

CROCKETT CHEER SQUAD WORKING HARD TO BE READY FOR COMPETITIONS



Above: Seniors Zoey Burleson (up top) and Alayna Scallion (lower left) celebrate the successful execution of a stunt lift during Tuesday's afternoon session. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

When Crockett County High School's cheer team went to the TSSAA State Competition last year, coaches Brandi Wilson and Ellary Brewster were surprised to learn that – for the first time – the non-tumbling division of the championships had been eliminated due to ongoing construction at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, causing a restriction of available space.

This could have been a significant problem, since Crockett was definitely a non-tumbling squad. Only then-freshman Rachel Crossnoe possessed that particular skill.

"We didn't have the heart to tell the girls that," Wilson said. "We just competed in there with the tumblers. And we still took third place!"

The most satisfying part of the story, as Wilson tells it, was the pre-results speech another coach had given to her own squad.

"She told them, 'Even if you finish in second place, you keep smiling and pretend that you're happy,'" Wilson laughed. "They obviously were expecting to win the whole thing. If we had finished second, our team would have been jumping up and down and screaming for joy! The best part is that we finished ahead of them!"

With that memory as a background – and with the hope that the non-tumbling division is re-inserted this year, since the contest is moving to Knoxville – Wilson and Brewster began preparing their Lady Cavaliers for the upcoming school year by holding a UCA Cheer Camp Monday and Tuesday in the auxiliary gymnasium at CCHS.

UCA – the Universal Cheer Association – sends a pair of official staffers to give two intense days of instruction and routine planning, and Crockett's participation in it makes the squad eligible for UCA competitions throughout the upcoming school year.

"Some places hold camps where several schools come together," Brewster said. "But we've found that having our own one here on campus allows us more personal instruction. We can accomplish in two days what the bigger camps do in four, and our girls get more attention than they would in a larger group."

Brewster, who was a member of Crockett's last state champion cheer squad in the Fall of 2014, said the UCA instructors work closely with the coaches to coordinate a two-day plan to get the most efficient preparation for the students. The Lady Cav team capped off Tuesday's work with a short showcase for family and friends.

"This is going to be a young squad overall," Brewster said. "We have several freshmen and sophomores. There are a few who have never cheered before. So this camp gives us a jumpstart for what we need to do to be ready for both football season and the competitions ahead." The ultimate goal is an impressive showing in February at the UCA Nationals in Orlando, Florida; CCHS placed eighth in its division last year.

Brewster said preparing for competitions isn't easy because individual judges have different standards of expectations.

"You can get points added to your score for doing more difficult stunts or having a more complicated routine, but you can lose points if your synchronization is off, you don't execute properly, or if you even stop smiling," she said.

"And sometimes two judges watching the exact same performance have very different reactions in their scoring. So we work Tuesday-through-Thursday every week except the two-week dead period (the last week of June and the first week of July, as mandated by the TSSAA) trying to get as solid as we can."

Crockett has 30 cheerleaders overall at the high school. Twenty-six of them will cheer at football games; 16 will cheer at basketball games; and 24 will be on the competition squad.

The 2024-25 cheer squad members are: Zoey Burleson (F, B, C); Melanie Meza (F, B, C); Alayna Scallion (F); Ella Emison (F); Kylee Garrett (F, C); Maddie Moore (F, C); Auriana Taylor (F, B, C); Ava North-Hall (F, B, C); Carrington Smith (F, B); Gracie Gaines (F, B, C); Kinzey Hutchison (F, C); Marlee Kellough (F, C); Sophia McGowan (F, C); Sarah Breland (F, C); Rachel Crossnoe (F, C); Kaylei Porter (F, B, C); Eva Burleson (F, B, C); Cacie Jo McNeill (F, B, C); Emmie Pickens (F, B, C); Georgi Conley (F, C); Kennedy Henning (F, B, C); Makayla Murphy (F, B, C); Kinlee Moore (F, C); Leah Kate Beaird (F, C); Lexie Beaird (F, C); Mia Grace Simmons (F, C); Melany Arreola (B); Lorelai Lipford (B); Kennedy Price (B); and Kaelyn Bonds (B).

During the UCA Camp, several of the team members earned awards from the instructors. On Monday, Scallion was named Most Versatile; Meza was selected as the Top-Top Girl; Henning captured the Human Kickstand award; and Price took the Fearless designation. Tuesday's winners: Crossnoe, Jump Off winner; North-Hall, Game Day Queen; and Smith, Bundle of Joy.

Four Lady Cavs were saluted for their entries in the UCA All-American division: Zoey Burleson, Meza, Scallion, and Garrett. If selected later this year, winners get the opportunity to cheer in parades and events across the country and even overseas in places like London and Rome.

Crockett's squad was awarded a Superior rating in the categories of Cheer Evaluation and Camp Routine by the UCA instructors.



Above: Junior cheerleader Kinzey Hutchison makes her dance moves "snappy" during Crockett's UCA Cheer Camp Tuesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Carrington Smith, another junior -- and with a seemingly never-ending smile on her face -- was honored Tuesday with a "Bundle of Joy" award. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Senior Maddie Moore is a veteran of the cheer dance routines and always adds a dazzling smile to the proceedings. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: UCA's two instructors stand before the Crockett squad with some final details before the team performs for their families and friends at Tuesday's conclusion. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Junior Marlee Kellough enthusiastically contributes to the cheer squad's Tuesday afternoon energy. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Being new to the high school ranks didn't stop Leah Kate Beard from jumping right in and mastering the dance steps. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Junior Gracie Gaines, who had to take it easy all of last football season after tearing an ACL, celebrates her return to full strength during Tuesday's workout. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Ava North-Hall's consistent efforts and attitude won her a "Game Day Queen" award Tuesday from the UCA instructors. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Sherry Ingram -- One of the things competition judges look for is animated faces, a major reason that CCHS coaches place Ava North-Hall right up front during a routine. Smiles also abound from her teammates Rachel Crossnoe (behind North-Hall) and Sophia McGowan (at right). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett cheer coaches Ellary Brewster (left) and Brandi Wilson (right) evaluate their squad's performance during Tuesday's UCA Camp afternoon session. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Rachel Crossnoe (center) -- flanked here by Melany Arreola (left) and Sophia McGowan (right foreground) -- was awarded Tuesday's Jump Off Winner prize. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: You think pulling off a stunt lift is easy? This one takes no less than 11 Lady Cavalier cheerleaders, with the eventual goal to spin senior Melanie Meza to the top of the stack. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The bases -- the girls on the mat -- launch Melanie Meza into position to be spun upside-down by her elevated teammates until Meza -- the flyer -- is caught again by the ones who launched her .. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and then she's steadied into place to successfully complete the stunt. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Crockett's entire cheer team of 30 members poses with their UCA instructors after being rated as Superior in the areas of Cheer Evaluation and Camp Routine. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Cheer squad members wave to their family and friends at the conclusion of Tuesday's UCA Camp program. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Four Crockett seniors -- (from left) Kylee Garrett, Melanie Meza, Alayna Scallion, and Zoey Burleson -- competed in the UCA All-American division. If selected later, winners get the opportunity to travel across the country and represent UCA in parades and other events. (Photo by Ron Barry)

