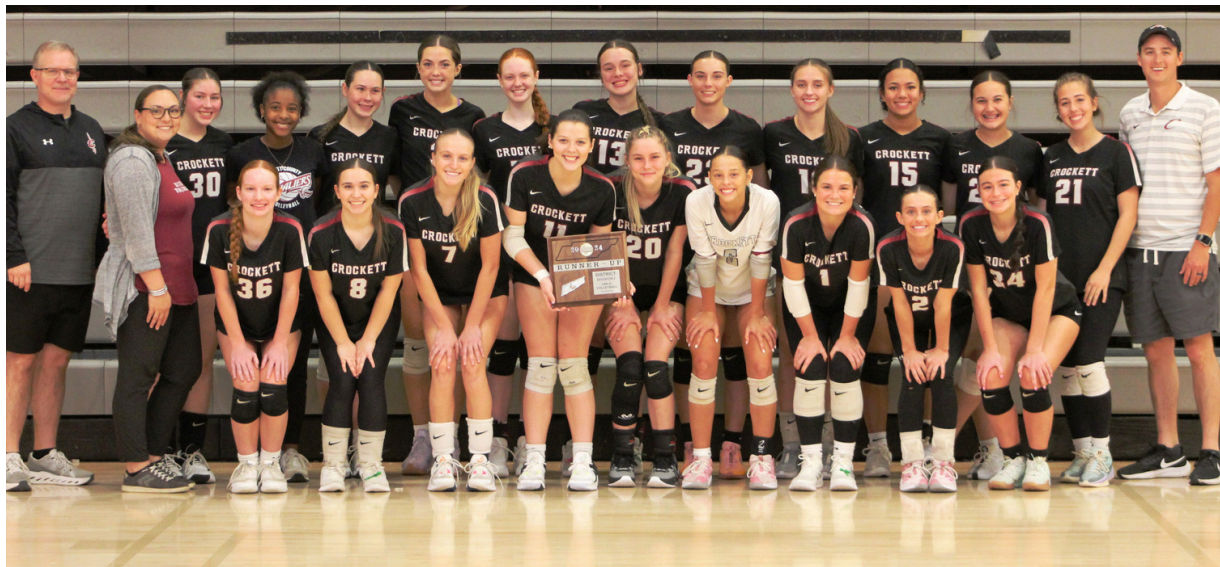


CROCKETT VOLLEYBALL, SOCCER TEAMS EARN DISTRICT 13-AA TOURNAMENT RUNNERS-UP



Above: Crockett finished as District 13-AA runner-up, earning a berth in next week's Region 7-AA event at Bolivar. The Lady Cavs play Lakeland Monday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

It is an unfortunate reality that – barring an upset of biblical proportions – both Crockett County's volleyball and soccer teams are destined to be no better than the runners-up in next week's Region 7-AA tournaments.

But that's okay for two reasons: (1) A semifinal win is all they need to keep their hopes alive for a State Tournament berth; and (2) the Bible is literally full of upsets of biblical proportions.

The Lady Cavalier volleyball squad has the unfortunate reality of sharing a district with powerful Dyer County, a State Tournament team from last year which boasts two of West Tennessee finest players – who, incidentally, also have a terrific supporting cast. In Thursday night's District 13-AA championship, the Lady Choctaws polished off Crockett's unit in straight sets despite getting a significant scare in Set 2.

The Lady Cavalier soccer unit – resting two of its key players who are recovering from injuries – fell in its District 13-AA championship tilt to mighty South Gibson County 6-0 Thursday night. “Hey, that's one goal closer than the last time they beat us,” said eternal optimist Coach Carli Branson.

But the fact remains that by reaching the district title games, both Crockett teams have earned Region berths next week, which means the march to the State continues for both. The volleyballers play Lakeland at Bolivar Monday night in their Region semifinal; the soccer club gets Haywood in Brownsville Tuesday night. A semifinal victory gets each squad in the Region championship, but more importantly also gets them into the West Sectional after that.

And a sectional win is what is necessary to go to the State. So the volleyballers can get there without beating Dyer County, and the kickers can get there without defeating South Gibson.

