

# LADY CAV SOCCER "WON'T BE DEFINED" BY CONTROVERSIAL WEST SECTIONAL LOSS



**Above:** Crockett's Lydia Waddey -- in a collision with a Brighton player as they both went for a high bouncing ball -- was called for a foul on this play. (Photo by Robin Waddey)...

## By Ron Barry

In the TSSAA record books, the official score of the West Sectional 8 girls soccer match will read Brighton 1, Crockett County 0.

But perhaps an asterisk should be placed next to the Crockett "0" -- to denote that the Lady Cavaliers did score, but the goal was disallowed by the game officials because of a controversial offsides call.

Photographic evidence accompanying this post shows no Crockett player was actually offsides, but the call was made and it will stand. Brighton -- a quality team that played well and executed a solid game plan -- will move on to the TSSAA State Tournament, while the Lady Cavs' historic season ends with an 11-6 record.

While the loss hurts, Coach Carli Branson says the final score is not what defined this 2024 team.

"This loss does not define us as a team," she said. "Being at the Sectional defines us as a team. Brighton is a skilled team and I do not want to take anything away from their win and the heart to play the full 80 (minutes) as well. It's an accomplishment for their team and we wish them the best at State."

What was called on the Lady Cav goal can be compared to what one can see in the photographic section of this post, where the reader can look at what cameras caught from two different angles.

But the focus now belongs to the spectacular growth and achievement produced by this gritty Lady Cavalier team, so ably coached by Branson, Joey Soriano, and Jennie Agee. The first Crockett girls soccer squad to ever make it to a Sectional match basically played the talented Lady Cardinals to a standstill, holding a team that had scored 15 goals in two Region 8-AA Tournament games to a single tally.

That single tally came on a late first-half breakaway by Brooke McClelland, who managed to outrace the Lady Cav defense and punch a wide-open shot past Crockett goalkeeper Amaria Walker -- the first-year player who thwarted everything else that got near the net Saturday, making several impressive stops.

While the Lady Cavs mounted a couple of second-half threats, Brighton was able to neutralize them because of a distinct advantage in overall team speed. The Lady Cardinals got to a vast majority of the 50-50 balls first and controlled possession time well with crisp passes.

All in all, Crockett's girls should feel extremely good about what they accomplished in the 11-6 season (with three of those defeats coming to powerhouse South Gibson County). The Lady Cav program is on a definite upswing, as their runner-up finish in both the district and region tournaments demonstrate -- and with several talented freshmen added next year from a stellar CCMS team, "up" is the likely direction it will take.

Branson's assessment of the season deserves to be quoted verbatim.

"Growth -- that is the word chosen for this season," she said. "It has been a journey filled with challenges, triumphs, and, most importantly, growth. From the first whistle to the last, we have encountered hurdles that tested our resolve and moments that sparked our passion. There were times when the odds were against us, when fatigue set in, and when doubt crept into our minds.

"But through it all, one thing remained constant: our determination. We pushed ourselves and each other, showing what it truly means to be part of a team. It's not just about the goals we scored or the games won -- it's about the character we developed along the way. Each practice and each match was an opportunity not only to improve our skills but to strengthen our bond as teammates. We supported one another, celebrated each other's successes, and lifted each other up during the tough moments. That is what defines us as a team.

"As we close out this chapter, I want the players to remember the lessons learned -- the hard work, the discipline, and the unwavering spirit that brought us together. These qualities will serve them well, not just on the field but in all aspects of life. They have shown that with determination and teamwork, there is no limit to what they can achieve. I am proud to coach such a dedicated and passionate group of young athletes."

Defender Chayse Lewis described what it has been like for the seniors who will graduate in the spring.

"Six years ago I found the sport I love," she said. "Six years ago I started this long journey to where I ended today. Six years ago my life changed for the better. Soccer is not just a sport to me -- it gave me lifelong friends and hundreds of bus rides singing and laughing with them. Soccer gave me memories that I will keep with me forever. I will forever be proud of all the accomplishments Lady Cavalier soccer made this year. I will forever be thankful for the opportunity God gave us this season."





**Above:** Amaria Walker is looking at a goalkeeper's worst nightmare: the opposing striker has eluded the defense and has a point-blank shot at the goal ... (Photo by Ron Barry)...

**Below:** ... but Walker stays low on the ball and seals off the near corner as Brighton's Brooke McClelland fires away ... (Photo by Ron Barry)...



**Above:** ... and amazingly, Walker deflects the ball away from the net and out of bounds. (Photo by Ron Barry)...

**Below:** Then, on the ensuing corner kick, Amaria Walker leaps above the attackers and spears the kick for another key save as Crockett defenders Kendra Juarez (11), Hannah Carter (6), Braniya Green (14), and Adalee Doyle (17) try to protect their areas. (Photo by Ron Barry)...



