

LADY CAV VOLLEYBALL TEAM HEADED TO STATE IN LAMAN'S FIRST YEAR



Above: The look of determination here says it all: Sadie Hoover prepares to deliver the serve that will send Crockett back to the TSSAA State Tournament in Murfreesboro. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

It was only fitting that Sadie Hoover got to serve out the final two points.

Hoover – one of Crockett County's seniors – is a member of the school's homecoming court, but had to miss her ride in Thursday's parade in Alamo because her volleyball team was playing in the West Sectional 8 at Covington.

So if she had to miss an important moment for a high school senior girl, she might as well be serving her school straight into a TSSAA State Tournament berth.

And that's exactly what she did, taking the ball when the Lady Cavaliers won service control back with a 23-13 lead in Set #4 of their duel with the host Lady Chargers. Hoover smacked two straight quality serves, Crockett won both points, and the Lady Cavs earned a spot in the State Tournament in Coach Andrew Laman's very first year as the head man. Alongside him, now as an assistant, was former head coach Bobby Rawson – a veteran of several State Tournament berths – who Laman readily acknowledges is a tremendous resource to have on his bench.

For Hoover, it was a special moment. As Crockett's primary setter, the gritty senior spent much of her career sitting behind Lady Cav star Bailey Ann Whitby, one of the finest passers to play the position in a Crockett uniform. Hoover would make occasional appearances in the Lady Cav rotation, mostly as a spot server.

Whitby was one of several graduating seniors on last year's State Tournament team, and if there were many folks who honestly thought Crockett would make it back without them so soon, they were pretty quiet about it.

"I honestly didn't know how good we could be until we played Dyer County for first time this season," Hoover said, ironically finding her greatest optimism in a defeat. "When we took a set off them, that's when I started thinking this team had a chance to go back to State."

Fellow senior Brennan Morris was also aware of the doubts – but was more vocal about the doubters.

"Nobody thought we could do this," she said after Thursday's 3-1 victory. "We just used the doubters to motivate ourselves even more. It just made us play harder; we wanted to prove everybody wrong."

And now the Lady Cavs are headed back to Murfreesboro with a 24-10 record, with virtually every defeat on that mark coming from another State-bound team in Tennessee and Mississippi.

"I thought we had a chance to be pretty good," Laman said. "We definitely have talented players, and when we work together and play intelligently, we do well. But we still have a few areas that need improvement, the main one being to keep our foot on the gas when we get an opponent down. You saw that again tonight."

Crockett was rolling along in the opening set with a 22-17 advantage until suddenly it was 22-all, a malady that has plagued the Lady Cavs all season: they haven't closed sets out very well when they have a solid lead. But Laman's club pulled it out 25-23 on consecutive kill shots by Keeton Holyfield and Madi Collins.

The second set was a relatively comfortable 25-15 win, although Crockett allowed a brief run by the hosts that cut a 17-8 margin to 22-14. But again, the Lady Cavs righted the ship and appeared headed for a sweep.

It was then that Covington's sensational sophomore Ava McCalla strapped the Charger team on her back and carried them to a 25-12 triumph in Set #3. McCalla was crushing topspin kills from both the front and back rows, producing winner after winner throughout the game.

That forced Crockett to take stock prior to Set #4 with a team huddle in which the coaching staff basically said, "Look – we're a better team than they are. We have more good players than they do. Just play like it!"

The Lady Cavs – riding a series of kills from Dee Cole, Katherine West, Jordyn Maddox, Wesley Thornton, Collins, and the glue girl in the middle, Holyfield – jumped out to leads of 7-2 and 18-8 in reestablishing superiority. When a West kill made it 22-12 Crockett, the squad began to sense the State Tournament berth was theirs.

"I'm extremely proud of the way the girls bounced back from that third set," Laman said. "Our blockers started neutralizing some of the angles Covington had been taking, and that gave us our edge back."

State Tournament action begins Tuesday at Siegel High School in Murfreesboro.

GIRLS SOCCER:

Coach Carli Branson's Lady Cavs dropped a 6-1 decision to host South Gibson County in Medina Thursday night to finish as the runner-up in the Region 7-AA Tournament. Crockett will now turn its attention to Saturday's West Sectional at Brighton, where the Lady Cavs will be gunning for their first TSSAA State Tournament berth in school history.

Brighton edged Munford 5-4 Thursday night for the Region 8-AA championship and the right to host Saturday's sectional, which will begin at 1:00 p.m.

In Thursday night's match at South Gibson, the Lady Cavs had to deal with several injuries against the powerful Lady Hornets, who downed Crockett for the third time this season. Nyah Cathey scored the lone Lady Cav on a through ball from Lydia Waddey for the assist.

