

CROCKETT MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCCER CLAIMS FIRST DISTRICT CHAMPIONSHIP



Above: And when it was all over, Crockett County Middle School had won its first-ever district championship in girls soccer. And on its arch-rival's field. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Many visiting schools have seen their soccer dreams die on the South Gibson County field.

It's nice to see one come vibrantly alive instead.

Crockett County Middle School – perhaps signaling a coming change in the hierarchy of girls soccer in West Tennessee – achieved Tuesday night what no other Lady Cavalier soccer team, middle or high school, had ever done before: beat South Gibson.

And on the Lady Hornets' own field.

And for a district championship.

CCMS, riding its talented defense as far as it can take them, blanked South Gibson 2-0 to claim the district crown and earn a berth in Saturday's opening round of the West Tennessee Regional Tournament. Crockett will host Huntingdon at 10:00 a.m. at Cavalier Stadium.

Coach Doug Wede was effusive in his praise of his young Lady Cavs, who are now 11-1 for the season and have outscored their opponents – and this is NOT a typo – by a total of 51-3. Crockett's only was a 2-1 decision to Trenton in a game in which Wede said “we had four or five shots hit off the goalposts in that one. We weren't meant to win that one, for some reason.”

But the Lady Cavs won the Tuesday night duel at Medina, on a slick, soggy field to which they adjusted much better than their hosts. They took Wede's pre-game question to heart: “Why not us?” It was a challenge that if the Crockett program was ever going to progress to the top, then some team with a ‘C’ on its jersey had to beat the Lady Hornets. So why not THIS team?

And, boy, did THIS team respond.

The story of this Crockett season starts with its defense. The Lady Cav back line rarely lets a team get a clear shot at the goal, thanks to the work of Amy Mena, Marley Thornton, Catherine Scruggs, Charlee Lewis, and Nataly Amador, who completely shut down South Gibson's preferred right-side attack.

Another reason opponents rarely get a clear shot at Crockett's net is that goalkeeper Hannah Wede – yes, she's the coach's daughter – will often run out as far as possible to either dive on the ball inside the box or kick it away if it's not. Her senses of timing and awareness are absolutely uncanny for a middle school player, and she spends the entirety of the game either encouraging, directing, or even coaching her defensive teammates.

On the offensive end of the field, Crockett has another assortment of talented options.

Sixth grader Kalynn Lewis, who controls the ball masterfully even on the dead run and through traffic, scores most of the Lady Cav goals, but she's hardly the lone threat. Ruth Gourley is the glue in the middle who engineers much of the Crockett onslaught, and the Lady Cavs also have perpetual motion machine Olivia Barger and steady Caroline Scruggs, who also seems to put herself in the right place to make something happen.

Such was the case at the 14:48 mark of the opening half when Kalynn Lewis maneuvered between a couple of defenders and launched a shoulder-high shot from the left wing into the area in front of the Lady Hornet net. Scruggs deflected it into the goal, and the visitors had a 1-0 lead while SGC tried to figure out what had just happened.

That was all the scoring in the first half, and Wede continued to challenge his players with the “Why Not Us? refrain.

“We need more than one goal,” Wede said, “so let's keep the pressure on.” He also used a significant amount of the intermission time to specifically instruct Amador – who has been a softball player in prior seasons – how and when to drop back in the defensive box at just the right time and how to be aware of South Gibson's strategy of looking like they want to do one thing while they really are trying to set you up for another.

"Nataly followed the instruction to the letter," Wede said after the game. "She's such a natural athlete, and she wants to learn more and more about her new sport. She was a big key for us tonight."

In the second half, Lewis worked the ball through the left side of the defense and looped a high shot just under the crossbar to give Crockett at 2-0 advantage with 16:33 to play. At that point, Wede shifted Gourley into an additional role in the backfield to stiffen the Lady Cav defense even more, and South Gibson never mounted more than one serious scoring opportunity after that.

"If these girls keep working as hard as they have, and stick together, they have a chance to lift Crockett soccer higher than it's ever been," Wede said. "This was the first step tonight. To beat this team on its own field is a major accomplishment. And now - someone's got to win the Region tournament. Why not us?"

In addition to the middle school securing its first girls soccer championship, there was other sports action involving Crockett County High School teams Tuesday.

