

MUNFORD UPSETS CROCKETT IN SOCCER SECTIONAL SATURDAY; CAVS' STATE BID ENDS



Above: When it was all over, Chris Cerda was alone with his thoughts of what could have been - and perhaps building the determination that he's not going to let this feeling happen again if he can possibly help it. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

There was an eeriness hanging around Cavalier Stadium all Saturday afternoon.

Maybe it was the rainstorm that forced a 90-minute delay of the scheduled game. Maybe it was the continued threat of wet weather that subdued the crowd. Maybe it was the contrast from the sense of absolute joy in the facility the night before, when CCHS held its graduation ceremony.

Maybe it was the pressure of a "win-or-go-home" match - with the tension always heightened when you're the heavy favorite. Maybe it was the assumption - felt by many who follow high school soccer in West Tennessee - that just making it to the Sectional would guarantee a State Tournament bid for the Region 7 team, because the squads from Region 8 won't furnish much opposition.

Whatever it was, something just didn't feel right as the duel between the Cavaliers and the Munford Cougars began. And as the day wore on, the eeriness turned to uneasiness as Crockett wasn't separating itself from its foe on the scoreboard as it had done so efficiently all season. The uneasiness turned to tension as the game went into an overtime, and then a second one.

Finally, as the match then went into a "Golden Goal" situation - each team receiving five penalty kicks in alternating fashion, one-on-one with the opposing goalkeeper - the realization kicked in that this situation was exactly the one on which Munford had staked its entire game plan.

In essence, the Cougars knew they couldn't outscore the Cavaliers if they played the game normally. They simply don't have the offensive firepower that Crockett has.

So head coach Jarrod Magan formulated a plan that concentrated simply on stopping the Cavs from scoring. Virtually ignoring the offensive component of the game entirely, Munford kept its entire on-field lineup close to its own goal box, doing its best to completely clog up the middle so it was virtually impossible for Crockett to get clean shots.

Munford put so much emphasis on this strategy that its offense did not make even a single strong rush at the Cavalier net for the entire 100-minute total duration of the regular halves and both overtimes. Its lone score came as the result of an inadvertent "handball" called against a Cav defender in the goal box with 21:33 left in regulation, awarding a penalty kick to the visitors. Eli Magan made it count, giving Munford the tally it needed to offset Chris Cerda's first-half Cav goal after a pass from Angel Garcia with 19:56 remaining until the intermission.

For its part, Crockett played into the Cougar strategy by emphasizing a multiple-pass, backfield-oriented, extremely patient offense that was noticeably different - and less energetic - than what had been its usual go-for-broke, risk-reward, constantly attacking entertainment package that produced the "fun" that characterized this season's success.

And when it came time to crank it up in the final minutes, Munford's middle-clogging strategy held up, assisted mightily by the play of freshman goalkeeper Devin Byus. The Cougars' bespectacled netminder had made a variety of fearless plays throughout the game, often moving well away from the net to leap on a loose ball or deflect a shot or crossing pass. He'd also personally stooped two Crockett penalty kicks during regulation time, another reason Munford was going to be content to get into a "Golden Goal" situation.

It eventually came to that, with the game deadlocked at 1-1 after two scoreless overtime periods in which Munford players rarely even glanced at the Cavalier goal. The Cougars were staking it all on the penalty kicks.

When Munford successfully made its first boot and Byus then thwarted the Cavs' first attempt, the tension in the stadium began to morph into a "sick-to-the-stomach" feeling. The Cougars made their second shot - quickly matched by Crockett's Garcia - and then their third. Byus guessed correctly again and stopped Crockett's third kick, and when the next Cougar successfully found the netting, Munford had secured the stunning upset, and the berth in the TSSAA State Tournament that most everyone had already assigned to the Cavs.

Byus - easily the star of the game for Munford - said afterward that he actually does have a strategy for stopping penalty kicks, on which goalkeepers are allowed to move laterally but cannot come forward toward the kicker until the ball is struck.

"I watch the kicker's eyes as he places the ball on the ground and as he sizes up the kick," Byus said. "As he nears the ball, I shift my focus to his hips, because the ball is going to follow the hip movement. If the hips move in the same direction as he's been looking most, I get a pretty good idea which way to move."

Adding even more surprise to the Sectional matchups was the news that Region 8 champion Millington had knocked off Region 7 runner-up Dyersburg 1-0, which means that neither Region 7-AA Tournament finalist will be in the field at the State Tournament.

The heartbreaking defeat ended one of the most successful seasons in Crockett history. The Cavs posted a 16-2 record, suffering only this loss and a 4-3 decision to powerhouse USJ. The Cavs claimed their third consecutive Region 7-AA championship. Although double-digit goal scorers Edgar Juarez and Eddy De La Rosa graduated Friday night, the vast majority of the roster will return for 2025.

