

SENIOR RISK-TAKING KEEPS LADY CAV BASKETBALL SEASON GOING; DYERSBURG NEXT



Above: But Lady Cav fans will remember this one largely because of the clutch three-point shooting by Karlee Castellaw, here nailing her third one of the opening half. Next foe: Dyersburg, Monday night at 6:00 in Newbern. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

The two seniors on the court for Crockett County did not want their careers to end at Fayette-Ware Friday night - but both had to take a big risk to keep the Lady Cav season going.

In the Region 7-AAA Basketball Tournament opener in Somerville, Coach Kayla Irvin's girls were in a dogfight with the Lady Wildcats of Fayette-Ware midway through the final quarter of a win-or-go-home duel.

Up to that point, Crockett had found no success in containing Fayette-Ware point guard KeMiyah Buggs, who had torched the visitors for 21 points already and was looking to break open a nip-and-tuck game when she drove the left baseline to try a quick layup she'd already made three or four times in the contest.

Suddenly, into her path stepped Lady Cav senior post Amaria Walker, whose two free throws on the other end had just given Crockett a 38-37 lead. Walker set up perfectly and took the charge from Buggs with 4:14 remaining. The significance of the play was this: the foul on Buggs was her fifth, producing her exit from the game. Fayette-Ware had now lost its main ball-handler and scorer.

"I had fouled her on the previous play," Walker said after the contest. "But we had a timeout, and Coach K (Irvin) told us that if she (Buggs) came driving in there again, somebody better be there to take a charge. So I went back out there thinking about that. Then here she came, and I took the charge."

The other senior to take a risk was guard Karlee Castellaw. Her long-range shooting (three triples) had kept the Lady Cavs in the game when Fayette-Ware was threatening to pull away just before halftime, but she had committed her fourth foul about a minute before Walker took the charge on Buggs and had joined Irvin on the sidelines for the time being.

With Buggs now out, however, Castellaw re-entered to help point guard Gabby Bursey handle the frenetic Lady Wildcat press, which had already produced a boatload of Crockett turnovers,

The hosts had tied the game at 38-all with a free throw, but Castellaw found Jordyn Maddox with a lob pass for a layup which pushed the Lady Cavs back on top 40-38 at the 2:35 mark. Another Fayette-Ware free throw made it 40-39 with 2:19 to go, at which point Irvin instructed her team to take its time in finding another shot.

Crockett's guards were weaving back and forth, alternately passing and dribbling as the crowds on both sides of the gymnasium held their collective breaths. The time-killing was going shakily, at best, when - almost shockingly - Castellaw let a shot fly from the top of the key with 1:28 left.

Nothing but NET.

The Crockett side of the gym went insane. It was now 43-39.

"I knew we were taking time off the clock, but I looked up at the board and saw the score," Castellaw said. "When I looked back down, I was wide open. And I had confidence, so I shot it."

"It was the best dumbest shot of the season," Irvin laughed after the game. "But it went in, so it was fantastic!"

Assistant coach Tyler Gadlen said it was one of those shots "where you go no, no, no... YES!!!"

Castellaw's bucket gave the Lady Cavs a little breathing room and forced Fayette-Ware to move more quickly with its offense. But without Buggs, the Lady Wildcats were out-of-synch. Bursey added a free throw for Crockett with 29.3 seconds remaining, then two more with 7.1 ticks left, to seal the 46-39 victory that improved the Lady Cavs' record to 22-7 and sends them back to Newbern Monday night to continue Region 7-AAA play against Dyersburg.

"I am so proud of these girls," Irvin said. "Mari (Walker) really came up big for us in the second half. We won't get any pretty points for this one, but we'll still be playing Monday night."

While the lead changed hands four times in the first quarter alone – after Castellaw had netted six points in the game's first two minutes – the Lady Wildcats went on a quick run in the second period and actually pulled ahead by 10 (24-14) at one point. Once ahead though, Fayette-Ware began to hold the ball to force Crockett to get out of a zone defense. That kept the game relatively low-scoring, which ended up aiding Crockett's comeback later.

That comeback began just before the halftime break when Castellaw hit another three and Maddox knocked in a short jumper to cut the margin to 24-19 at the intermission. Walker asserted herself in the third period, muscling inside for three tough baskets. Additional buckets by Maddox and Keeton Holyfield allowed Crockett to get within one (32-31) heading into the fourth quarter and setting up the senior heroics.

Crockett's win completed a sweep for the District 13-AAA teams over the District 14-AAA teams in the Region 7-AAA quarterfinals, so the four schools headed back to Newbern Monday night will be a basic repeat of the district tournament, just with a different semifinal matchup.

Crockett will face Dyersburg at 6:00, followed by South Gibson against host Dyer County at 7:30.

GIRLS - FEBRUARY 28

Crockett (46) – Jordyn Maddox 14, Karlee Castellaw 14, Amaria Walker 8, Gabby Bursey 6, Keeton Holyfield 2, Wesley Thornton 1, Halle Holyfield 1, TEAM 16 FG, 9-17 FT. 3-Pointers: Castellaw 4, Bursey 1. Record: 22-7.

Fayette-Ware (39) – KeMiyah Buggs 21, Victory McKinnie 7, Jerkiyra Jones 5, Aaziyah Robertson 2, Morgan Crutcher 2, Caleigh McGowan 2, Myla Gaddie 0, Amelia Walker 0, TEAM 17 FG, 4-8 FT. 3-Pointers: Buggs 1. Record: 15-12.



Left: Jordyn Maddox (left, on floor) and Gabby Bursey (middle) collide with Fayette-Ware's KeMiyah Buggs (right, on floor) and Victory McKinnie as they battle for the ball in Friday night's Region 7-AAA Tournament opener. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Amaria Walker muscled inside to score this third-quarter basket over a Fayette-Ware double team to help Crockett get back into a tight game. Walker scored all eight of her points and took a key charge defensively in the second half. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Karlee Castellaw glances up at the scoreboard just before launching a three-pointer from the top of the key with just 1:28 remaining to give Crockett a 43-39 lead Friday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Are you noticing a theme with Jordyn Maddox during this game? Another collision, this time with Fayette-Ware's Morgan Crutcher. Maddox actually managed to stay on her feet long enough to score 14 points in the physical battle. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Karlee Castellaw came out smoking hot, canning two identical three-point shots from the right corner in the game's first two minutes. She finished with 14, matching Jordyn Maddox. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett received more timely minutes off the bench from freshman Wesley Thornton, who showed that she wasn't afraid to mix it up with the physical Lady Wildcats. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Halle Holyfield drives toward the lane as Coach Kayla Irvin watches over her shoulder from the Lady Cavalier sideline. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Two free throws by Amaria Walker pushed Crockett ahead 38-37 in the fourth quarter with 4:35 to go; seconds later, she took the charge from Fayette-Ware's outstanding KeMiyah Buggs that put her out of the game. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Jordyn Maddox searches for an open cutter before Fayette-Ware can hit her with a double-team in Friday night's 46-39 Region 7-AAA Tournament win. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Gabby Bursesey sealed the Crockett triumph -- the team's 22nd of the season against just seven losses -- with three free throws in the final minute. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Once Fayette-Ware started to pull ahead in the second quarter, the Lady Wildcats may have done Crockett a favor by slowing the game down and spreading the floor. It kept the game close and enabled the Lady Cav comeback. (Photo by Ron Barry)