CAV SOCCER BOUNCED FROM STATE TOURNAMENT; BONDS SIXTH IN 300-METER HURDLES



Above: Chris Cerda works to keep the ball from going out of bounds in order to initiate another attack on goal in the fading minutes of Wednesday's 4-3 loss to Fulton at the TSSAA State Tournament. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

55 lousy seconds.

That may be all that stands between victory and defeat for Crockett County's soccer team at the TSSAA State Tournament in Murfreesboro.

Fulton High of Knoxville scored two first-half goals in a span of 55 seconds – the second coming with the Falcon shooter literally sitting on his backside on a freakish play - and then fought off two Cavalier comebacks to post a 4-3 triumph and bounce the Cavs from the event Wednesday.

Crockett was making its third trip to the State in soccer, but left still seeking its first win in State tournament play. The Cavs are making progress; they didn't even score a goal in their previous appearances.

First-year head coach Joey Soriano, while proud of his team's comeback Wednesday, couldn't help but wonder if the outcome may have been different if a sudden monsoon hadn't postponed the match from Tuesday afternoon to Wednesday morning.

"Our guys were so ready to play Tuesday," Soriano said, "and I know it's kind of pointless to speculate, and it won't do any good now anyway. But I just wonder what might have happened if we had been able to play when this match was originally scheduled."

Soriano knows full well that Fulton may have been ready to play Tuesday as well, but he's not convinced the Falcons are a better team than the Cavaliers.

"Fulton has one great player," Soriano said, "and the rest of them are solid. But I don't think they're a better team than we are. We made a couple of mistakes, and they capitalized on them."

That one "great" player is Falcon sophomore Emanuel Mosquera Gonzalez, a chiseled athlete who netted all four goals for the Knoxville school. As for his teammates, no observer of the match would deny that they played more aggressively than the Cavs, utilizing the more physical brand of play that seems to be more common among East Tennessee schools.

But Crockett is making progress as a program. In its first two State appearances, they were soundly beaten by clearly better teams. At least this matchup was debatable as to the superior squad after the Cavs made a game of it when they could have packed it in after that initial two-goal flurry.

But for now, West Tennessee soccer in the Class AA category still falls behind the other regions. Three of the four semifinalists – including Franklin County, which edged South Gibson County 1-0 Wednesday – are East Tennessee schools. The other – Station Camp, the top seed – is located in Gallatin in Middle Tennessee.

Fulton dominated possession time in the first half against Crockett, using its speed and aggressiveness to get to the ball as quickly as possible. The Falcons finally got on the scoreboard at the 31:28 and 30:53 marks, with both goals coming on plays in which the ball rattled around in traffic in front of the net. Gonzalez was actually sitting on the ground on the second one, punching the ball in with his heel when it couldn't be cleared by the defense.

Rather than hang their heads, the resilient Cavs needed less than a minute to respond. Braulio Marquez slipped a pass to the right side of the net, which the Falcon goalkeeper tried to intercept. When he missed it, Chris Cerda beat the other Fulton defenders to the ball and drilled it in as teammate Luke Carter drew much of the Falcons' attention.

Cerda's goal – exactly at the 30:00 mark – cut the margin to 2-1, and while Fulton continued to dominate the possession time, the Falcons didn't score again before the halftime break.

The Cav offensive attack was more effective in the final period, and Crockett finally evened the count at 2-2 when Marquez – utilizing a free kick from deep on the left wing – managed to curl a shot that threaded the Fulton traffic in front of the net, eluded the goalkeeper, and barely crossed the goal line just before Brandon Carcamo could head it in, although he gave it a significant pursuit.

The shot by Marquez gave Crockett new life with 25:32 to play, but it was Fulton that immediately responded with urgency. Gonzalez twice took advantage of some indecision from the Cav defense by scoring again at the 21:44 and 13:18 marks, upping the Falcon margin to 4-2.

Fulton had two excellent chances increase the margin even more, but Crockett defender Mason Wood cleared one ball out that was bound for the netting, and then newly-installed goalkeeper Allan Marquez made a diving stop of a Falcon penalty kick.

With time running out, Cerda was fouled inside the goal box on a rush from the right wing. He rammed home the ensuing penalty kick to make it 4-3, but only 1:41 remained. Crockett made a couple of furious runs at the goal in the final minute, but Fulton cleared each attempt to hang on for the win.

Soriano – assisted this season by Carli Branson and Alex Taylor – led the Cavs to a 14-5 record in his first year at the helm.

TRACK & FIELD: Crockett County's Laithon Bonds – in a race postponed from Tuesday night by inclement weather – finished sixth in the 300-meter hurdles Wednesday at the TSSAA State Track & Field Championships.

