CAV SOCCER MOVES INTO WEDNESDAY REGION TITLE MATCH; SECURES SECTIONAL BERTH



Above: Returning to midfield, Daniel Grajeda accepts congratulations from Luke Carter (1) and Brandon Carcamo (14). The Cavs were very businesslike throughout the entire match, (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

You're in the Region 7-AA Soccer Tournament semifinal, in a game you have to win to keep your season going. Your opponent has virtually abandoned its offense, dropping everybody back on defense in the hopes a scoreless game might provide a penalty kick situation to decide which team advances.

It's basically the same strategy Munford employed against Crockett County last season in the West Sectional – and it worked then.

So Haywood's Tomcats tried it Tuesday evening against this year's Cavalier squad. What do you do if you're Crockett County?

Score anyway.

As Coach Joey Soriano said later, "It wasn't pretty. But it's a win." Crockett out-gritted the very physical Haywood club 3-0, and immediately moves into the tournament championship game tonight (Wednesday) at Medina against South Gibson at 6:00, when the Cavs hope to avenge last week's 4-3 defeat to the Hornets in the District 13-AA title matchup.

Tuesday's win also advanced the Cavs into a West Sectional match Saturday. If Crockett wins Wednesday, it will host; if the Cavs lose, they'll head to either Brighton or Memphis Kirby.

Haywood opened Tuesday's contest by dropping every starter it had into the defensive zone, thereby making it extremely difficult for Crockett to even see the goal, much less net a shot. As a result, the Cavs completely dominated possession time in the opening half, but still couldn't generate many open shot opportunities. There seemed to always be at least two or three Tomcats between each Crockett player and the net posts.

But the persistent Cavs kept plugging away, and with about six minutes left in the half (there was no visible running clock), Brandon Carcamo dribbled a ball down the center of the field, eventually drawing a couple of defenders close enough to enable junior speedster Luke Carter to slip in behind them near the goal. As the Haywood keeper moved out to position himself, Carcamo deftly guided the ball over to Carter, who easily netted a soft shot to give Crockett a 1-0 advantage.

While scoring a goal should have forced Haywood to adjust its approach – because now the Tomcats had to score at least once to force any kind of overtime – the hosts still maintained their defensive posture for much of the second half. But Soriano and assistants Carli Branson and Alex Taylor made a couple of alignment changes that eventually paid off, as Carter tallied again on an assist from Chris Cerda and Daniel Grajeda did likewise on a pass from Aiden Markgraf to provide the final margin.

Crockett goalie Noah Mayfield recorded the clean sheet (shutout) for the visitors by making six saves, although none were that threatening. The Cavs' back line of Max Utley, Mason Wood, Josue Martinez, and occasionally Carcamo or Grajeda kept the Tomcats safely away from Mayfield on the rare occasions that the hosts attacked offensively.

"Haywood was dropping everybody back to double down on its defense," Soriano said, "and we anticipated them to do that for the most part. But I think we also came over here expecting it to be easier than it was, so I'm glad they made it tougher for us. That should help us have a better mindset to head over to South Gibson."

Crockett was able to rest midfielder Angel Garcia in an attempt to have him fresh for the rematch with the Hornets, but Utley rolled his ankle early in the second half and did not return to action for the Cavs. His status for Wednesday will be a match-time decision.

The Cavs improved to 12-4 on the season. The team that put them out a year ago – Munford – was eliminated by Kirby Tuesday night, so Saturday's Sectional will feature a different foe.



Left: Crockett's Brandon Carcamo (14) draws the Haywood defense toward him as teammate Luke Carter slips in behind them, out of the line of sight of the Tomcat goalkeeper. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Before the Haywood keeper can react to Luke Carter's appearance, the speedy junior softly taps a shot into the empty net for the first goal of Tuesday's match. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Haywood's keeper reflects his disappointment as Luke Carter puts the Cavaliers up 1-0 with six minutes left in the first half of the Region 7-AA Tournament in Brownsville. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Braulio Marquez (6) and Chris Cerda (right) -- two Cavs who do much of the heavy lifting in getting the ball in position for Crockett goals -- discuss a play while there's a stop in the action. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Camden Martin (5) works to get around a Haywood defender in the second half of Crockett's 3-0 victory in the region tournament semifinal Tuesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)







Left: Cav goalkeeper Noah Mayfield (in green) wasn't challenged often Tuesday, but had to brace for action on this Haywood corner kick as the Crockett back line wall of Adrian Calderon, Mason Wood, Daniel Grajeda (20), and Brandon Carcamo provide support against the attempted header. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Representative of Haywood's strategy in this match, three defenders surround Crockett's Aiden Markgraf (23) as he tries to get the ball close enough for a teammate to get a potential shot. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Luke Carter put Crockett on the scoreboard again when he took a pass from Chris Cerda (background, right) and rifled it past the Haywood defenders... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... as they try to argue that Carter was offside when he booted the ball into the net. He wasn't, and Crockett led 2-0 after the score. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Adrian Calderon (17) chases down a pass heading toward the right corner as he attempts to steer it back toward the middle of the field with a crossing pass. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Crockett back-liner Josue Martinez (12) can be seen in the background chuckling to himself after watching Braulio Marquez (6) fake out the Haywood defender (at left) so completely that he lost his footing. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Max Utley (21) drills a long pass upfield to get an attack going right before injuring his ankle early in the second half Tuesday. He will be a match-time decision Wednesday night at Medina. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Crockett's final goal came on this play when Aiden Markgraf (left in white) slid a short pass through the defense to Daniel Grajeda, who will have a decent shot if he can beat the Tomcats to the ball. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Daniel Grajeda wins the foot race and nets this left-footed kick into the Haywood net to boost the Crockett margin to 3-0. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Chris Cerda gets taken out by a sliding Haywood defender as he nears the goal late in the second half of Tuesday's regional tournament semifinal. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: It looked for a while like the halftime score might be 0-0, as this sliding breakup of a Luke Carter rush repeated itself a few times. But the District 13-AA Offensive Player of the Year finally broke through to add two more goals to his season total. (Photo by Ron Barry)