

FOURTH-QUARTER SOUTH GIBSON RALLY THWARTS CAVLIER HOOPS UPSET EFFORT



Above: Crockett cheerleader Gracie Gaines was liking what she was seeing most of the night from the scrappy Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

In sports, there are heart-stopping victories and there are heart-breaking losses.

But sometimes, your team gets smacked with the gut-punch defeat: the one that hits when you've led for most of the game, yet something happens at the end that almost destroys your psyche.

Crockett County's basketball Cavaliers experienced the gut-punch Thursday night against South Gibson County.

Coach Rick Rudesill's scrappy Cavs - who've certainly had their share of down times this season - put up a valiant fight against the Hornets from Medina, maintaining a lead throughout the final quarter after a third-period buzzer-beating three-pointer from Squirt Pickens had provided a 52-50 advantage to the hosts.

The Cavs were still ahead approaching the final minute of the game, protecting a one-point edge with a sideline inbounds play to execute. But a wayward bounce pass was picked off by South Gibson, and the visitors had plenty of time to find the best available shot.

Up to that point, Crockett's boys had played one of their better games of the season, even though they still had more turnovers than your local bakery and a foolish technical foul had cost them four points in the second quarter. They weathered that storm, however, and now just needed a defensive stop, aided by the fact they had three fouls to give before the Hornets would go to the line.

The Cavs used two of them to keep SGC shooters well away from the basket and working the clock down to around the 20-second mark. But SGC's Gavin Crawford - a thorn in Crockett's side all night long - found a gap in the defense and drove into the lane from the left side, tossing up a floater over the outstretched arm of the Cavs' Preston Lambert, who'd left his man to contest the shot. Crawford's shot banked softly off the backboard and through the net with just 12.3 seconds remaining, pushing the Hornets in front 60-59.

Crockett's Zay Jones, whose two second-quarter consecutive threes had given the Cavs their biggest lead of the night at nine points, tried to drive the left side of the lane as Crawford had done on the opposite end, but Hornet defenders forced a pull-up jumper that bounded off the rim. By the time the Cavs could foul SGC's rebounder, only 0.8 seconds were on the clock and the game was over, for all practical purposes.

When Sam Tritt sank both free throws - giving him a perfect 10-for-10 in the contest - the Hornets had a 62-59 district win, improving to 15-9 on the year. Crockett, still winless in the district, dropped to 7-15.

Rudesill's club had built a 35-29 halftime advantage on the strength of the three-pointers by Jones, a Jayden Frye bucket, and a late five-point flurry from Grayson Lambert. The entire third quarter was a back-and-forth shootout, with the Hornets pulling even at 37-all on the first of Tritt's three triples during the period. That was part of a 10-0 SGC run that boosted the visitors into a five-point lead, but Jones responded with another three and then the Cavs' Cortland Reddick added another to regain the edge for Crockett.

Crawford and Preston Lambert swished offsetting threes, but Tritt's last one appeared to put the Hornets on top heading into the fourth - until Pickens knocked down a trey from the right corner at the buzzer to send the Crockett crowd into a frenzy and set up the final frame with the hosts holding a 52-50 margin.

Then... everything that led up to the gut-punch result.

Crawford and Tritt each connected for 19 points to pace South Gibson, while Jones had 12, Preston Lambert 11, and Pickens 10 for the Cavs. Crockett drilled nine three-pointers in the duel, but made nine less free throws than SGC.

In the highly anticipated girls' matchup that tipped off the evening, South Gibson's frenetic, double-teaming, run-and-jump press again got to the Lady Cavaliers, holding them to a 10-point first half and keying a big fourth-period run when needed to post a 49-33 triumph.

The Lady Hornet press - which double-teams every opposing player who puts the ball on the floor - significantly exploited two of Thursday's Crockett weaknesses: moving the ball without a dribble, and setting screens for each other. The most stunning statistic produced by the constant pressure was this one: the Lady Cavaliers only managed one two-point field goal in the entire game. Their other seven were three-pointers.

Karlee Castellaw scored seven of the 10 first-half Crockett points, and Jordyn Maddox produced 13 of the 23 second-half tallies, but when Coach Kayla Irvin's club pulled within six points (31-25 with 29.9 seconds in the third period), the Lady Hornets went on a 12-1 run. Crockett-killer Karson Dunn - who always seems to play well against the Lady Cavs - scored six of those points, and Ivy Cianciolo added four more from the free throw line.

Maddox finished with 15 points and Castellaw 11 for Crockett, which placed just four players in the scoring column. Dunn and Trinity Johnson each had 12 for South Gibson, which improved to 19-5 on the season. The Lady Cavs are 17-5.

Both Crockett teams host Henry County Saturday afternoon at 2:00 in a make-up of a snow-out from earlier this month.