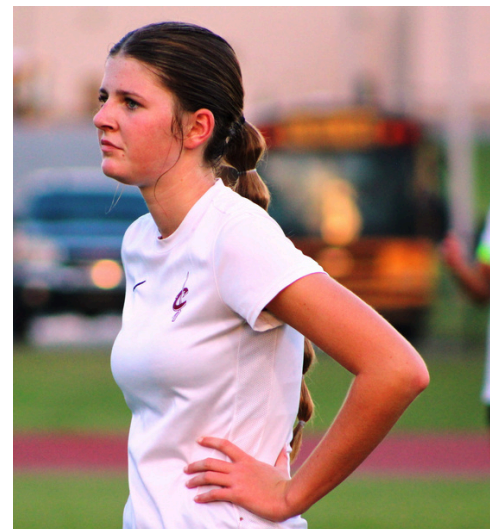
VOLLEYBALL: In the past few seasons, if Crockett and Dyersburg are scheduled to play, you might want to postpone any post-match plans for another night, because the duel is going to take a while. Last year, the Lady Cavs' senior-laden team won a pair of five-set matches with the Lady Trojans, coming from considerably behind in both of them. Tuesday night offered up another five-setter, and again Crockett prevailed in Dyersburg.

Steady and heady play by junior Keeton Holyfield was a significant factor in the positive outcome for Crockett. Holyfield occasionally gets overlooked by opponents because - in the middle hitter position - she doesn't often get the chance to pound kills with the powerful authority of teammates Dee Cole and Katherine West. But she excels as both a blocker and touch shot artist, and both talents were large reasons that Coach Andrew Laman's club picked up the road district victory Tuesday.

CROSS-COUNTRY: TCA hosted its annual invitational in Jackson Tuesday, and the Lady Cavaliers placed fifth out of 11 full teams while the boys were ninth of 18 full teams.

Out of the 117 racers in the girls 5K, Claire Evans and Avery Thornton were Crockett's top finishers in 23rd (in a time of 23:36.70) and 24th (23:41.36), respectively. Alicia Hale (25:36.80) finished 45th; Harmony Walker (28:08.67) was 61st; Ashley Boone (29:11.68) was 68th; Olivia Mann (29:14.65) was 69th; and Kate Davis (33:21.04) placed 100th. Obion County Central won the girls team title.

With 205 racers in the boys event, Crockett's Lane Foster (19:51.71) was 34th; Aidan Klonowski (19:54.14) was 35th; Uriel Diaz (21:06.64) was 63rd; Hutson Stephens (21:24.69) was 75th; Zaul Sanchez (22:45.62) was 106th; Leck Lucky (23:05.63) was 113th; and Mase Utley (23:32.89) was 121st. Madison Academic captured the boys crown.



Above: The steady play of Marley Thornton has been a key reason that Crockett is 11-1 for the season and has outscored its opponents 51-3. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Amy Mena isn't going to let anything get too close to the Lady Cav net, cutting off this SGC attacker as Catherine Scruggs fills in the back line behind her. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett's Nataly Amador (18) and Kalynn Lewis try to put ball pressure on a South Gibson player as the field conditions are evident from the splashing. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Catherine Scruggs breaks up a South Gibson rush as Marley Thornton lets her know someone is coming up behind her. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Kalynn Lewis (19) splashes her way past a couple of Lady Hornet defenders to try to attack the SGC goal from the left side. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett players return to their positions after congratulating Caroline Scruggs (middle) for scoring the game's first goal, by deflecting in a shot by Kalynn Lewis (left), who got the assist. Running alongside Scruggs are Nataly Amador, Ruth Gourley, and Olivia Barger (right). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Ruth Gourley -- with the obstacle of South Gibson beginning to literally fade into the distance -- begins to offer a slight smile at the thought of accomplishing history for Crockett County girls soccer. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Lady Cav goalie Hannah Wede delivers a goal kick to initiate the next offensive play for Crockett after a South Gibson shot went wide of the net. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Charlee Lewis was a part of Crockett's rock-solid defense all night. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: This play was South Gibson's best chance to score in the second half, but Amy Mena's rush toward the shooter forced the shot to go wide of goalie Hannah Wede. Arriving from the right side are Marley Thornton, Ruth Gourley, and Catherine Scruggs. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: When KaylInn Lewis -- congratulated here by Caroline Scruggs, as the SGC defenders stand dejected -- scored Crockett's second goal, the hosts knew they were in serious trouble. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Goalie Hannah Wede ran all the way out of the box to kick this ball away from an onrushing Lady Hornet before a shot could even be lined up. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett's Olivia Barger battles through a shirt-pulling to knock the ball away from a South Gibson player. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Coach Doug Wede challenged his team over and over again: "Why not us?" (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: : Ruth Gourley and Hannah Wede display their joy as the final horn sounds. (Photo by Ron Barry)