

LADY CAV VOLLEYBALLERS SECURE WEST SECTIONAL BERTH FOR THURSDAY



Above: Even Keeton Holyfield -- who rarely shows emotion while on the court -- had to break into a smile after scoring a key point in Set #4. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: When the Lady Cavaliers finally got it rolling late in Set #4 to close it out, this was the scenario: front-liners Keeton Holyfield (14), Jordyn Maddox (13), and Katherine West (3) awaiting the serve from teammate Brennan Morris (in the right background). (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Last week, Crockett County volleyball coach Andrew Laman may have been humming the Lynyrd Skynyrd classic "Gimme Three Steps."

His Lady Cavaliers had three steps to take to book a return trip to the TSSAA State Tournament.

First, they had to win a district tournament semifinal, which they did by defeating Dyersburg. Second, they had to be victorious in a region tournament semifinal -- which they accomplished Monday night by downing Lakeland Prep. That leaves Step #3, which will come Thursday night at a site yet to be determined. But it will be a West Sectional, and Crockett earned a berth in it with the win in Bolivar over Lakeland Prep.

Before that, though, Laman's crew will once again do battle with powerful Dyer County for the Region 7-AA championship, set for Tuesday night at 6:00 in Newbern. The outcome of that contest determines where Thursday's sectionals will be played. If Crockett stuns the world and knocks off the Lady Choctaws, it will host a sectional Thursday night. If Dyer County prevails, the Lady Cavs will hit the road to either Millington, Covington, or Memphis East.

Millington defeated Ridgeway 3-0 in one of the Region 8-AA semifinals. A score on the Covington-Memphis East duel had not been reported as of 3:30 Tuesday morning.

Crockett's win over Lakeland Prep -- a team without a single senior -- did not come easy Monday night. The Lady Cavs actually trailed past the halfway point in each of the four sets played, but bounced back to prevail in three of them, largely due to the net play of Keeton Holyfield, the consistently dependable digging of libero Piper White, and the rocket serving of Brennan Morris.

Holyfield, the least imposing of Crockett's front-line hitters but the one who always seems to know just where and how hard (or softly) to hit it, kept Lakeland Prep's blockers off-kilter all night, mixing up her placements while also playing aggressively enough to stuff several Lady Lion shots and get quick kills on balls she could reach near the net.

White was rock-solid in the back line, productively digging virtually every shot she could reach and keeping point after point alive for the Crockett setters and hitters.

"And when the Lady Cavs needed a service run, Morris delivered at key stretches in the match, including the decisive fourth set in which she carried Crockett from a 17-17 deadlock to a 22-17 advantage. She had similar runs in Sets #1 and #2, the other ones in which the Lady Cavs prevailed.

It added up to a 25-20, 25-21, 24-26, 25-20 triumph -- and in it, the afore-mentioned trio had plenty of help from their teammates.

Front-liners Dee Cole, Katherine West, Madi Collins, Jordyn Maddox, and Wesley Thornton all had their moments, scoring kills and putting up successful blocks on occasion. Setters Sadie Hoover and Lakyn Forsythe provided plenty of opportunities for the hitters, and Morris and Halle Holyfield were solid contributors from the back row.

Laman said one of the keys to Crockett's win was its service improvement. "We've been working on that extra-hard in practice lately," he said. "We wanted more serves to not just be in, but to be hard and in. There are risks involved with that, but our service game had not been challenging opponents very much since the tournaments started. We'll miss some -- that's the risk you take -- but when they're on, it definitely makes us better and tougher."

Morris – whose strong serves helped Crockett attain a State berth a year ago – was booming line drives throughout Monday night’s match. Teammates were also, for the most part, putting more velocity on their offerings as well.

Crockett trailed 12-8 and 16-13 in the opening set before winning nine of the next 10 points to open up its decisive margin. In Set #2, the Lady Cavs trailed 20-18 until a Collins kill tied things at 20-20. It went to 21-21 before Crockett pulled away, scoring the final two points when Cole nailed a pair of kills.

In Set #3, the Lady Cavs jumped to a commanding 7-1 lead but soon found themselves tied at 11-11. They went back up 20-16 and seemed poised to sweep the match, but the young Lady Lions fought back and forced a fourth set.

“This team – for whatever reason – has had trouble keeping its foot on the gas when we get a lead,” Laman said. “We simply have to get better focus when we are in the range of closing out a set. We’ve let too many slip away on us.”

It happened again in Set #4, when Crockett allowed a 12-5 advantage to shrink away. Lakeland Prep caught the Lady Cavs at 16-16 and actually took a one-point edge until Crockett scored and Morris began the service run that provided the necessary margin again.

The Lady Cavs, now 23-10 on the season, will face Dyer County for the fourth time this year in the championship game Tuesday night. The Lady Choctaws absolutely destroyed host Bolivar Central in the first semifinal Monday night, winning 25-5, 25-8, and 25-7.

Crockett – as it was last season as well – is the only team in District 13-AA to take at least a set off Dyer County this year. The championship game shifts to Newbern since the District 14-AA teams have both been eliminated.



Left: Crockett Coach Andrew Laman is looking forward to a match in which he doesn't have to constantly remind his club to keep its foot on the gas when it gets a lead. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: A familiar sight for Crockett Monday night was libero Piper White tracking an opponent's serve, ready to productively direct it toward her setter. White was outstandingly consistent for the Lady Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)



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Left: Freshman Wesley Thornton (23) hammers home a decisive kill in Set #2 for the Lady Cavs. Sadie Hoover (left) and Piper White (6) are backing up the shot. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: When you go up for a block -- even a successful one, as managed by Jordyn Maddox (13) and Keeton Holyfield (14) here -- it's hard to remain photogenic. Your face can be a target. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: When Dee Cole (15) rips a shot at an opponent, the result is often as you see here ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Halle Holyfield (30) contributed several solid rotations for the Lady Cavs in their Region 7-AA Tournament win over Lakeland Prep. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... By the time Dee Cole lands, the ball is ricocheting off the nearest foe and heading to a place where it can not be returned. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Advancing to a Region championship game demands play that is satisfying enough to bring a lot of smiles. Here's a gallery from Monday night, beginning with Brennan Morris ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... and Katherine West (3), Madi Collins (16), and Jordyn Maddox (right) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and reserve Ava Lee ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and Lily Riley (left) and Sadie Hoover ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... and Wesley Thornton (23), laughing it up with Madi Collins (left). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Jordyn Maddox (13) prepares to lower the boom on a couple of Lakeland Prep blockers as Madi Collins provides support to her left. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Piper White listens intently to instructions from Coach Andrew Laman during a timeout. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: This is what it looks like from the opponents' back row when Dee Cole is about to rain one down on your parade. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Khaki Hail offers encouragement as Crockett begins to let a lead slip away in Set #2 -- but the Lady Cavs rallied to pull it out. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Something unexpected appears to have been said by somebody during a timeout huddle that has Wesley Thornton (23) and Jiorgia Elmore (21) questioning their hearing. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Madi Collins (right) fires up the huddle after smashing the kill that ties Set #2 up at 20-20. Reacting are Lakyn Forsythe (34), Brennan Morris (11), Keeton Holyfield (14), and Jordyn Maddox (13). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: But when it was all said and done, it took a lot of digs like this one from Piper White (6) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and a lot of putaways like this one from Keeton Holyfield (14), with support from Lakyn Forsythe (34) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: ... and a lot of accurately-placed rocket serves like this one from Brennan Morris (11), that keyed the win that moves the Lady Cavs into a West Sectional berth on Thursday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)