GIRLS GAME #22 - JANUARY 30

Crockett (33) - Jordyn Maddox 15, Karlee Castellaw 11, Gabby Burse 6, Amaria Walker 1, Halle Holyfield 0, Kira Bray 0, Keeton Holyfield 0, TEAM 8 FG, 10-16 FT. 3-Pointers: Castellaw 3, Maddox 3, Burse 1. Record: 17-5.

South Gibson (49) - Karson Dunn 12, Trinity Johnson 12, Jade Reed 10, Ivy Cianciolo 6, Serenity Johnson 5, Faith Reed 4, Anna Teague 0, Ava Owens 0, TEAM 17 FG, 14-15 FT. 3-Pointers: S Johnson 1. Record: 19-5.

BOYS GAME #22 - JANUARY 30

Crockett (59) - Zay Jones 12, Preston Lambert 11, Squirt Pickens 10, Cade Freeman 8, Kevin Pledge 6, Grayson Lambert 5, Cortland Reddick 3, Reed Leforgee 2, Jayden Frye 2, Andre Garduno 0, DK Woods 0, TEAM 20 FG, 10-13 FT. 3-Pointers - Jones 4, Pickens 2, P Lambert 2, Reddick 1. Record: 7-15.

South Gibson (62) - Sam Tritt 19, Gavin Crawford 19, Richard Addo 9, Koen Thomas 6, Cade Beaver 5, Jaxon Young 2, Aiden Moore 2, Jackson Strickland 0, TEAM 18 FG, 19-24 FT. 3-Pointers - Tritt 3, Crawford 2, Addo 1, Beaver 1. Record: 15-9.



Left: Crockett's DK Woods (32) rips the ball away from South Gibson's Koen Thomas (2) in the early going of Thursday night's district clash. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Grayson Lambert (1) gets the Cavalier bucket over the flopping Sam Tritt, who was called for a block. Lambert made the free throw to give Crockett a six-point halftime lead. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Cavalier coach Rick Rudesill observes from the sideline bench area as his club battles South Gibson's Hornets. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Crockett's Zay Jones got hot from the three-point region against the Hornets, knocking down four during the contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Preston Lambert is about to make a play for the ball against South Gibson's Koen Thomas, while Crockett's Squirt Pickens and the Hornets' Gavin Crawford consider their options. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Cortland Reddick gave the Cavs a defensive boost during a second-quarter run and also nailed a clutch third-period three-pointer in Thursday's district encounter. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Jayden Frye gets South Gibson's Jackson Strickland (35) up in the air with a ball fake, but can't get off a shot until a couple of passes later. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Kevin Pledge has a happy trigger finger after his second basket of the fourth quarter gave Crockett a 59-54 lead with 3:32 to go -- but the Cavs would never score again. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Squirt Pickens looks like a running back on this possession as he uses his quickness to buzz between Hornet defenders Koen Thomas (left) and Sam Tritt for a layup. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Cav cheer team member Leah Beard tries to help get the crowd fired up during the frenetic final quarter of Thursday night's duel with South Gibson. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett's Cade Freeman hit a bucket with 4:08 remaining in the game to briefly give the Cavs a 57-54 advantage. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Far Left: Grayson Lambert (1) and Cortland Reddick (14) get defensive directions from Coach Rick Rudesill before Lambert went to the foul line to complete an "and-one" three-point play. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Crockett's hopes were finally dashed when South Gibson's Gavin Crawford (24) popped in this short floater with 12.3 seconds left to provide the game-winning bucket for the Hornets. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: South Gibson's defense double-teamed the ball all night long, even in the post. Here, Crockett's Amaria Walker is immediately rebuffed by Serenity Johnson (14) and Faith Reed (12). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Karlee Castellaw prepares to launch one of her three successful three-pointers against South Gibson, on her way to an 11-point performance. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Keeton Holyfield yanks this loose ball away from South Gibson's Faith Reed in first-half action of an extremely physical girls game Thursday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Halle Holyfield was also on the floor going after a loose ball, here battling South Gibson's Ava Owens for control. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Jordyn Maddox draws three South Gibson defenders toward her and then whips a quick pass out to Gabby Bursey, who drilled a three-pointer. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Lady Cav superfans Hannah Carter (left) and Izzy Yearwood laugh it up as Crockett makes a third-quarter run at the Lady Hornets. In the upcoming spring season, Carter will be playing softball and Yearwood tennis for Crockett. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Gabby Bursey tries to operate against South Gibson's Trinity Johnson. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Jordyn Maddox dribbles away from Lady Hornet Karson Dunn, the Crockett-killer who once again netted crucial fourth-quarter points to help SGC prevail. Maddox led the Lady Cavs with 15. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Karlee Castellaw scored seven of Crockett's 10 first-half points, but the Lady Hornet defense significantly altered the usually potent Lady Cav attack. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Keeton Holyfield latches on to this ball as South Gibson's Serenity Johnson (14) makes a lunge for it. (Photo by Ron Barry)