

THURSDAY NIGHT CROCKETT SOCCER PRODUCES TWO VICTORIES



Above: Senior Lydia Waddey (12), playing her final regular season game as a Lady Cavalier, created a lasting memory by blasting in three goals -- two from long range. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Stephanie Joyner shades a North Side player who is giving her a slight dig in the ribs as they await a ball being put in play Thursday. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Pick 100 adults, sit them down, and poll them on this question: "What's the first word that comes to your mind when you hear the words 'middle school students'?"

It's a pretty good bet that – amid the sighs, groans, head-shaking, hand-wringing, and likely a few expletives – you could bunch their responses around a single word: immaturity.

Let's face it – in general, middle school kids don't get a whole lot of respect.

Which makes what the Crockett County Middle School girls soccer team displayed Thursday night at Cavalier Stadium all the more remarkable.

Playing in a semifinal game of the West Tennessee Regional Tournament, the Lady Cavaliers – a squad with a 12-1 record, and which has outscored its opponents 52-3 this season – found themselves behind 1-0 less than eight minutes into the match against Henry County. The Lady Patriots had managed to punch a shot past Crockett goalkeeper Hannah Wede – a feat roughly equivalent to sneaking sunrise past a rooster.

Coach Doug Wede's club could have panicked and folded like a card table. Instead, barely 10 minutes later – playing with a poise and a confidence and a patience beyond their years – tied it up. Seven minutes after that, they took the lead.

And as they displayed a maturity that would stun the 100 unbelieving random adults we polled earlier...

They were following the lead of a sixth-grader.

Not a typo, ladies and gentlemen. A sixth-grader. With a smile almost as big as her limitless potential. And a work ethic bigger than the smile and the limitless potential.

Her name is Kalynn Lewis, and by the time the final horn sounded Thursday night, she'd pounded three goals into the Henry County net and the nails in the coffin of the Lady Patriots' championship hopes. Crockett won the contest 4-1 and is headed to the title game Saturday morning in Jackson at Trinity Christian Academy.

"Let me tell you about Kalynn Lewis," Coach Wede said after the triumph. "I asked the girls to be here by 5:00 tonight. That's for a 6:30 start time. Kalynn was here at 4:15, drilling shots at the goal, which she had pulled over to its spot on the field from its usual storage position in the corner of the stadium. She'd already worked up a sweat like Dak Prescott. I told her, 'You're gonna be gassed before we even play!' She just said, 'I'm good.' She's not really ready to go unless she's warmed herself up like that. Not only that, but she's one of the most coachable players I've ever had. She always wants to learn how to be better. And that is exactly why she is going to have many memorable moments on this field in the coming years."

And while the hat trick by Lewis was the major story from the game, this should also be definitively noted: If you think the Lady Cavaliers are anything close to a one-girl team, you are sadly mistaken and/or misguided – which is another reason this squad is so formidable. None of the players is jealous of anyone else's success.

That becomes evident when they score a goal against a strong opponent such as Henry County. There are hugs all around, high fives and tens, slapped hands, pats on the back, and smiles you can't fake. If they play a foe that is, shall we say, less than stellar – their celebrations are much more toned down. Sometimes you can't even tell they just scored.

But each goal Thursday night brought the party atmosphere. After the two scores by Lewis gave the suddenly rejuvenated hosts a 2-1 lead by the halftime intermission, Wede did what he often does during the break: He picks a certain player, pulls her aside, and makes a strategic adjustment with detailed instruction. For this particular match – after talking with defender Charlee Lewis, who was playing despite suffering a back injury a couple of games ago – he then called Kalynn Lewis and Olivia Barger out onto the field and taught them a change in strategy he thought would open things up in the second half.

When he was finished with them, the two girls stayed together and talked through it with each other until they were both comfortable with it.

With 17:50 left in the match, Lewis fired a shot from the left wing that deflected off the goalkeeper's hands but stayed in bounds. Barger – who's constantly moving – slammed in the rebound to make it 3-1, Crockett. The joy those two shared in the ensuing embrace would settle the current conflict in the Middle East.

Now with a two-goal lead – and ever-dependable Ruth Gourley policing the middle of the pitch to ensure there'd be no clear runs at the Lady Cav net – Crockett's players gained even more confidence. The back line defense – Amy Mena, Kamilah Juarez, Catherine Scruggs, Marley Thornton, and Charlee Lewis – kept Hannah Wede from having to make any serious second-half stops.

And with time ticking down, Kalynn Lewis found yet another opening and put the whipped cream on top of the milk shake when she booted in the final tally in the 4-1 triumph.

