

CROCKETT DIAMOND DUO BEATS THE ODDS TO WIN A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP



Above: Crockett & EBC first baseman Brady Fronabarger. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Cavalier diamonders Brady Fronabarger (left) and Carter Winders (right) take a study break in the Crockett library. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

What are the odds that two guys from a small rural county in West Tennessee would ever get to play for a legitimate national championship in any sport?

What are the odds that they could do so when that tournament has 465 teams in it?

What are the odds when their path to the finals was blocked by the #1 team in the national rankings?

What are the odds that those two players would not only WIN that national championship, but be the two players last to touch the ball on the final play to clinch the title?

Well, I put pen to paper, and ... realized I don't have the foggiest idea how to calculate what those odds are. But I know they're IMMENSE.

But that's exactly what happened this summer in Marietta, Georgia when Crockett County High School baseball players Carter Winders and Brady Fronabarger - with assistance from Brady's dad Brent, who coached first base throughout the event -

helped spearhead the EBC (Easley Baseball Club) 16U Wright team to the 2024 World Wood Bat Association 16U National Championship during the week of July 6-13.

Playing at six different locations in the Atlanta area and defeating teams from seven different states (which included showcase players from all over the country), the Jeff Wright-coached squad - officially playing out of Germantown, Tennessee - stunned the youth travel baseball world by winning its most prestigious event.

"I'm not really sure the whole thing has sunk in yet as to what we just accomplished," Brady said during a school break Monday. "These were the best teams in the country. There were players from all over the place. But this team of Tennessee and Mississippi boys left with the trophy."

"I honestly think that once we won our first bracket game, we just decided we weren't going to lose," Carter added. "We had to come from 6-0 behind in that one, against a nationally-ranked team, but once we came back and beat them, we started to get the feeling we could win the whole thing."

"That game (against Dulin Dodgers Prime-Godwin of Dallas, Texas) was the one," Brady said. "We weren't really challenged that much at all in our pool games (EBC went 5-0, outscoring their opponents 60-7), but when we managed that comeback after giving up a grand slam in the first inning, we knew we had a pretty good chance."

Brent Fronabarger - who after the 2024 spring season stepped down as Crockett's head baseball coach - said the difference in EBC and many of the other organizations competing was their "team" aspect.

"A lot of these showcase-type events have a lot of teams that are made up of really great players," he said, "but they don't play together very much. Many of them are just there to be seen as individuals. Some pitchers fly in from somewhere, pitch a game, and fly back out. But our group is an actual TEAM. We approach the tournament as a TEAM. We don't emphasize the individuals - ideally, baseball is a team sport. And we showed that approach still works, even against outstanding talent."

“Most of our guys have played against one another since they were 13 years old,” Coach Wright told the Atlanta-area media, “and some even longer than that. We had nobody sulking. We had nobody down. We didn’t have anybody that was selfish. They were all pulling for each other.”

Nobody exemplified that approach more than Carter and Brady. Ironically, both of them were among the Top 20 offensive players in the entire tournament in the final statistical measures, even while focusing on team play.

“I think I hit better that week than I ever have before,” Carter laughed. “It was weird, because prior to this tournament, we had played a few others. We’d have maybe one guy who was hot, but that was about it – we couldn’t string things together. But in this tournament, we always had five or six guys who were hitting well in every game. It was contagious.”

Carter’s hitting wasn’t all that was noticed during the event. “He caught 11 straight games in that heat,” Coach Wright said, “and I don’t think he had a passed ball. He caught five games in two days. But he never came off, never complained. He was a warrior, 100%.”

“The day I caught three games (the beginning of the round of 32), I was surprised when it was over that I felt pretty good,” Carter said. “The next day (for the final two games) – not so much. I was kind of sore at first, but once we won our semifinal, there was no way we were going to let this opportunity get away. Besides, I was really the only catcher on our roster, so I needed to stay out there!”

Brady, who played first base throughout the tournament, with a couple of relief pitching stints, was impressive enough that he has now been rated as the top first base prospect in the state of Tennessee for the upcoming season. Both he and Winders will still only be juniors.

Here’s the 11-game winning path the team took through the tournament:

July 6: EBC W 6-1 over Dulins Dodgers 2024 Strausborger (Gunter, TX).

July 7: EBC W 12-3 over Blue Sox Baseball Elite (Ringgold, GA).

July 8: EBC W 16-0 over SBA 16U Scout Knoll (Coral Springs, FL).

July 9: EBC W 11-3 over USA Prime Coastal 16U Stars (Clemmons, NC).

July 10: EBC W 15-0 over 5TP Development (Bronx, NY). [End of pool play.]

July 11: EBC W 13-1 over Nova Premier 16U Orange (Sterling, VA).

July 12: EBC W 6-0 over DCP 2026 National (Berlin, MD).

July 12: EBC W 7-6 over Dulin Dodgers Prime-Godwin (Dallas, TX: #20 national ranking).

July 12: EBC W 12-1 over Body Armor Titans Vigeant 2026 (Bayport, NY).

July 13: EBC W 4-3 over Canes National 16U (Fredericksburg, VA: #1 national ranking).

July 13: EBC W 4-3 over Dirtbags 2026 National (Sedalia, NC). [National championship game.]

Brady said the semifinal win over the top-ranked Canes was as satisfying as any of them.

“Getting to that game meant we had already gone farther than any EBC team ever had,” he said, “but then we face the #1 team in the country. And man, they let you KNOW they were the #1 team before the game even started. It was just a lot of attitude. But we never trailed in that game – we played with a lot of confidence, and they kept us motivated.”

Part of the surprising nature of that EBC win was the fact that fully 14 members of the Canes roster – none above the level of a high school sophomore – had already committed to a four-year college. And major universities at that.

“And there are new rules now that you can’t commit until your junior year of high school,” Brady said, “so some of those guys have been committed since they were in the eighth grade. So it was fun to be able to take them down.” That brought EBC to the championship game, and they quickly fell behind 2-0 in the first inning. Wright made a pitching change and brought in lefthander Ashton Spurr – one of two Kentuckians on the EBC roster – and he delivered 6.1 innings of sparkling relief, while his teammates rallied to take a 4-3 advantage into the seventh.

With two outs and the tying run on first base, and a 2-2 count on the lefty hitter, Spurr threw a pitch that sailed up and in and actually hit the knob of the bat, sending the ball bouncing into fair territory a few feet in front of the plate. Despite his soreness, Carter pounced on the ball, took his time, set his feet, and gunned the throw to his Crockett buddy Brady at first base for the tournament’s final out – an improbable ending to a Cinderella story.

A joyous dogpile ensued just beyond the pitching mound. Among the celebrants were Tommy Baker, the EBC third baseman from South Gibson County High, and tournament MVP Cole Prosek of Magnolia Heights, Mississippi, who’s already announced he’s head for Ole Miss when his high school days are over.

So ... what WERE the odds? Seemingly insurmountable – but not impossible.

“I mean, how can you NOT be romantic about baseball?” Carter asked.

You can’t, Mr. Winders – you just CAN’T.



Left: Crockett & EBC Wright catcher Carter Winders. (Photo by Ron Barry)