VOLLEYBALL: Coach Andrew Laman is realistic about how his young team compares to Dyer County's juggernaut. “Let's face it, they're good,” he said after Thursday night's match. “I'm disappointed tonight because I didn't think we played our best. But I guess we've played them tougher than anyone else, so there's that. But right now that's not a lot of consolation.”

Dyer County has a 6-2 middle hitter named Rylee Kee and a 5-5 athletic wonder named Teagan Reed – who were named co-MVPs of District 13-AA – and if they make it to the match on time, the Lady Choctaws don't usually have a lot to worry about.

When most teams set a front-line hitter for a kill, that hitter generally hopes to just get the ball to land in bounds, a majority of the time very near the back line or a corner. Key gives Dyer County an added luxury: her kills are often going almost straight into the court floor, rarely 15 feet away from where she struck them. They're virtually impossible to defend.

Reed – who can probably high jump the net if she tried – gets up just as high or higher than Key, but also adds athleticism to every position as she rotates around the court. There's rarely a wayward dig or set that she can't run down and keep in play, and if a ball is set well to her as a hitter, it's lights out for the opponent.

Still, for the second year in a row, Crockett is the only district team to even win a set off the Lady Choctaws, and almost did it again Thursday night in Set 2 when they rallied from a 20-15 deficit. Consecutive kills by freshman Wesley Thornton and junior Dee Cole pulled the Lady Cavs within 20-19.

Dyer County answered with a point, but then Crockett's Sadie Hoover pulled on of her patented “sneaky flip” sets straight over the net to an empty spot in the Lady Choctaw court, and it was 21-20. The first two killer net violations was then called against Crockett, but the Lady Cavs countered with a Katherine West kill and another point to tie the match at 22-all.

It went to 23-all when the second net violation was called, and Dyer County closed it out with a kill on the next point. "We were trying to be more aggressive in the second set," Laman said, "and net violations are the risk you take when you do that. We were also trying to be more aggressive on our serves tonight, which opens up room for mistakes, but I thought we handled that part of our game well. Dyer County's just good, but we can play them tougher than we showed tonight."

The final scores of the sets were 25-13, 25-23, and 25-14.

Crockett will play Lakeland and Dyer County will face host Bolivar when the Region Tournament begins Monday night

SOCCER: Branson knows South Gibson is the top dog of District 13-AA right now, and a Region semifinal win at this stage is more important. So she held out key players Rebecca Waddey and Dani Rios in hopes that the recent injuries they've suffered will heal by Tuesday's match time at Brownsville.

Even without them, Crockett's squad played the Lady Hornets one goal closer this time. SGC had blanked the Lady Cavs 7-0 in their first meeting this fall.

"Every girl had quality minutes and put up a good fight against a powerhouse team," Branson said after her crew's record dipped to 10-4-1 – still one of the best marks in West Tennessee.

If the Lady Cavs defeat Brownsville at 5:30 Tuesday, they'll play Thursday in the Region championship – most likely at South Gibson again at 6:00. A Tuesday triumph also puts Crockett in a Saturday West Sectional, with the winner of that contest going to the State.



