LADY CAV SOCCER PROGRAM TO TAKE HUGE STEP THIS FALL IN "TRUSTING THE PROCESS"

By Ron Barry

It's been a long, slow process – and a perfect example to her players – for CCHS girls soccer assistant coach Carli Branson.

Anyone who's been around the Crockett County athletic program in the last decade can appreciate the obstacles faced by someone determined to develop a fall sport within the confines of football-crazy West Tennessee. And with girls. And at a school in which another girls' sport had already cleared those barriers to popularity.

But Branson has visibly demonstrated to her community and to the players that she will go above and beyond what many – perhaps even most – coaches would do in order to build a program.
The best part of all of it is that Branson has helped to build the Lady Cavalier soccer program into a successful venture while embracing and fully supporting the other sports with which she must compete for athletes and sponsorships.

She knows that football is king for the fall athletic program. That's fine with her – thus far, no girls in Crockett County have ventured into Cav helmets and shoulder pads.

She knows that Crockett's volleyball team has achieved great things. That's fine too. Although she'd love to have some of the athletes on Coach Andrew Laman's roster try their hand at soccer, Branson understands the intricate teamwork and timing that the sport demands.

She knows that Crockett cross-country coach Julie Nass faces the same challenges in trying to build her sport as a fall success – so much so that the soccer program and Nass share a handful of athletes. Running long distances is good for both sports – and Nass and Branson are smart enough to know that, so they've worked out a plan to get the most out of the girls dedicated enough to try two endeavors during the same season.

But the 2025 campaign could mark a distinct turning point for Crockett girls soccer. With half their team graduating from last year, Lady Cav head coach Joey Soriano and assistants Branson and Jennie Agee knew a rebuilding effort would be necessary this fall. The good news is: An incoming group of 10 freshmen have already experienced a run of extraordinary success at the middle school level and are ready to measure their talents on the bigger stage.

"We are entering this season with anticipation and excitement," Branson said. "We're welcoming 10 incredible freshmen and two new seniors to the Lady Cavalier family. Our team motto this year is simple but powerful: 'Trust the Process.' [Nick Saban would approve.] When you're young, you rebuild. You grow. You connect the dots. Every day, these girls are doing just that, not only learning the game but learning to believe in themselves, in their teammates, and in the journey ahead."

When Branson talks about the Lady Cavalier "family," it has a special ring to it this time around: three pairs of actual sisters are on the roster. And if Lydia Waddey hadn't graduated, there would be four. Freshmen twins Catherine and Caroline Scruggs have joined the club, with freshmen Marley Thornton and Kamiliah Juarez pairing up with their junior sisters Avery and Kendra, respectively. Another freshman, Ruth Gourley, will be following in the footsteps of her sister Kate Gourley, who starred for the Lady Cavs three years ago.

"The bonds being formed now are the foundation for something special," Branson said. "We're moving forward with positivity, heart, and the knowledge that success isn't just measured in wins, it's measured in growth. We are united in our mission to support, guide, and uplift these young women every step of the way."

The "we" includes Branson's colleagues Soriano and Agee, "whose leadership and dedication mean the world to this team." Branson calls it an "incredible blessing to get to coach alongside two rock stars" like Soriano and Agee.

There's yet another reason for optimism for the coaching staff with the incoming group of freshmen. For the past two seasons, Crockett has gone into the fall schedule with "rookie" goalies – Hannah Johnson and Amaria Walker – who were both senior basketball players who'd never played a game of soccer before. Both went on to experience tremendous seasons, but the Lady Cavs are very happy to see goalkeeper Hannah Wede among the newcomers.

Wede – daughter of CCMS coaches Doug and Jenny Wede – was the backbone of the stellar middle school defense of the recent championships. She displays a natural "feel" for the position and, despite her youth, has performed like an additional coach on the field for her teammates. If she stays healthy, Crockett could be pleasantly set at the keeper position for the next four years.

The first official game is August 18 at always-tough Huntingdon, kicking off an extremely challenging schedule that includes a prestigious event in Gatlinburg and the usual juggernaut that is district play.

The coaches have challenged their players to strive for excellence knowing they have their backs.

"To our players: Know that you are exactly where you're supposed to be," she said. "We see you, we believe in you, and we are with you, every step of the process."

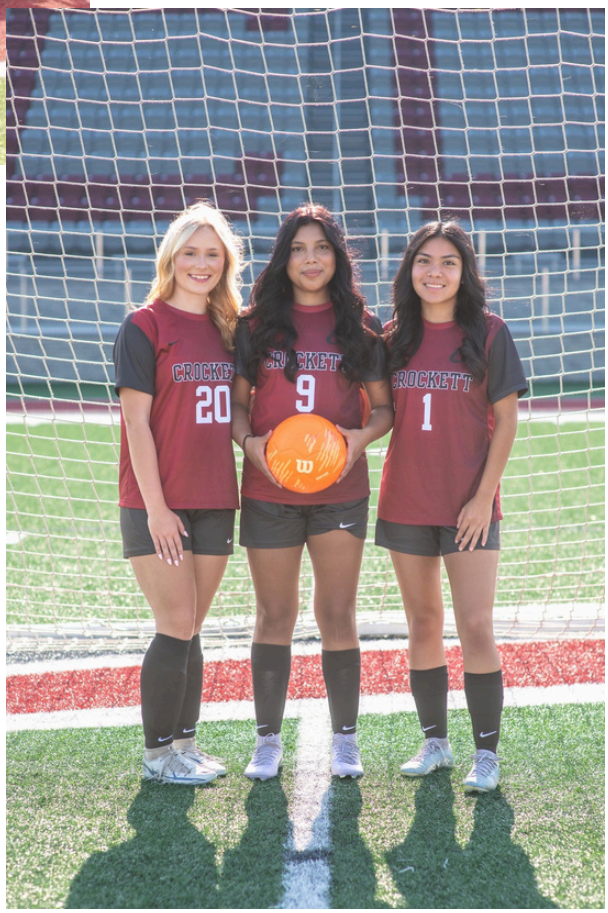
(All portrait photos accompanying this post are by Robin Waddey)



Left: The 2025 Lady Cavalier Soccer Team. (Photo by Robin Waddey)

Below: Seniors, left to right: Litha Jones, Emily Morales, and Cristal Martinez. (Photo by Robin Waddy)

Below Left: Juniors, left to right: Anahy De La Rosa, Emme Grace Martin, Rebecca Waddey, Avery Thornton, Braniya Green, Kendra Juarez, and Chloe Campbell. (Photo by Robin Waddey)







Left: Sophomores, left to right: Alivia Hale, Cesia Sanchez, Claire Nichols, Skyleigh Qualls, and Kate Davis. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



Left: Crockett's coaching staff (from left): Jennie Agee, Joey Soriano, and Carli Branson. (Photo by Robin Waddey)

Below: Freshmen, left to right: Caroline Scruggs, Aime Aguilar, Amy Mena, Charlee Lewis, Marley Thornton, Hannah Wede, Ruth Gourley, Kyleigh Kelley, Catherine Scruggs, Kamiliah Juarez, and Evelyn Calderon. (Photo by Robin Waddey)





Right: Braniya Green after scoring a goal against North Side in the 2024 season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Rebecca Waddey after converting a District Tournament penalty kick in the 2024 season. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Avery Thornton after scoring a goal against Dyer County in the 2024 season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