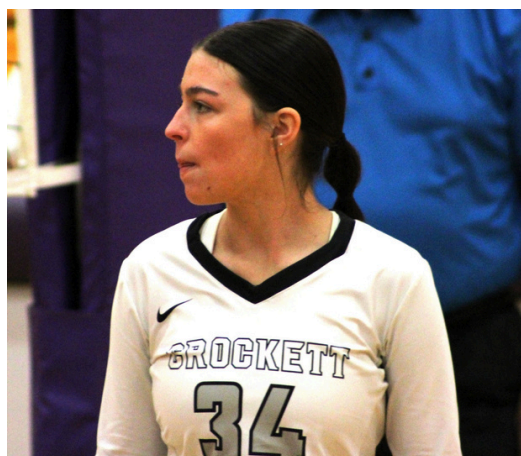
The Lady Cavs sat Rebecca Waddey out and also removed defensive standout Dani Rios early in the second half to keep recurring injuries from preventing them from playing Saturday. Emme Grace Martin also left the game Thursday night after a hit to her face.

"It was an absolute dogfight from beginning to end," Branson said. "I'm very proud of the way this team fought against South Gibson. I'm proud of their willingness to never give up. The score does not show the true grit these girls played with. We're looking forward to another hard match at the Sectional."



Above: Piper White zeroes in to dig a perfect pass to setter Sadie Hoover (1) in Thursday night's 3-1 West Sectional win over Covington, sending Crockett County back to the TSSAA State Tournament. (Photo by Ron Barry)

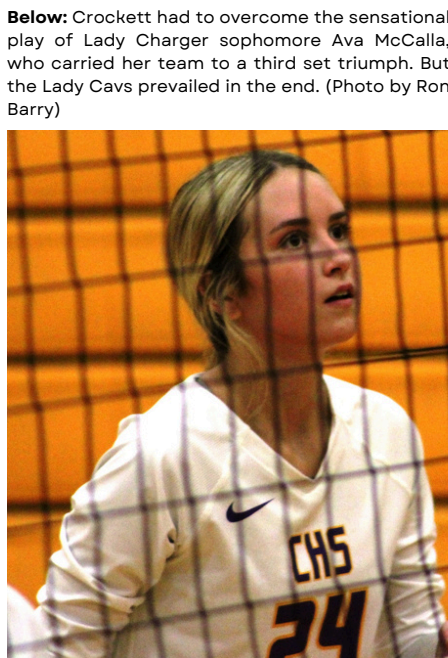
Below: Celebrating her birthday, Keeton Holyfield -- usually seen placing deft shots just out of reach of her opponents -- hammers a kill to solidify a Lady Cavalier lead. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The play of freshman Lakyn Forsythe has been a boost to the Lady Cavs' play in the post-season tournaments. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Brennan Morris had her hard serve cooking again Thursday night with her specially painted nails on full display. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Crockett had to overcome the sensational play of Lady Charger sophomore Ava McCalla, who carried her team to a third set triumph. But the Lady Cavs prevailed in the end. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett head coach Andrew Laman reacts early to a couple of dubious calls by the officials which helped keep the first set extremely tight. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Lady Cav junior Dee Cole (15) belts this winning kill against a Covington double-block as Keeton Holyfield looks on ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... and later in the match, Dee Cole reacts enthusiastically to a similar kill shot by her good friend Keeton Holyfield. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Often with the Lady Cavs, it appears some very intriguing conversations are going on over in the bench area. Here, Lily Riley (right) seems to have proposed a perplexing question to Brennan Morris (11) and Sadie Hoover (1). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Halle Holyfield, operating in the back row between teammates Madi Collins and Piper White, steers a dig pass in the direction of the hitters at the net. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Katherine West successfully stuffs this block for a point as Keeton Holyfield and Jordyn Maddox offer support to her right. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Another freshman, Wesley Thornton, measures up this set from a teammate ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: ... and proceeds to drill it home for an effective kill as Madi Collins and Brennan Morris ready for a return that isn't coming. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Piper White's face tells the story of how the third set is going for the Lady Cavs, who were blitzed 25-12. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: But when the fourth set came around, Piper White was ready, here fighting off a facefull of her own hair to get low for an effective dig. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: And when the final point is secured, the jumping for joy begins! From left are Wesley Thornton (23), Katherine West (3), Sadie Hoover (1), Brennan Morris (11), Dee Cole (15), Jordyn Maddox (13), Piper White (in black), Lily Riley (2), and Laky Forsythe (34). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Soon thereafter the whole team is gathered, and begins to celebrate their upcoming journey to Murfreesboro for the State Tournament. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The special friendship of Dee Cole (15) and Keeton Holyfield (14) was evident as they left the court after much of the celebrating had been completed. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: State Tournament bound: Your 2024 Crockett County Lady Cavaliers, with coaches Andrew Laman, Bobby Rawson, and Hope Owens. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: South Gibson's soccer team had shut Crockett out twice prior to Thursday night's Region 7-AA Tournament championship game, but here Nyah Cathey (4) punches a shot past the sliding Lady Hornet keeper ... (Photo by Robin Waddey)

Below: ... and reacts in joyous amazement while a South Gibson defender complains about something to any official that will listen. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



Below: Nyah Cathey is still on the ground in joyous excitement as teammates Braniya Green (14) and Emme Grace Martin arrive to celebrate her goal. (Photo by Robin Waddey)

