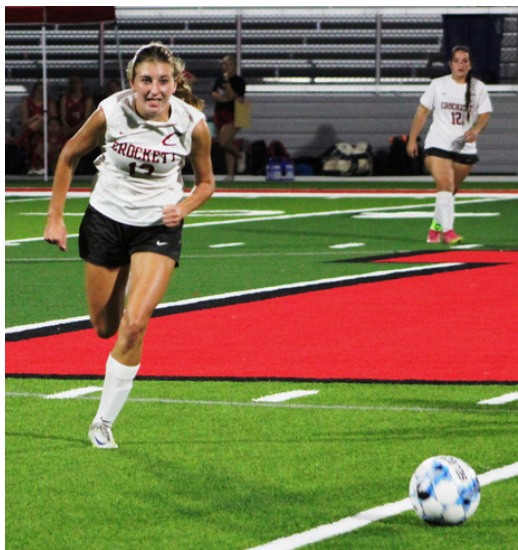


FINISHING STRONG: AVERY THORNTON HAVING QUITE A WEEK AS LADY CAVS ROLL 2-1



Above: Crockett's Avery Thornton streaks to the ball passed into the open by Nyah Cathey, headed toward the Lexington goal to launch the shot that gave the Lady Cavs a 2-1 road win Thursday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: After Avery Thornton's shot went in, a very excited Lydia Waddey was there to greet her with a hug as Stephanie Joyner (left) and Nyah Cathey (right) move in to join them while the disgruntled Big Red goalkeeper pulls the ball from the back of the net. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Crockett County's Avery Thornton is having quite a week of strong finishes.

On Tuesday as a cross-country runner, Thornton mustered a late extended sprint to finish 13th and earn a medal in the Crockett County Invitational. On Thursday night, as a soccer player with just 17:55 remaining in the match, Thornton drilled in a top-shelf shot from about 20 yards out to give the Lady Cavaliers a 2-1 win over stubborn Lexington and improve Crockett's season record to 7-1-1.

Thornton's shot capped off an amazing team effort by Coach Carli Branson's club, which trailed 1-0 at halftime and was being both out hustled and pushed around by the much more physical host team, coached by former Lady Cavalier assistant Natalie Stephens.

Lexington was getting to every 50-50 ball first and, once there, wasn't shy about shoving Crockett players away. The Lady Tigers weren't doing anything illegal; they were just playing with more intensity and physicality than the visiting Lady Cavs.

In the second half, the momentum began to swing somewhat as Crockett came out with a much more determined frame of mind. It took less than five minutes to tie things up when, on a beautifully placed corner kick by Dani Rios in front of the Lexington goal, Hannah Carter leaped among the throng of bunched players and snapped a header directly past the Big Red goaltender into the net. With 35:37 remaining, the match was deadlocked.

It stayed that way for roughly (no pun intended, although it's an apt description) the next 20 minutes, but the Lady Cavs were holding their own against the aggressive nature of the hosts' play. Finally, at the 17:55 mark, Crockett's Nyah Cathey freed an outlet pass to Thornton, who dribbled it in open space for a while before determining the point from which she'd shoot.

"I was aiming for the right corner," Thornton said, "but just as I kicked it, the defender stuck her foot in and made the ball rise higher than I intended." The altered flight of the ball confused Lexington's goalie as it sailed from the right corner toward the middle of the goal, drifting just above her outstretched arms and under the crossbar to give the Lady Cavs a 2-1 advantage.

Still, there was time for the hosts to make a comeback, but Crockett's back line defense of Rios, Carter, Kendra Juarez, Chayse Lewis, Claire Nichols, Adalee Doyle, and Carley Lampley reversed nearly every attempt at a rush made by the Lexington offense. Midfielders Rebecca Waddey, Cristal Martinez, and Lydia Waddey were all working hard to break up the Lady Tiger rhythm, and Crockett attackers Cathey, Thornton, Braniya Green, and Stephanie Joyner were doing their part to keep the ball on the far side of the field.

With about seven minutes left – and her team beginning to show the effects of the warm, humid night – Branson inserted freshman Kate Davis, another cross-country racer who can run forever, and seemingly does. She controlled the ball for much of the game's remainder, with Lexington players helplessly chasing her around until the clock ran out.

"The last two years, we've tied Lexington, but haven't been able to beat them," Branson said. "Tonight I was very proud of the way our girls persevered and adjusted to the physicality of this match. The second half was a much better performance than the first. As long as we can use our soccer IQs and play hard, clean, smart soccer, we're going to be much better off."

Branson and assistant coach Joey Soriano both touted the play of the defensive back line, which was solid all night except for the one misplay on a corner kick that allowed the Lady Tiger goal at the 18:09 mark of the opening half. Goalkeeper Amaria Walker stopped everything else, continuing her improvement in her first year of soccer competition.

