

LADY CAVALIER SOCCER TEAM CLAIMS FIRST SECTIONAL BERTH IN PROGRAM HISTORY



Above: Crockett's senior captain Lydia Waddey (12) kept finding herself open -- mostly due to her own hustle -- and the result was a sparkling four-goal performance in the Region 7-AA Tournament semifinal against Haywood. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The Lady Cavs had an idea it might be a good day when Stephanie Joyner launched this long-range missile from just outside the box, yet found the back of the net as it sailed above the goalkeeper's head for a goal to make it 2-0. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Crockett County girls soccer coach Carli Branson knows the history of this school's program inside and out. So she knew Tuesday night's Region 7-AA Tournament semifinal win over Haywood in Brownsville was a big deal -- even though the lopsided 9-1 triumph wasn't a surprise.

The big deal is that for the first time in school history, the Lady Cavaliers will be playing in a West Sectional match (formerly known as the Substate). Crockett will face either Munford or Brighton on Saturday. The site will be determined by the outcome of Thursday night's region tournament championship games.

And while it's exciting to be playing for a region crown Thursday, most teams have their sights set on the Sectional -- because winning that match puts you into the TSSAA State Tournament.

"This win is a testament to the hard work and determination these girls have put in," Branson said after Crockett easily disposed of the host Lady Tomcats. "I'm so proud of these girls for never giving up, staying the course, and trusting the process. They kept working hard through Fall Break and have definitely earned this achievement. So many players have been patient and are seeing their hard work pay off right before their eyes."

The Lady Cavs will first journey over to Medina Thursday night to duel South Gibson County for the region title. The Lady Hornets have easily defeated Crockett 7-0 and 6-0 in their first two meetings this season.

So if the Lady Cav focus is more on Saturday than Thursday this week, it's certainly understandable. Whichever team Crockett faces -- Munford was a 10-0 victor over Ridgeway and Brighton drilled Craigmont 10-1 in the Region 8-AA semifinals -- will be a formidable opponent. South Gibson advanced to the Region 7-AA championship with a 13-0 romp over hapless Fayette-Ware.

"We didn't play very well in the first half tonight," Branson said when assessing her team's performance against Haywood. "We were too slow to the ball, and just looked a little out-of-synch. I told the girls at halftime, 'Ladies, this really shouldn't be that much of a game right now.'" Crockett led 3-1 at the intermission, but missed a few other scoring opportunities.

But the second half was a different story. "We did everything well in the second half that we didn't do well in the first half," Branson said.

"Games like this (which you're supposed to win easily) always make me a little nervous, because there's a tendency to think the other team is just going to roll over and hand it to you. But that's not how it works, and I told the girls to get back out there and earn this win. And they did. They got after it the second half."

So dominant was the Lady Cavs' play in the final 40 minutes that Crockett goalkeeper Amaria Walker never even touched the ball. Her main concern was finding a way to stay warm as the temperatures dipped into the upper 40s by the match's end.

Offensively, senior captain Lydia Waddey scored the game's first goal on a rush through the middle and then added three more tallies in rapid succession in the second half. Stephanie Joyner gave Crockett a 2-0 lead early on with a long blast from outside the right edge of the goal box. Another goal by Emme Grace Martin was waved off for an offside violation, and a header by Hannah Carter off a Dani Rios corner kick went off the left post. So the halftime score could have been a lot more uneven.

In the second half, Nyah Cathey added a pair of scores for the winners and Braniya Green also netted a shot. Rebecca Waddey notched the third goal of the opening period for Crockett and joined Lydia Waddey, Green, and Anahy De La Rosa as Lady Cav players with assists in the game.

VOLLEYBALL: Crockett's volleyball team earned its West Sectional berth with a Monday night win in the Region 7-AA Tournament semifinals, and finished as the region runner-up as powerful Dyer County handed the Lady Cavs their fourth loss to the Lady Choctaws this season Tuesday night. Crockett is now 23-11.

