

ANDREW LAMAN ERA IN CROCKETT COUNTY VOLLEYBALL BEGINS WITH A VICTORY



Above: There weren't many moments Monday night that made Crockett's Andrew Laman cringe, but whatever happened on THIS play did. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Once the match began, there was a lot of THIS from left wing Katherine West (3) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

One down – only 677 to go.

Andrew Laman picked up his first victory as head coach of the Crockett County Lady Cavalier volleyball team Monday night at Halls, with his squad defeating the Lady Tigers 25-14, 25-10, and 25-16 for a 3-0 sweep.

Just before the 2023-24 school year ended, CCHS announced that Laman – then an assistant coach – would be swapping positions with head man Bobby Rawson when West Tennessee's winningest coach (outside of Memphis) decided he'd step down after 26 seasons. Monday night's matchup with Halls was the first official contest with Laman at the helm, and it's obvious that the camaraderie between the two coaches is still there.

"What do I need to catch him?" Laman joked after the win. "Only about 600-something more?"

"If he does, I won't be around to see it!" laughed Rawson, who figures he'll be enjoying his eventual heavenly home by then.

It's clear that Laman won't be tinkering much with the formula that helped Rawson compile an incredible 678-288 record over 26 years as Crockett's leader. But there have been some changes – specifically in a few switches of player positions – and if Monday's result was a proper indication, Laman has made some sound moves.

The Lady Cavs graduated a highly-talented group of seniors that led Crockett to a TSSAA State Tournament berth in Rawson's final campaign as the head coach. That included the team's top wing (Sarah Cherry), the top setter (Bailey Ann Whitby), the 'kill' leader in the middle (Joy Evans), the main libero (Brooklyn Haynes), and two stellar backline diggers (Kinleigh Lamb and Lynden Cole).

And while Halls might not be the most talented opponent on the Crockett schedule in 2024, the performance Monday night was very encouraging to Laman.

"I thought our girls really kept their focus well throughout the match," he said, "which isn't always easy to do when you win the first set fairly easily. But they executed well in all three games. For a first match, I was very pleased."

While last year's squad was senior-laden, it's not like the cupboard was left bare. Several returnees have extensive match experience, notably Brennan Morris, Sadie Hoover, Dee Cole, Katherine West, Keeton Holyfield, Maddie Collins, Kylee Garrett, Lily Riley, Jiorgia Elmore, and Khaki Hail. Two more outstanding Lady Cav athletes – basketball's Jordyn Maddox and softball's Piper White – have also stepped into the main rotation.

That doesn't even include a talented group of freshmen and sophomores, who could be seeing varsity play from time to time throughout the season. Three of them participated in Monday night's triumph.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of Monday night's win was the play of junior Katherine West, who was moved from the middle to the left wing. West played quite a bit last year but was mostly known for using her height effectively on blocks and softer placement shots, rarely going with a power game.

But at Halls, West came out firing on all cylinders, smashing winner after winner from the left side. When she wasn't doing it, Cole, Holyfield, Collins, Maddox, and Garrett were. Morris, Hoover, and White were providing the majority of the sets.

“Katherine has really worked hard since last season,” Laman said. “I believe she’s improved her confidence level quite a bit.”

“Playing travel ball this summer really helped my game,” West said. “I didn’t always get many chances to play power shots when I was in the middle, but playing on the wing in Sarah’s old spot has brought it out.”

“She’s been keeping it [the power game] in her back pocket,” joked assistant coach Hope Owens.

Rawson said this team should continue to get better as the younger players start to recognize things on the court that his seniors last year had already learned.

“Your court vision just gets better the more you play,” he said. “The hitters will start noticing when there’s only one blocker instead of two. The setters will notice when the other team’s back line has crept up too far and left room for push shots. Things like that just come with experience.”

The Lady Cavs were never seriously tested in the sweep over Halls. After a 6-6 start in Game 1, Crockett pushed the lead to 15-9 and 19-10 before winning 25-14. Game 2 was a rout from the beginning, with the Lady Cavs opening up a quick 15-4 edge. Game 3 was 9-9 before the winners kicked it into gear, eventually pulling away steadily.

Crockett stays on the road Tuesday evening with a battle at Martin Westview and then plays at Obion County Thursday before competing Friday and Saturday in the Memphis Spartan Tournament.



Above: People have different ways of preparing for games. Lady Cav assistant coach Bobby Rawson has always been pretty serious, but that’s almost impossible when Brennan Morris is around. This picture pretty much summarizes how both get ready for the start of a match. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: ... And a lot of THIS from Dee Cole (15) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... And a lot of THIS from Keeton Holyfield (14) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... And a lot of THIS from Maddie Collins (16) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: ... And a lot of THIS from Jordyn Maddox (13) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... Which led to lots and lots of smiles and celebrations, like this one from Sadie Hoover (1) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: ... And this one from Kylee Garrett (22) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... And this one from Piper White (6) and Maddie Collins (16) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... And this one from Katherine West (3) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: ... And this one from Dee Cole (15) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... And this one from Lily Riley (2) and Jiorgia Elmore (21) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... And this one from freshman Wesley Thornton (23), seeing action in her first varsity match. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Khaki Hail (20) prepares to blast a serve. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: When all was said and done for the night, Andrew Laman had his first official victory as a Crockett County head coach. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: For all her joking around, Brennan Morris is deadly serious when a game is in question. This picture sums her up perfectly: She gives it her "ALL." (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Keeton Holyfield (left) and Piper White get ready for a Halls serve. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Halle Holyfield (30) digs a Lady Tiger serve, setting up the next shot for Khaki Hail (20), Carmen Claybrooks (behind Holyfield), or Jordyn Maddox (13). (Photo by Ron Barry)

