

STATE TOURNAMENT GRIT VALIDATES LADY CAVALIER 2024 VOLLEYBALL SEASON



Above: Piper White hammers a serve against Soddy Daisy in the opening set of Crockett's state tournament match Wednesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Elimination from a state tournament is never an easy thing to experience.

The coach knows the tears will be coming, the thoughts of what could have been, and the realization for some of the seniors that their high school sports career is over.

It's especially tough to face when you know in your heart that the team that just put you out isn't necessarily better than yours. Things just seemed to click for them at the right time, when they didn't for yours.

The thought that lingers longest, however – and the one that will either ultimately bring peace to each athlete or haunt them for seemingly endless time – is this: Did I put up my best fight, even in defeat?

On that last count, Crockett County's volleyballers should be able to find some redemption once the immediate pain subsides.

Were they the best team there? The eyeball test – and the season's results – surely says no. The Lady Cavaliers have four losses already to Dyer County, which is currently solidly lodged in the winners bracket final against Valor Prep, a superb squad that defeated Crockett Tuesday in the opening round.

On the other hand, the team which eliminated the Lady Cavs Wednesday, Soddy Daisy, was beatable. Crockett proved that themselves by winning Sets #1 and #3. And the Lady Trojans were themselves eliminated Thursday morning in the losers bracket.

But for Sets #4 and #5 Wednesday, Soddy Daisy – a team that actually came into the tournament with a losing record for the season – pulled its execution skills together. They passed well, set well, and ended the majority of their possessions with solid kill shots. The Lady Cavs struggled in Sets #2, #4, and #5, rarely appearing quite in synch after pushing mighty Valor Prep to step up its game the previous day just to advance in the winners bracket.

Wednesday's final reflects a five-set Soddy Daisy victory: 15-25, 25-14, 18-25, 25-14, and 15-11.

If that looks like a strange ebb-and-flow, it's because it WAS. If a spectator had walked in at the beginning of the fourth set and watched only the remainder of the match, he or she would have wondered, "How did Crockett even take two sets off these girls?"

So first-year head coach Andrew Laman, after his initial experience with having to console his group of tear-stained players, managed a philosophic yet accurate summary of his team's 25-13 campaign: "I'd rather end our season here (in Murfreesboro, at the state tournament) than anywhere else. I'd rather end it here than at Dyer County or Covington (two sites where it could have ended sooner). I'm proud of these girls for the way they stepped in to fill roles, learn new things, and battle to the end."

Both Laman and his predecessor, Bobby Rawson – who now serves as an assistant coach to Laman, as the two reversed roles after the 2023 season –

said there are many who would have said Crockett wasn't going to be a state tournament team after graduating a talented group of seniors.

"Some people thought that was the main reason I stepped down," Rawson said Wednesday. "They said we were losing so much talent that now was the time to get out. But I knew we still had talent. I wouldn't have wanted to leave Andrew a bare cupboard. And this group proved they had the fight to take us back to Murfreesboro."

That fight was most evident Tuesday against Valor Prep, a team that could give college teams a ferocious battle. The underdog Lady Cavs got better with each set in dropping a 25-14, 25-17, 25-19 decision to the top seed, after having early leads in all three.

"We made Valor Prep work for everything they got," Laman said. "Today (against Soddy Daisy) we fought; we just didn't execute down the stretch the way we needed to. But we made it here (to Murfreesboro) – I think that surprised a lot of people."

Crockett took Wednesday's first set against Soddy Daisy when it broke open a 16-13 game with an eight-point service run by Keeton Holyfield. In Set #2, rather than putting their foot on the gas – a malady that has been the team's undoing in its defeats this year – they allowed the Lady Trojans to get off to a good start. An 8-3 edge ballooned to 15-5 quickly, and the Lady Cavs never caught up.

Set #3 was a mixture. Crockett jumped ahead 7-3, but suddenly it was 8-8. The Lady Cavs went back on top on a pair of points from freshman Wesley Thornton and stretched it out to a 17-12 margin before eventually winning by seven. Set #4 was a disaster throughout, as Crockett fell behind 5-1 and 12-4 and never got within less than five after that.

The final set – the winner being the first to 15, with a margin of at least two points – began as a nervous back-and-forth. Scores were 1-1, 2-2, and 3-3, but then Soddy Daisy moved ahead 6-3 before a Jordyn Maddox kill slowed the advance. The Lady Trojans then pushed it to 8-4 until a Madi Collins putaway tightened it up again.

But Crockett could never get closer than three points again, and when the Lady Trojans dropped a final point deftly into an open area in front of a diving Piper White, the Lady Cav season had ended. White, who played valiantly throughout the tournament season on an injured foot, was typical of the effort put forth by Crockett's squad.

Katherine West continued to slam kills with a labrum injury that may require surgery. Brennan Morris was diving all around the court and offering encouragement. Dee Cole and Collins, reliably countering opponents at the net despite yielding height advantages nearly every time, kept battling. Maddox and Holyfield – the more stoic members of the front line – never wavered in the face of the opponents.