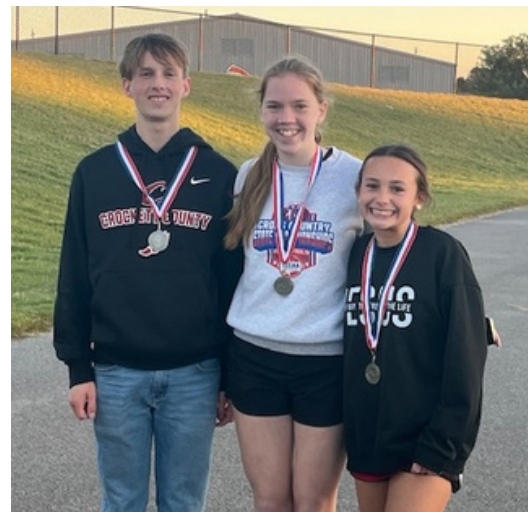
Coach Andrew Laman's squad will travel to Covington Thursday night for the volleyball West Sectional, needing a victory to gain a second straight trip to the TSSAA State Tournament. The loser of that match will be eliminated. Dyer County will be hosting Millington in the other West Sectional, also looking to repeat a trip to the State. Crockett was represented on the All-Region Tournament team by Brennan Morris and Piper White.

CROSS-COUNTRY: Competing in Tuesday's Dyer County Invitational, Crockett's cross-country squads delivered three individual race medalists and a third-place team finish in the girls 5K.

The Cavs' Lane Foster ran a time of 18:29.81 to place 17th in the boys' field of 86 runners, earning a medal for his Top 20 mark. Uriel Diaz (20:12.02) was 37th, Hutsen Stephens (20:16:14) was 38th, and Mase Utley (23:00.44) was 70th for Coach Julie Nass, whose boys' unit did not the requisite five runners to compete in the team standings this meet.

Her girls did, however, and despite missing a couple of key runners, still managed a third-place finish as both Clair Evans (11th in 22:28.33) and Alivia Hale (17th in 23:26.50) earned medals. It was the first medal for freshman Hale, who has been a pleasant surprise for Crockett in her first year of competition, setting another new huge personal record time in this meet.

Solidifying the team placement were Harmony Walker (32nd, 26:02.09), Ashley Boone (36th, 27:06.06), and Olivia Mann (40th, 29:38.47). Crockett was without soccer players Avery Thornton and Kate Davis, who is nursing a foot injury and is out for the remainder of the season. Crockett's teams will run in the Martin Westview Invitational next week.



Above: Three Crockett cross-country racers earned medals for their performances Tuesday at the Dyer County Invitational: Lane Foster (left), who finished 17th in the boys' 5K; Clair Evans (center), who placed 11th in the girls' 5K; and freshman Alivia Hale (right), who posted another personal best time while earning her first medal with a 17th-place showing. (Photo courtesy of Julie Nass)



Above: Crockett's Avery Thornton kept a lot of pressure on inside the box in the opening half, battling for control of several corner kicks like this one. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: ... even dropping to her hands and knees in an attempt to head the ball into the net. But Hannah Carter's header hit the left goalpost and bounded back into the field, where it was eventually cleared by the Haywood defense. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Braniya Green had both a goal and an assist for Crockett, shown here working for position while Coach Carli Branson's family watches from behind her left shoulder. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett's Claire Nichols (25) clears one of the few balls that even crossed the midfield stripe toward the Lady Cav goal. Nichols was named District 13-AA's Defensive Player of the Year. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Emme Grace Martin took this pass from Rebecca Waddey in front of the Haywood net, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... saw that the Lady Tomcat keeper was concerned with Crockett's Avery Thornton (13), and set her feet for a potential shot attempt at an empty net. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Nyah Cathey is actually breaking into a grin as she chases down this ball, outrunning the Lady Tomcat defender. Cathey used her speed to score a pair of second-half goals for the Lady Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Emme Grace Martin rammed the shot right past the startled goalkeeper, but the score was negated when the official called an offsides violation. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crista Martinez awaits a Crockett corner kick, positioning herself in front of a Haywood defender. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Rebecca Waddey's ability to maneuver the ball through traffic helped produce both a goal and an assist for the victorious Lady Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Nyah Cathey spots a lane toward the goal that is so wide open she is momentarily surprised before continuing to move on in for the kill. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: But this day belonged to Lydia Waddey -- Crockett's epitome of hustle and grit -- who found the right place to be at just the right time and tallied four goals to vault Crockett into Saturday's West Sectional for the first time in school history. (Photo by Ron Barry)