"Our intent was not to let up at halftime," Coach Wede said. "We wanted to keep the pressure on. We made a little adjustment with Kalynn and Olivia that I thought would help both of them, and it's a tribute to them that they were willing to try it and execute it so well. This entire team is a dream to coach."

Saturday's title match at TCA will be Crockett's first time ever playing for the Regional Championship.

And speaking of successful teams...

HIGH SCHOOL SOCCER: Crockett's high schoolers – no slouches themselves this year – closed their regular season schedule Thursday afternoon with a solid 5-0 victory at Jackson North Side as senior Lydia Waddey collected a hat trick and Amaria Walker – though rarely tested on this day – posted another clean sheet in goal.

Coach Carli Branson's Lady Cavs improved to 9-3-1 for the season and now head into next week's district tournament play at South Gibson County in Medina. Crockett opens with revenge-minded Dyersburg at 5:30 Tuesday after having defeated the Lady Trojans in an extra-time penalty kick situation last week.

Against North Side, Rebecca Waddey got the Crockett offense started early when she poked in a corner kick by Dani Rios that had glanced off the goalkeeper's hands.

Older sister Lydia then drilled in two long shots in the time remaining in the opening period. The Lady Cavs upped the margin to 5-0 in the second on Lydia's third goal and another by Braniya Green off an Emme Grace Martin assist. Branson used almost her entire roster Thursday and received solid minutes from reserve players Chloe Campbell, Adalee Doyle, Elany Miguel, Alivia Hale, and Kate Davis, among others.



Above: Crockett received another strong defensive effort from its backfield, with Kamilah Juarez (seen here on a throw-in) playing one of her best games. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Kalynn Lewis (25, left of goal) blasts a shot past the Henry County goalkeeper to tie Thursday night's West Tennessee Regional Tournament semifinal at 1-1 with 11:50 left in the opening half. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Kalynn Lewis slaps hands with Nataly Amador while CCMS teammates Ruth Gourley, Caroline Scruggs, and Olivia Barger head upfield with the dejected Henry County defense in the background. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Catherine Scruggs (2), fending off a Henry County striker here, was another solid defender in the Lady Cavalier triumph. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Caroline Scruggs (1) tries to move past a couple of Henry County backfielders. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Charlee Lewis (12) heads off this drive by a Henry County attacker. Lewis played despite a back injury suffered two games ago, saying she was good to go. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett's Amy Mena (14) dribbles out of a pack of Lady Patriots to get the ball started toward a Lady Cav attack. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: A scene that will strike fear into the heart of any West Tennessee goalie: the sight of Kalynn Lewis coming at you in the open field. This play produced the go-ahead goal at 4:57 of Thursday night's first half. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: At halftime, Coach Doug Wede made a strategic adjustment with Olivia Barger (left) and Kalynn Lewis. The pair can be seen talking with each other about it here. The strategy -- and their communication -- worked, as each scored a second-half goal ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... and when Olivia Barger scored Crockett's third goal, the look on the frustrated Henry County goalie tells the whole story. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett goalkeeper Hannah Wede stopped this shot, and prepares to punt the ball out as the disappointed Lady Patriot shooter turns back upfield in the foreground. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett's Nataly Amador (18) battles a Lady Patriot for possession of the ball near the sideline. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Olivia Barger almost kicked a head that somehow got between her foot and the ball, but she managed to avoid the potential jolt. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Once the Lady Cavs get a lead, they can always count on Ruth Gourley (3) to break up a lot of the attacks opponents will attempt. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Marley Thornton hollers directions to a teammate while awaiting a throw-in in Thursday night's victory over Henry County. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Evelyn Calderon went way up high to give this clearout kick a hefty boost in the second half of Crockett's win. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Braniya Green is a model of happiness as she heads back to her position after giving the Lady Cavs a 5-0 advantage. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: Meanwhile, earlier in the day in Jackson, Adalee Doyle (17 in white) was among the Lady Cav high school defenders making it tough on North Side -- which never scored. Backing Doyle here are Hannah Carter (left), Claire Nichols, and Dani Rios (right). (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Alivia Hale's hairdo took a jolt when she played this pass off her chest. Teammate Cristal Martinez (1) is ready to go after the ball. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Chloe Campbell (24) attempts to work the ball inside to teammate Nyah Cathey (4) as North Side defends. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Crockett's Chayse Lewis has her eye on a North Side clearout kick and is timing its descent in order to redirect away from the Lady Cav goal area. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Braniya Green scored Crockett's final goal and awaits congratulations from Emme Grace Martin (right), who fed her the assist. Lydia Waddey (12) is also coming over for the celebration. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Dani Rios (15) prepares to defend against a header as a North Side player sizes up the level of the ball in flight. (Photo by Ron Barry)