Senior Sadie Hoover and freshman Lakyn Forsythe served as the primary setters, a tough task when the power serves of the opposition often meant they were chasing the flight of the digs far outside of the best locations for effective sets. Halle Holyfield joined White with the unenviable task of trying to counter those serves.

Laman is looking forward to what the future holds for Crockett volleyball.

"We're still a relatively young team, and most of these girls will be back," he said. "I'm looking forward to continuing to learn and to see how much each of them can improve. For my first season as a head coach, I sure am proud of how far they came."

MIDDLE SCHOOL BASKETBALL:

CCMS has its first home games of the season Thursday night, hosting Riverside before resuming play Saturday in the Blue Suede Invitational Tournament Saturday in Medina.

Crockett's boys will be in Saturday's championship game against Humboldt after winning their first two games of the event. Coach Tyler Gadlen's Cavs knocked off Westover 43-22 and then defeated Northeast 34-30.

Following are the scoring summaries from those first two games.

OPENING ROUND

Crockett (43) – Jeremiah Young 9, Jaylen Frye 9, Messiah McCurry 6, Cole Summar 6, Brody Haley 4, Julian Carcamo 4, Cade Reasons 3, Parker Patterson 2, Chris Vance 0, Jacob McGowan 0, Peter Bosco 0, Roman Barker 0, Kamden Lewis 0, Ryder Williams 0, Jevan McCottrell 0, TEAM 14 FG, 8-19 FT. 3-Pointers: Frye 3, Summar 2, Young 1, Haley 1. (Record: 1-0)

Westover (22) – Redding Wilson 14, Mason Emerson 3, Jonah Lawson 2, Asher Burke 2, Randon Thompson 1, TEAM 7 FG, 7-10 FT. 3-Pointers – Emerson 1.

SECOND ROUND

Crockett (34) – Haley 13, Young 5, Summar 3, Reasons 3, Davis Porter 3, Vance 3, McCurry 2, Frye 2, Carcamo 0, TEAM 12 FG, 5-10 FT. 3-Pointers – Haley 3, Summar 1, Vance 1. (Record: 2-0)

Northeast (30) – Curry 10, Bullock 6, Boyd 6, Tisdale 3, Lee 3, Buckley 2, TEAM 11 FG, 6-10 FT. 3-Pointers – Lee 1, Tisdale 1.



Above: The steady play of All-District performer Keeton Holyfield -- and two straight state tournament appearances -- helps give Crockett future hope as she returns next season along with what will be a veteran slew of hitters. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Concern is growing on the face of Jordyn Maddox as Set #5 creeps to its unkind end for Crockett against Soddy Daisy. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Jordyn Maddox goes high to smack this kill shot as Crockett teammates Piper White (left), Dee Cole (15), and Keeton Holyfield (14) fill in the areas around her in the TSSAA State Tournament Wednesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Freshman Wesley Thornton soaks in some knowledge from Lady Cav assistant coach Bobby Rawson during a break in play Wednesday in Murfreesboro. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: A state tournament service winner gets senior Sadie Hoover a spot inside the Crockett dance circle as (from left) Madi Collins, Wesley Thornton, Katherine West (3), Piper White (6), and Brennan Morris (11) help her celebrate. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: A black-clad contingent of Crockett students watches freshman Lakyn Forsythe (foreground right) deliver a serve at Wednesday's state tournament match with Soddy Daisy. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Keeton Holyfield (14) winds up to belt this kill shot against Soddy Daisy as teammates Lakyn Forsythe and Dee Cole back her up. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Katherine West provides encouragement to Crockett's server during Set #5 of the state tournament match with Soddy Daisy. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Sadie Hoover slaps hands with a teammate and tries to keep the morale up during Crockett's match with Soddy Daisy. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Dee Cole and Khaki Hail get a pointer from assistant coach Hope Owens during a Crockett timeout Wednesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Dee Cole slams home a point during Crockett's state tournament match Wednesday in Murfreesboro. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Kylee Garrett (22) celebrates a winning point with Dee Cole (15), Keeton Holyfield, Sadie Hoover (1), and Katherine West (right). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Brennan Morris displays picture-perfect form in delivering one of her rocket serves against the Lady Trojans of Soddy Daisy. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Katherine West (3) pushes a soft touch shot over a pair of Soddy Daisy blockers as teammates Keeton Holyfield (14), Lakyn Forsythe (34), Madi Collins (16), and Jordyn Maddox (13) maintain their positions. Dee Cole (15) and assistant coach Bobby Rawson view the action from the bench area. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Piper White (6) was fighting off tough serves all day from Soddy Daisy, lifting this one up for a solid pass as Halle Holyfield (30) and Keeton Holyfield (14) cover other areas. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Madi Collins (16) and Katherine West (3) leap for a double-team block against this lefty kill attempt from Soddy Daisy. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Madi Collins guides a short shot over the net against the Lady Trojans as Katherine West (3) and Jordyn Maddox position themselves for a return. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Lakyn Forsythe (34) has to turn her back to the net to rescue this wayward pass and save a point as Crockett coach Andrew Laman looks on from the sidelines. (Photo by Ron Barry)