Bonds completed the event in a time of 42.62 seconds and became the first athlete in CCHS history to make it to the State both as a hurdler and in an event shorter than 400 meters. He repeatedly broke and reset the school record for the 300 hurdles this season.

"This means we've expanded from being a good distance program to now including the sprint races as well," said Coach Julie Nass, who is assisted by Charles Evans. "Laithon definitely just became the shoulders all future Crockett speedsters will stand on. Before today, we had only ever qualified 4x800 teams and 800-meters, 1600-meters, and 3200-meters individuals. The bottom line is, it's harder to train the other events without a proper facility. But of course, that's about to change."

CCHS currently has a brand-new eight-lane track under construction on campus, expected to be ready for the 2026 track season.



Left: Mason Wood looks to get the ball upfield in order for Crockett to make one final push for a tying score in the State Tournament quarterfinal Wednesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Brandon Carcamo tries to reverse the ball back toward the Fulton goal in the second half of Wednesday's State Tournament game. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Crockett's first goal came when the Fulton goalkeeper got out of position trying to intercept a pass from Braulio Marquez to Chris Cerda (10). Cerda heads toward the goal as Luke Carter (1) leaps over the keeper to lend support. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Chris Cerda keeps the ball moving toward the goal and collects himself to ready for the shot as Luke Carter drops in behind him... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: ... and then Cerda lets the shot fly as the helpless Fulton goalkeeper is completely out of the play. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Having cut the margin to 2-1, Chris Cerda runs back out to midfield to celebrate with Braulio Marquez (6) and Angel Garcia. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The Cavaliers almost tied the match before halftime when Luke Carter (1) headed this ball high into the air in the direction of Chris Cerda, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: ... who tries to gauge the best way to control the ball descending from such a high angle without losing the opportunity for a shot. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Seeing he now has the Fulton keeper in a vulnerable position, Chris Cerda tries to decide how he can redirect the ball back toward the goal or to a teammate. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: His task made more difficult by the angle forced by the ball's descent, Chris Cerda attempts to swing his leg like a gate to either knock it into the net or send a crossing pass past the goalkeeper. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Chris Cerda somehow manages to flip the crossing pass so that the goalkeeper can't reach it, but a double-team by the Fulton defenders keeps Luke Carter from being able to get to it. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Right: Although he's not seen in this shot sequence until the resulting celebration, Braulio Marquez actually scored this goal with a free kick. Here it looks as if Brandon Carcamo is trying his best to head it into the net after the Fulton goalkeeper fails to catch it. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: But that's okay, because Braulio Marquez put enough force into his free kick that the ball settled into the net on its own power, even as Brandon Carcamo chases it into the threads. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Fulton scored the next two goals, but Crockett's Allan Marquez -- who'd just entered the match moments earlier -- kept the contest from getting out of reach by making this terrific diving save on a Falcon penalty kick. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Now it's a matter of whether or not Brandon Carcamo (14) can get to it in time; there's no longer anybody between him and the net. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Carcamo lunges desperately in a gallant effort to direct the ball into the Falcon net, but never actually makes contact. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: And that means the game is tied 2-2, which brings about a celebration with Daniel Grajeda (20), Gio Marquez (11), Angel Garcia, Luke Carter (1), and Braulio Marquez, who delivered the magical kick. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The save by Allan Marquez allowed Crockett to make another run at the Fulton net, which resulted in a foul call against the Falcons when Chris Cerda was clobbered on this rush from the right side. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Walking off the pitch for the final time this season are Braulio Marquez (left), Brandon Carcamo (14), Luke Carter (1), and Aiden Markgraf (23). Crockett finished with a 14-5 record and a Region 7-AA championship. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The medal ceremony for the 300-meter hurdles features Crockett County's Laithon Bonds on the #6 slot on the stand. Bonds is the first Cavalier hurdler to ever gain a berth in the State meet. (Photo by Julie Nass)



Left: And when Chris Cerda drilled this penalty kick into the net -- with teammates Brandon Carcamo, Adrian Calderon, and Jathen Young watching from behind -- Crockett was back within a single goal, but time was running out. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The Cavs tried to generate one last effort to deadlock the match, as Chris Cerda, Jathen Young, and George Goldsby fight to redirect the ball back toward the Fulton defenders, but couldn't orchestrate a miracle shot. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Laithon Bonds proudly displays his medal after finishing sixth in the state in the 300-meter hurdles at the TSSAA Track & Field Championships in Murfreesboro. (Photo by Julie Nass)