

STALLINGS, CLUTCH HITS, SOLID DEFENSE SPARK LADY CAV SOFTBALL TAKEDOWN OF SOUTH GIBSON



Above: Crockett head coach Baron Jimmerson picked up a win against his former team when the Lady Cavs toppled South Gibson 7-2 Monday in Medina. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

Crockett County softball coach Baron Jimmerson bears no ill will against anyone from South Gibson County High School in Medina.

But he was a very satisfied man after his Lady Cavaliers took down the Lady Hornets – the team Jimmerson coached for the previous eight seasons – in a key district matchup Monday evening in Medina.

Jimmerson led South Gibson to several district championships and one TSSAA State Tournament berth, but after Crockett's David Barker stepped down from softball to concentrate more on football and his family, and the South Gibson administrative folks began talking about switching to a co-head coach structure, Jimmerson felt the timing was right for him to make the move to the Lady Cavaliers.

And as his new team continues to play better and better as the season rolls along, he's very glad he did.

The Lady Cavs defeated the host Lady Hornets 7-2 behind the one-hit pitching of junior Anna Stallings, an offense that produced timely hits a lot of activity on the base paths, and a defense that made play after play to keep South Gibson from producing any serious threats.

No one was happier about it than Jimmerson.

"The girls knew how much I wanted to get this one," Jimmerson said afterwards, "not because I'm upset at anyone here (in Medina) but mostly because I know how good this team is, and if we beat them, we're definitely moving in the right direction as to where we want to be." Jimmerson knew coming in that South Gibson was capable of getting 14 or 15 hits against many of the teams it had played, but was extremely pleased with his club's showing defensively and in the effort put forth by Stallings.

"Anna threw the ball well tonight and really shut them down," he said, "and one reason for that was our defense. We've really been working hard on improving that part of our game. We had some games early on with seven or eight errors, and we couldn't keep doing that, thinking we could just outscore people."

Offensively, Jimmerson's emphasis on "small ball" has been creating a load of problems for Crockett's opponents.

"I've heard them talk about our 'small ball,' like it's nothing to worry about," he said. "But nobody has really stopped it yet, and we're going to keep doing it until somebody does. We're not a big team; we're not going to overpower anybody. But if we can keep filling up the bases and then get a big hit or two once we do, we're scoring all the runs we need to keep winning these games."

The Lady Cavs – now 17-4 on the season – put Jimmerson's strategy on full display Monday evening from very first inning. Leadoff hitter Piper White beat out a bunt by about 47 car lengths to start the game, and Hannah Carter followed with an infield single to shortstop Lydia Hall. After a popout and then a fielder's choice which didn't retire anybody, Kiyra Liggins drove a hard ground-ball single to center, plating two runners for a 2-0 advantage.

After Stallings sailed through the bottom of the first, Crockett struck again in the second. Madison Solis ripped a hard grounder that third baseman Jada Reed booted for an error. Fallon Beard came on to "courtesy run" for the senior catcher, kicking off an evening of head-first slides, a cut elbow, and the dirtiest uniform on the team – but also three stolen bases and a huge run.

After Beard stole second after entering for Solis, Gabby Bursey doubled her home on a hard liner to left field. Following a strikeout, Carter grounded out to third baseman Reed, but first baseman Kylie Ballentine tried to throw back over to third to get Bursey, but tossed it wide and suddenly the Lady Cavs were up 4-0.

Crockett loaded the bases again in the third and looked like it might break the game wide open when White scorched a liner that appeared to be ready to sail over the head of center fielder Sydney Scott, but the talented senior somehow reached up and speared it, beginning a double play that foiled the threat.

South Gibson finally got a baserunner in the third on an infield error, but Solis gunned her down trying to steal third for the final out of the frame.

The Lady Cavs left runners on second and third to end the top of the fourth, but Stallings continued to shut the hosts down in their half.

Solis drew a walk and Beaird stole another base in the fifth, but a groundout squelched any rally. The Lady Hornets went down in order in the bottom of the inning, so Crockett still held its 4-0 margin.

But Thornton led off the Lady Cav sixth by slamming a double over Scott's head in center, and Madison Stitts sacrificed her over to third. Jimmerson called on freshman Maddie Haynes to pinch-hit, and she promptly dropped a perfect bunt that allowed Thornton to score by beating the throw home after the out was recorded at first.

In the bottom of the sixth, Stallings issued a leadoff walk and then surrendered her only hit when Anna Teague plopped a bunt right down the third base line but only about a couple of yards from home plate, enough to get to first before the hurried throw. A wild pitch moved the runners to second and third, but Stallings struck out Hall and White made a tough play on a grounder to short for the second out, although a run scored. White then made a fantastic backhand play on a grounder in the hole by Scott, gunning her down at first with an accurate throw to end the frame with Crockett now up 5-1.

In the seventh, White drew a walk and stole second. Carter beat out another infield single to first, moving White to third. Carter then stole second, prompting the Lady Hornets to give Thornton the old "unintentional" intentional walk, with none of the pitches anywhere near the strike zone.

With the bases loaded, freshman Stitts drilled a liner to right for a two-run single, making it 7-1. Haynes followed with another scorcher to the right side, but SGC second baseman Brooklyn Davidson speared it and doubled off a runner to end the uprising.