**Above:** Braniya Green (14) tries to head a ball to Crockett's advantage during a Brighton attack in Saturday's sectional. (Photo by Robin Waddey)...

**Below:** Crockett's Nyah Cathey (4) just misses heading this corner kick backwards into the goal as Lady Cardinal goalkeeper Manone Gist snares it to make the save for the hosts. (Photo by Ron Barry)...







**Left:** Lady Cav defender Chayse Lewis (5 in white) makes a terrific play to deflect this shot by Brighton's Brooke McClelland (5 in red) -- who managed several good looks at the goal -- to help out goalie Amaria Walker. (Photo by Robin Waddey)...

**Below:** Crockett's best chance to score in the second half came when Nyah Cathey was almost able to run down this ball for a shot before Brighton goalie Manone Gist could grab it ... (Photo by Ron Barry)...



**Left:** ... but the sliding Gist got to it first, sending Cathey flying out of the way. (Photo by Ron Barry)...

**Below:** Crockett's Lydia Waddey (12) was a "southern pest" on this ball as far as Brighton was concerned. (Photo by Ron Barry)...



**Above:** Lady Cav Dani Rios (15) tries to center a ball away from the sideline as Crockett Coach Carli Branson -- perhaps telepathically -- is trying to guide her leg. (Photo by Ron Barry)...







**Above:** Rebecca Waddey (7), playing on a painfully sprained ankle, still gave it her all for the Lady Cavs. Along with older sister Lydia, the Waddeys have been warriors for Crockett throughout the 11-6 season. (Photo by Ron Barry)...



**Below:** Stephanie Joyner -- who nailed a shot from this distance against Haywood in the regional -- launches an attempt at the Brighton goal. (Photo by Ron Barry)...

**Below:** When the match was over, Crockett seniors Carley Lampley (23) and Chayse Lewis (5) choked back some tears but were still proud of the upward direction they have helped turn the Lady Cav program. (Photo by Ron Barry)...



**Below:** This senior class will be remembered as one of the key components in the growth of Crockett soccer. From left: Stephanie Joyner, Dalia Aguirre, Chayse Lewis, Dani Rios, Amaria Walker, Carley Lampley, Adalee Doyle, Nyah Cathey, Hannah Carter, and Lydia Waddey. (Photo by Robin Waddey)







**Left:** Crockett scored the match's first goal, but it was negated when officials made an offside call -- but not until the shot was already in the net, well after the player they later claimed was offside, passer Avery Thornton, had delivered the ball to scorer Stephanie Joyner. Here is the beginning of the disputed play, with Thornton in control of the ball. (Photo by Robin Waddey)...

**Right:** Thornton passes the ball to Nyah Cathey, now surrounded by three defenders, including one who has left Thornton. (Photo by Ron Barry)...

**Below:** Back to the side view: Cathey tries to work the ball through the defenders as Thornton begins to move toward the goal. (Photo by Robin Waddey)...



**Left:** Avery Thornton gets the ball back. The ball is now almost even with the goal line. Time for the official definition of "offside" in soccer: A player is offside if she is in the attacking half and closer to the opposing team's goal line than BOTH the ball AND the second-last opponent. Assistant referees placed on either sideline in opposite halves are in charge of flagging an offside infringement with the main referee then responsible for enforcing the decision. Note that Thornton is NOT closer to the goal line than the ball here. (Photo by Robin Waddey)





**Left:** Thornton centers the ball directly in front of the net and past the goalkeeper as Stephanie Joyner makes a perfectly-timed run at the goal. Note that now the defender on the far left is closer to the goal line than Joyner, who obviously is also NOT closer to the goal line than the ball she is going to kick. (Photo by Robin Waddey)

**Below:** As Joyner drills the ball into the net for the score, the defender at the far left is now literally standing on the goal line -- making it impossible by rule for any Crockett player to be offside at this time. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



**Below:** Back to the other view: As Joyner turns to celebrate her goal, there are no Brighton players claiming offside. They are resigned to the fact that the Lady Cavs have taken a 1-0 lead. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Right:** Nyah Cathey runs over to congratulate Stephanie Joyner as the Brighton players dejectedly prepare to line up for the next play. Seconds thereafter, the center official shakes off the goal, simply claiming offsides. No additional explanation was provided at the time, but yellow cards were given to both Carli Branson and Joey Soriano when they reacted to the call by saying, "That's impossible." (Photo by Ron Barry)