Above: Brennan Morris and Piper White were named to the All-District Academic team for maintaining GPAs of at least 3.5 throughout their four years of school. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett's senior setter Sadie Hoover (1) steers a ball over the net on the team's final hit of this point as squad mates Wesley Thornton (23), Katherine West (3), and Brennan Morris (right) prepare to react to the return. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: It isn't easy to get a ball past Dyer County's front line when District Co-MVP Rylee Key -- all 6-2 of her -- is waiting to pound it back at you. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Katherine West rears back to blast a kill as teammates Madi Collins (16), Wesley Thornton (23), Sadie Hoover (behind West), Piper White (in white), and Brennan Morris get ready for any counter. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Among the fans cheering the Lady Cavaliers on Thursday night were two star members of last year's State Tournament team, Kinleigh Lamb and Brooklyn Haynes. Both are now freshmen and housemates at UT-Martin. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett led the district in this category: Most Girls Named as District Scholars, for maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA throughout their four years of school. From left are Jiorgia Elmore, Sadie Hoover, Kylee Garrett, and Lily Riley. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Sadie Hoover and Keeton Holyfield were named to the All-District Tournament team for their excellent play this week at Dyer County. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Keeton Holyfield, going up against Dyer County's imposing front line, employs her effective touch shot toward an open spot in the Lady Choctaw defense. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Coach Andrew Laman reacts to an out call that went against the Lady Cavaliers midway through the first set of the District 13-AA Tournament. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: And if Key doesn't mash it on you, there's a good chance the other District Co-MVP -- the marvelous Teagan Reed -- will find a way to spoil your fortunes. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: After Jordyn Maddox (13) recorded a kill against Dyer County, she's congratulated by Katherine West (3), Madi Collins (16), and Lakyn Forsythe (34), while Brennan Morris (11) reminds her to always "go with your gut" when deciding on placement. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: Piper White is a picture of concentration as she awaits a serve from the Lady Choctaw side. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Wesley Thornton (23) gets a salute from Brennan Morris (right) and congratulations from Katherine West (3) and Madi Collins (16) after blasting a kill from the right side. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Every time Sadie Hoover pulls off one of her "sneaky flip" sets -- steering the ball into an open spot on the opponents' court while making it look like she's getting ready to set it to a teammate -- the reaction is priceless. This one is provided by (from left) Wesley Thornton, Dee Cole (15), and Halle Holyfield (30). (Photo by Ron Barry)

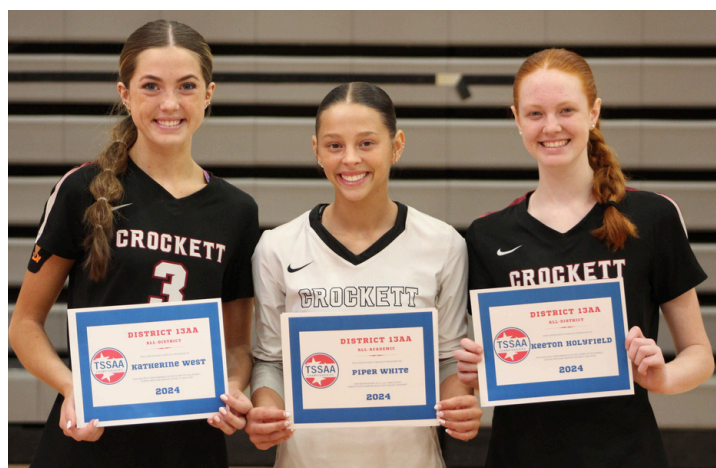


Above: By the midpoint of the third set Thursday night, things began to slip away for the Lady Cavs, illustrated by this tough return in which both Madi Collins (16) and Lakyn Forsythe (on the floor) are battling just to keep the ball in the air long enough for a teammate to reach it. You can tell by the look on assistant coach Bobby Rawson's face that it isn't going to happen. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Trying to fire the Lady Cavaliers up prior to the pre-game introductions are (from left) Ellie Henderson, Kinlee Walker, Addie Hoover, and Tink Willis. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Named to the All-District 13-AA Team for their outstanding play throughout the season were Katherine West, Piper White, and Keeton Holyfield. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: For their outstanding play throughout the season, four Crockett players were named to the All-District 13-AA Team: first, Rebecca Waddey (7). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Next up on the All-District 13-AA Team: Stephanie Joyner. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Rounding out the All-District 13-AA Team for her excellent play this season: Kendra Juarez (11). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Also named to the All-District 13-AA Team: Dani Rios (15). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: After Crockett's soccer team dropped a 6-0 decision to host South Gibson in the District 13-AA Tournament championship game, awards were presented for the season and the tournament. Lady Cav freshman Claire Nichols was selected as the District's Defensive Player of the Year. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: And the third Lady Cav to be named to the All-District Tournament Team: goalkeeper Amaria Walker. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Named to the All-District Tournament Team for their play this week was defender Hannah Carter (6). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: Also named to the All-District Tournament Team: Lydia Wadley (12). (Photo by Ron Barry)

