maddox 7, G Lambert 6, Freeman 4, Proctor 4, Winders 3, Vance 3, Vasquez 2, Ray 2, Rathbun 1, Rawson 1.

**Hits:** Nichols 27, Fronabarger 27, Winders 26, Ingram 24, Willis 23, Gould 20, Wicker 19, G Lambert 19, Freeman 7, Ray 6, Vasquez 3, P Lambert 2, Rathbun 2, Proctor 1.

**RBI's:** Fronabarger 28, Winders 25, Willis 18, Gould 17, Wicker 11, G Lambert 10, Nichols 8, Ingram 6, Freeman 4, Vasquez 1, Ray 1, P Lambert 1, Rathbun 1.

**Walks:** Winders 16, Gould 14, Fronabarger 10, Willis 9, G Lambert 8, Ingram 8, Wicker 7, Nichols 7, Freeman 3, Ray 2, P Lambert 2, Vasquez 1, Rawson 1.

**Strikeouts (as hitter):** G Lambert 20, Willis 15, Gould 14, Wicker 13, Vasquez 11, Ingram 11, Nichols 11, Winders 8, Fronabarger 7, Freeman 6, Ray 6, P Lambert 5, Proctor 1, Vance 1, Austin 1.

**Doubles:** Fronabarger 11, Winders 7, Willis 5, Gould 3, Wicker 3, Ingram 2, Nichols 1, G Lambert 1, Ray 1.

**Triples:** Willis 1, Winders 1.

**Home Runs:** Fronabarger 3, Freeman 1, Winders 1.

**On-Base Percentage:** Fronabarger .517, Winders .511, Willis .493, Nichols .462, Ingram .427, Gould .415, Wicker .392, G Lambert .326, Freeman .313, Vasquez .179; (less than 25 plate appearances) Rawson .500, Rathbun .375, Ray .364, Proctor .333, P Lambert .238, Austin .000, Vance .000.

**OPS (on-base + slugging pct):** Fronabarger 1.118, Winders 1.046, Willis .985, Nichols .830, Ingram .793, Gould .753, Wicker .736, Freeman .658, G Lambert .586, Vasquez .294; (less than 25 plate appearances) Ray .714, Proctor .667, Rathbun .661, Rawson .500, P Lambert .349, Vance .000, Austin .000.

**Hit by Pitches:** Fronabarger 9, Nichols 8, Willis 5, Winders 5, Wicker 3, Ingram 3, G Lambert 1, Vasquez 1, P Lambert 1, Rathbun 1.

**Sacrifice Flies:** Fronabarger 5, Willis 3, Gould 2, Winders 1, Ingram 1, Wicker 1. Stolen Bases: Ingram 6, G Lambert 5, Maddox 3, Willis 3, Nichols 2, P Lambert 2, Gould 1.

**Caught Stealing:** Maddox 3, Gould 2, Nichols 2, G Lambert 1, Fronabarger 1, Ingram 1.

**Fielding Errors:** Wicker 9, Gould 8, Ingram 8, Ray 8, Winders 4, Fronabarger 4, Nichols 3, Rathbun 1, Willis 1, P Lambert 1, G Lambert 1.

The complete 2024 season pitching statistics for the Cavaliers:

**Innings Pitched:** Winders 41.2, G Lambert 31.1, Fronabarger 31, Rathbun 22.2, Gould 17.2, P Lambert 8.1, Willis 5.2, Ray 4, Freeman 1.1, Vance 0.1.

**Hits Allowed:** Winders 40, Fronabarger 33, Rathbun 27, G Lambert 21, P Lambert 19, Gould 16, Willis 5, Freeman 1, Ray 0, Vance 0.

**Runs Allowed/Earned Runs:** Winders 28/19, Fronabarger 23/11, P Lambert 17/13, G Lambert 14/8, Gould 12/8, Rathbun 10/10, Willis 8/4, Freeman 1/1, Ray 0/0, Vance 0/0.

**Walks/Strikeouts:** Winders 11/37, Fronabarger 21/36, G Lambert 13/28, Rathbun 7/16, Gould 9/8, P Lambert 9/3, Willis 8/2, Freeman 0/2, Ray 2/2, Vance 1/0.

**ERA (based on a 7-inning game):** Ray 0.00, Vance 0.00, G Lambert 1.79, Fronabarger 2.48, Rathbun 3.09, Gould 3.17, Winders 3.19, Willis 4.94, Freeman 5.25, P Lambert 10.92.

**Wild Pitches:** Fronabarger 5, Winders 5, G Lambert 4, P Lambert 3, Gould 1.

**Hit Batsmen:** Winders 5, Fronabarger 3, G Lambert 3, P Lambert 2, Gould 1, Ray 1, Vance 1.

**No-Hitters:** G Lambert 1.

**Wins-Losses:** Rathbun 3-1, Winders 3-3, G Lambert 2-2, Fronabarger 2-2, Ray 1-0, Gould 1-2, P Lambert 0-1.



**Above Left:** Crockett senior Joseph Gould fouled off seven pitches before working a walk to put the Cavs in position to win in extra innings against Dyersburg Saturday, but the Trojans escaped with a 4-3 victory to end Crockett's season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Above Right:** Brady Fronabarger was Crockett's top batter for the 2024 season with a .386 average and an on-base percentage of .517. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Left:** Senior outfielder Blaine Nichols was the team leader in runs scored and was an effective leadoff man for the Cavs, producing an on-base percentage of .462. (Photo by Ron Barry)