

CROCKETT TEAMS MUST CLAW THEIR WAY OUT OF THE LOSERS BRACKET FOR REGION HOPES

By Ron Barry

In Tennessee high school softball and baseball, teams must make it to the district championship game in order to advance to region tournament play.

That task grew infinitely tougher for Crockett County's squads Thursday evening as both dropped their District 13 openers to South Gibson. The Lady Cavalier softball team fell to the Lady Hornets 10-6, while Crockett's baseballers suffered a heartbreaking 7-6 defeat to SGC after a four-run rally had given them a lead in the top of the sixth inning.

Those results drop both Crockett clubs into the losers bracket of their respective tournaments, and now each needs to win three straight games just to get into the championship tilt.

Both tournaments resume Friday afternoon in Newbern at Dyer County High School (weather permitting). The boys play at 4:30 and the girls begin at 5:00.

SOFTBALL: A short pop fly - which should have been caught but wasn't - opened the floodgates for the Lady Hornets, who took the opportunity to begin scorching the ball in a way they had not done in two regular-season losses to Crockett.

The game was tied 2-2 in the top of the third with one out when Kylie Ballentine's soft fly fell between Lady Cav fielders in the centerfield grass. It was seemingly the last ball hit that wasn't barreled by South Gibson's hitters, who began drilling hard base hits in rapid succession, producing a four-run uprising that gave them a 6-2 advantage.

The visitors kept hitting in the next frame as well, mixing three more screamers with a double steal on a change-up to tally two more times. South Gibson added single unearned runs in both the fifth and sixth innings to offset any hopes Crockett had of making a comeback.



Left: Crockett freshman Wesley Thornton -- in her first varsity postseason at-bat -- smashed this pitch well over the centerfield fence for her sixth home run of the season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Coach Baron Jimmerson's team had taken a 2-0 lead in the first frame when Hannah Carter reached on an error and eventually scored on an errant throw after a Piper White flyout. Then - in her first postseason at-bat as a varsity player - freshman Wesley Thornton tattooed a solo home run over the centerfield fence.

The Lady Cavs' joy was short-lived as SGC bounced back to tie it in the second and then take the lead for good in the third, despite a two-run single by Crockett freshman Maddie Haynes, which momentarily cut the margin to 6-4.

The hosts had a potential rally killed in the bottom of the fourth when a lined shot to Lady Hornet shortstop Addison Flowers was converted into an inning-ending double play. Haynes singled in another Crockett run in the fifth and Thornton drove home the final Lady Cav tally with a groundout in the sixth.

Crockett, now 26-9 for the season, faces its first elimination game Friday at 5:00 in Newbern. The good news is that the last time the Lady Cavs dropped into the losers bracket in a tournament this season, they roared back with five straight wins in one day.

BASEBALL: The Cavaliers - who lost twice to South Gibson during the regular season - almost pulled off the upset as the District 13 event got underway at Dyer County.

South Gibson scored in each of the first four innings and held a 5-0 advantage as Crockett went to the plate in the top of the fifth. The Cavs quickly loaded the bases on a Landry Fronabarger walk, an infield error, and a bunt single by Mason Ray. Aiden Austin singled in a run and Callan Willis brought home another with a groundout to cut the Hornet edge to 5-2.

In the top of the sixth, Crockett rallied for four runs to take a 6-5 lead. Bryson Vance led off with a single and stole second, moving to third when Fronabarger reached on a fielder's choice. After Vance scored on a passed ball, Ray drew a walk sandwiched by two strikeouts before Willis delivered a two-run triple to tie the game. Brady Fronabarger followed with a run-scoring double to give the visitors a 6-5 edge.

A costly infield error led to a sacrifice fly in the bottom of the sixth which tied the score, and another infield error and a stolen base set up a run-scoring single by Gage Nesbi for the eventual game-winner.

Nesbi also came on in relief of South Gibson starting pitcher Jack Bradberry and picked up the victory with one-and-a-third innings of scoreless ball.

Crockett, now 13-12, faces its first elimination game at 4:30 Friday in Newbern.

MIDDLE SCHOOL TENNIS: CCMS, coached by Doug Wede, concluded its season with a 5-2 record by defeating Obion County 10-4 Tuesday.

Girls singles winners were Hannah Wede (7-5) and Addison Milby (6-4), while boys singles victories went to Davis Manning (6-3), Penn Mann (6-1), Laren Pruett (6-0), and James Bruton (7-6). Manning and Penn also teamed for a doubles triumph (6-1).

“With so many young players, this is a group that has potential for the future of Crockett County tennis,” Wede said.



Left: Wesley Thornton was all smiles after returning to the dugout after her first-inning homer gave the Lady Cavaliers a 2-0 advantage. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Maddie Haynes -- one of six freshmen who played in the game for Crockett -- drove in three runs with a pair of hits in the contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Ever-hustling Hannah Carter slides past South Gibson catcher Addison Pinckley with the Lady Cavs' first run of the game in Thursday's district tournament opener. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett third baseman Maddie Stitts -- another Lady Cav freshman -- made a sparkling throw on the run to retire the Lady Hornets' Addison Pinckley on this bunt attempt. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Senior shortstop Piper White made this nifty backhand play and threw out the South Gibson runner to keep the game close in the early going. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Yet another Crockett freshman -- catcher Macie Teel -- got in some good swings and gained some valuable tournament experience for the Lady Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Hannah Carter was all over the basepaths Thursday, here sliding into second safely as Lady Hornet centerfielder Sydney Scott tries to maintain her balance and grip on the ball after sneaking in from the outfield. (Photo by Ron Barry)