Through their 18 games this season, here are the final statistical totals for Crockett players:

GOALS – Luke Carter 28, Christopher Cerda 24, Edgar Juarez 19, Eddy De La Rosa 11, Braulio Marquez 9, Angel Garcia 4, Leo Arreola 3, Angel Martinez 1, Adrian Calderon 1, Jathen Young 1, Mason Wood 1;

ASSISTS – Braulio Marquez 18, Edgar Juarez 17, Christopher Cerda 15, Luke Carter 9, Angel Garcia 8, Eddy De La Rosa 4, Ozzi Sanchez 3, Adrian Calderon 1, Santiago Santos 1, Max Utley 1, Leo Arreola 1, Eduardo Galvez 1, Camden Martin 1, Mason Wood 1, Noah Mayfield 1.



Left: In the only fully successful offensive sequence of the day for Crockett, Chris Cerda speeds past a Munford defender and uses his head to momentarily control a lob pass from Angel Garcia, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... then transferring control to his feet, managing to begin his shot as he's hit from behind by the Cougars' Nolan Falcon, a tactic Munford used frequently against Crockett shooters all day. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Despite being belted from behind, Chris Cerda got the shot off before tumbling to the ground, and it eluded charging Cougar goalkeeper Devin Byus - the only thing that got past him in the entire afternoon. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Chris Cerda took some extra punishment on his goal, getting crunched by two Cougars after falling to the ground. But he'd netted his 24th goal of the season for a 1-0 Cavalier lead. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Finishing off the sequence, Cav teammate Luke Carter comes over to help make sure Chris Cerda's bones are all still intact after the punishment he took from the Munford defense. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Chris Cerda also took an elbow to the face on this corner kick as he, Angel Garcia, and Eddy De La Rosa all leap in an effort to head the ball toward the Cougar net. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett's Luke Carter tries to head in another Cav corner kick on this play, which also shows how many players Munford was consistently dropping into the box to prevent good shot opportunities. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Another example of the effectiveness of Munford's bunched defense in the box: Crockett shooters had to try to put a little loft on the ball at times, in order to get over the Cougar wall. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett's Angel Garcia tries to blast a shot through the Munford wall, but there are five defenders in front of the goalkeeper to knock it away. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Another play showing the activity of Munford goalkeeper Devin Byus, here swatting away a high kick while Daniel Grajeda (6), Luke Carter (1), Max Utley (5) and a mostly-hidden Angel Garcia (8) try to position themselves for a chance. (Photo by Ron Barry)

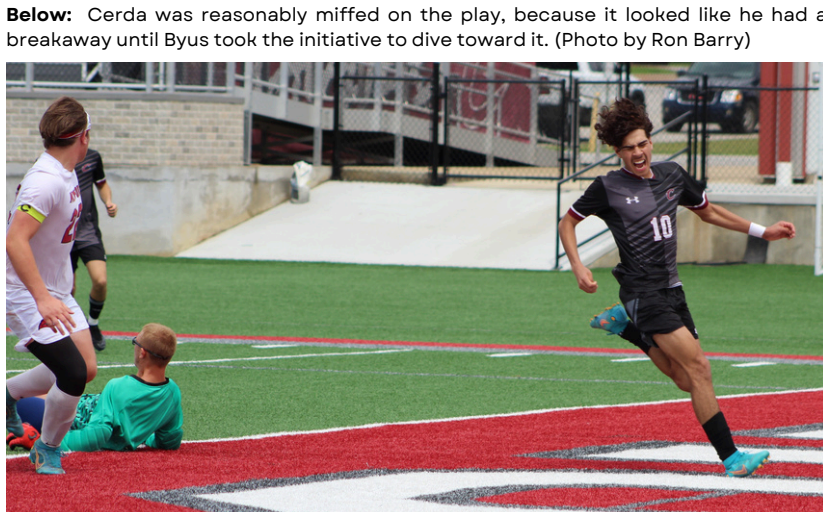


Right: Munford's Devin Byus slide-kicks this ball away just before the Cavs' Luke Carter can finish off a shot attempt. Near-misses like this were abundant on the day. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: In the first overtime, goalkeeper Devin Byus slides into this shot attempt by Chris Cerda, taking away Crockett's best chance to score in the two extra periods. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Cerda was reasonably miffed on the play, because it looked like he had a breakaway until Byus took the initiative to dive toward it. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Late in the game, Luke Carter was on the run and appeared to have an open shot when he fell to the ground, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: ... prompting a howl from the Crockett fans (and from Carter himself) that he'd been fouled, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... but this shot from the beginning of the play, clearly shows that the Munford defender had his foot on the ball first. It was that kind of day for Crockett. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: On yet another Cav scoring chance, this cross shot from Braulio Marquez (21) sailed just wide left of the goalpost ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: ... and this one by Eddy De La Rosa slid through the wall of defenders but clanked off the top bar of the net to miss being the game-winner by inches. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Crockett bids adieu to graduates Edgar Juarez (9), ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... Ozzi Sanchez (12), ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: ... Eddy De La Rosa (2), ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and Leo Arreola (24). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett County's 2024 Cavaliers: District 13-AA and Region 7-AA Champions. **Left:** Crockett County's 2024 Cavaliers: 16-2 overall record, District 13-AA and Region 7-AA Champions, 16-2 overall record. (Photo by Ron Barry)