Three outs from defeat, the Lady Hornets decided they weren't going to go down easily. Davidson hit a grounder up the middle that White dove on, throwing to first from her knees, but not in time. That brought up Ballentine, who launched a deep fly ball to right that was either going to hit the top of the fence or go over - except that senior Sadie Hoover, who went after it with her back to the infield the whole way, somehow leaped up caught the ball backhanded above her left shoulder as her hip hit the fence.

Hoover then spun and fired the ball back in, preventing the runner from advancing further than third base. Reed, the next hitter, smacked a long drive almost to the warning track in center, where Bursey corralled it for the second out as South Gibson's runner scored. Elizabeth Whittemore then followed with a drive to the left field warning track, but Carter hauled it in for the game's last out.

Thornton's three hits led the Lady Cav offense, with Carter, Hoover, and Bursey collecting two apiece. Stallings pitched all seven innings for the winners, issuing just two walks and the one bunt single while striking out two.

Crockett returns to action Wednesday in another key district encounter at Dyer County in Newbern at 6:30.

SOCCER: It was Senior Night in Alamo and the Cavalier coaching staff decided to let the seniors set the starting lineup for Monday's contest with Haywood - including a first-half stint of top scorer Chris Cerda at goalkeeper.

Their creativity worked out. Crockett prevailed 5-0, with Cerda contributing five saves to the clean sheet which Noah Mayfield preserved with four more in the second half.

Seniors Josue Martinez and George Goldsby were also instrumental in the shutout, helping man the back line defense with multiple stops.

Crockett's other two seniors were active in the win as well. Jathen Young scored a goal on a penalty kick and also recorded an assist. Santiago Santos controlled the middle of the field and pushed the attack forward, helping junior Luke Carter pick up a hat trick with three goals. Aiden Markgraf had the other tally for the winners, with Angel Garcia and Cerda picking up assists. Crockett is now 7-3 and has a big district match at home with Dyersburg Thursday at 6 p.m.

CCMS TENNIS: Crockett improved to 2-2 for the season by defeating Dyersburg 11-3, sweeping all the boys matches and taking four more on the girls side.

"The boys got the sweep by hanging tough against many hard strikers for Dyersburg," said Coach Doug Wede, "but we kept winning the close sets to finish out our matches."

The winning matches on the boys side: Singles - Carson Craig 6-2, Davis Manning 6-2, Logan Sammons 6-2, Penn Mann 6-0, and James Bruton 6-1; Doubles - Craig & Manning 6-3; Larry Pruett & Mann 6-4.

Hannah Wede and Charlee Lewis came straight out of a soccer practice to help get the girls players off to a solid start. Wede, playing at #1, has been facing exceptional opponents but acknowledged it is simply making her better. It showed Monday with a 6-2 singles triumph. Other singles winners were MaLeah Maben 6-4 and Caroline Neal 6-0. Wede then teamed with Addison Milby for a 6-3 doubles win.

CCMS plays CCA Tuesday.

Below: Anna Stallings, like threading a bowling ball directly into the pocket, follows through with another perfect pitch as she one-hit the South Gibson Lady Hornets Monday. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: The defensive play of the day was this amazing backhanded, over-the-shoulder robbery of a sure extra-base hit or home run, made by senior right fielder Sadie Hoover in the seventh inning. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: This was the only appropriate reaction to a catch like that, but it's often the standard expression on Sadie Hoover's face anyway. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below Left: Wesley Thornton had another big day at the plate in her first matchup with South Gibson, slamming this line-drive single for the first of her three hits, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: ... and capping it off with a double later on, as she acknowledges the cheering from her teammates in the dugout. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Kiyra Liggins roped this two-run single to get the Lady Cavs started on the right foot in the opening inning. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Piper White made a series of fine defensive plays at shortstop, including this rocket throw from deep in the hole to retire a Lady Hornet batter. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Hannah Carter tallied Crockett's second run by getting her bent knee onto the corner of the plate before she was tagged on the head by SGC catcher Annie Whittemore. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett's fifth run was huge and came courtesy of freshman pinch-hitter Maddie Haynes, who laid down a perfect safety squeeze bunt that allowed Wesley Thornton to score. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Freshman Fallon Beard won the dirtiest uniform of the day award, stealing three bases as a courtesy runner for Madison Solis, including this one where she got a face full of dirt... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... and asking for time after an easier steal to still get some of the dirt out from under her belt. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Madison Solis hit the ball hard all day and also drew a walk. Defensively, she gunned down a base stealer at third from her catching position. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Freshman Madison Stitts put the icing on the cake for Crockett with a timely two-run single in the top of the seventh. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Wesley Thornton raced home on the safety squeeze bunt by Maddie Haynes and got her feet across the plate before she was tagged high, even though some Lady Hornet fans seem to think she was out. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Gabby Burse was excited after ripping a run-scoring double in the second inning. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Piper Smith has been a key participant in the "small ball" attack that is giving Crockett opponents fits, often beating throws to first after bunts. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: But at the end of the day, the Lady Cavs wanted this one badly for Coach Baron Jimmerson, who spent the previous eight seasons as skipper of the South Gibson squad. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Luke Carter hammered in three goals for Crockett's soccer team Monday evening, leading the Cavs to a 5-0 victory over Haywood. (Photo by Ron Barry)