“Amaria walked in to such a hard position with zero experience and has been clutch for us,” Branson said. “I’m thankful to have her on this team. She brings so much joy to us, and she gets better and better every day.”

Crockett now turns its attention to a pair of tough district matches next week against their primary rivals, South Gibson and Dyersburg.

CCMS SOCCER: The high school team wasn’t the only one celebrating a big soccer win Thursday night. The middle schoolers knocked off the #1 team in the North District when the Lady Cavs blanked Henry County 2-0. On Saturday, Coach Doug Wede’s squad had downed the South District’s #1 club, McNairy, also by a 2-0 count.

Thursday evening, Ruth Gourley and Kalynn Lewis netted the goals, but “the difference maker was the defense,” Wede said. “Our stingy defenders caused Henry County to have to take low percentage shots from outside the box. This gave our goalie (Wede’s daughter Hannah) time to set up on the shots and frustrate the Henry County strikers.” Wede made 15 saves to post the clean sheet for the winners.

“Catherine Scruggs, Marley Thornton, Amy Mena, and Kamila Juarez were as solid as a defense can look,” Wede said. “We have now beaten the best in the North District and South District. Next Tuesday will be the battle for the best of our own district.” It will actually be an elimination match for CCMS, as the Regional Tournament selects only 8 of the 26 West Tennessee teams to a playoff spot.

Crockett must travel to South Gibson for the Tuesday match.

“We are in playoff mode now,” Wede said. “With a win, we clinch a home field advantage in the single elimination Regional. With a loss, our season is over. Even with this pressure, the girls are ready to play their best. And they still manage to find time to laugh, smile, sing, and make fun memories during the games. They are leaders on the sideline, but even more so in their classes. I’m very proud of them.”

CCMS SOFTBALL: Emilee Chandler tossed a two-hit shutout and Kendall Savage had a single, scored twice, stole two bases, and drove in a run as Coach Duke Kail’s Lady Cavs improved to 10-4 with a 5-0 blanking of USJ Thursday.

Savage, Ariana Mosier, Haley Leforgee, and Lily Cole all knocked in runs for Crockett. Mosier, Savage, Cole, Chandler, Leforgee, Nadia Turner, and Reagen McCoy collected the seven hits managed by the Lady Cavs.

Chandler walked just one batter and struck out eight, throwing an amazing 57 strikes in 76 pitches.

CCMS FOOTBALL: The Cavalier gridders fell to Martin Middle School 24-22 Thursday night, their second straight defeat after opening the season with four victories.



Above: It was an extremely physical game, as the next sequence of shots will show. First up is Stephanie Joyner getting sandwiched by a couple of Lexington defenders. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Before that, Crockett’s first score came when Hannah Carter (ponytail flying) snapped a header into the net (ball is at the far right) off of a perfect corner kick by Dani Rios. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Lydia Waddey is sent for a tumble when a Lady Tiger ran through her from behind. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Nyah Cathey has to try to center a pass to a teammate while being held from the back by another Lexington defender. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Then Stephanie Joyner gets raked across the shin again while trying to get a shot off from the front of the box. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: But in the end, the solid defensive backfield held up for the Lady Cavaliers, sparked by the play of Kendra Juarez ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... and Claire Nichols, here prepping a pass to Hannah Carter (foreground) while Lydia Waddey watches from behind ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: ... and Chayse Lewis, here poking the ball away from a Lexington attacker ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: ... and Hannah Carter, sprinting down the sideline after stealing the ball from the Big Red offense. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Here punting the ball toward midfield after another save, goalkeeper Amaria Walker continues to improve each game and has become a stalwart in the Lady Cavalier defense. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Braniya Green was so quick on this move that the Lexington player never saw her coming - and maybe still hasn't. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Rebecca Waddey was a workhorse throughout the game in the midfield area for Crockett. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: And when the game was on the line in the fading minutes, Lady Cav freshman Kate Davis (19) made Lexington defenders chase her all over, killing the remaining time off the clock. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: The second half especially was action-packed for Avery Thornton, here chasing down an airborne ball as Rebecca Waddey (background) and Nyah Cathey (right) try to get in position for a pass. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Chayse Lewis prepares for an inbounds pass, searching for just the right area and player to hurl the ball. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Cristal Martinez moves in to take control of a ball as Claire Nichols (25) backs her up in case Lexington can take it away. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Ruth Gourley scored one of the goals as CCMS defeated Henry County 2-0 and kept the Lady Cavs' highly successful season rolling along. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Kalynn Lewis tallied the other goal for CCMS, continuing her astounding sixth-grade season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Reagan McCoy also ripped a hit for the victorious Crockett softballers against USJ. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Naudia Turner collected one of the seven Lady Cav hits as CCMS improved to 10-4 by blanking USJ Middle School 5-0 Thursday. (Photo by Ron Barry)