

VOLLEYBALL TEAM DRUBS HALLS; YOUNG LADY CAV SOCCER DRAWS WITH HUNTINGDON

By Ron Barry

Two more Crockett County High School sports teams kicked off their seasons Monday night, and both presented solid cases for optimism this fall.

Coach Andrew Laman's volleyball team – starting five seniors – crushed visiting Halls 3-0. Coach Carli Branson's soccer team – starting five freshmen – played talented host team Huntingdon to a scoreless draw.

HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL: Laman's squad quickly polished off the Lady Tigers, rolling through its victorious sets 25-8, 25-11, and 25-13. His biggest challenge was keeping his club focused during the lopsided encounter.

"For the first match of the season, I really have no complaints," Laman said. "But we definitely have some room for improvement. I always look down the road toward the better teams we'll be playing later, so that's how I tend to measure things. We need to keep our focus a little better. It's hard sometimes when you're playing a match that isn't ever particularly close, so I get it. But we will soon be playing better teams than this one."

Against Halls, Crockett had no shortage of kill shots. Deonna Cole, Madi Collins, Keeton Holyfield, Wesley Thornton, and Katherine West all had multiple chances to power down on the visitors. Lakyn Forsythe provided the majority of their sets, and libero Addie Davidson, Darcy Puffer, and Audrey Whitby did the heavy lifting required in the back row.

Collins also had her power serve working, leading to several long scoring runs for the hosts.

Crockett travels to Westview in Martin tonight for its next match before returning home Thursday to battle Obion County. The Lady Cavs will head to Memphis Friday and Saturday for the prestigious Spartan Classic.



Left: Crockett libero Addie Davidson dives to the floor to dig a ball up into the air for teammates Katherine West (left), Lakyn Forsythe (11), or Ava Lee (22) in Monday's match against Halls. (Photo by Ron Barry)

HIGH SCHOOL SOCCER: For the past two seasons, Crockett coaches have had to recruit senior basketball players to fill the goalkeeper position. Neither had ever played in a real soccer game until their season debuts.

This year – and possibly for the following three as well – the problem may have been solved early.

Branson started freshman Hannah Wede – fresh off a sparkling middle school career – at the net, and the "rookie" showed no signs that the bigger high school stage is going to frighten her. Wede made 10 saves to record a clean sheet (a shutout) in her varsity debut, helping the Lady Cavs to a 0-0 draw with the always-talented Lady Mustangs.

"Hannah was outstanding in the net," Branson said. "She stayed alert and collected 10 big saves to keep the game scoreless. Our defense rose to the challenge around her, shutting down multiple counterattacks and showing major growth since last week's scrimmage against Westview."

Branson had five freshmen among her starters, and praised the play of all of them. One in particular – Kyleigh Kelley – did not even play in middle school, concentrating on rodeo-style sports with her horse. But Kelley played the entire 80-minute duel in the brutal heat, and Branson likened her effort to recent graduate Hannah Carter.

Another player Branson touted was returnee Chloe Campbell, who transitioned from midfield to defense and "has been a game changer for us," she said. "She used her speed, aggression, and tactical awareness to deliver several critical stops." Campbell played over 70 minutes before taking an elbow to the mouth.

"Overall, we sowed sharper aggression, quicker decision-making, and solid teamwork against Huntingdon," Branson said. "I think it proves this group is heading in the right direction as the season continues."

Crockett will play its home opener Thursday against Jackson North Side on the grass field.

MIDDLE SCHOOL SOFTBALL: Kyndall Savage was hit by a pitch, stole second, took third on a groundout, and then scored the go-ahead run on a two-out wild pitch in the bottom of the fifth inning as CCMS edged South Gibson Monday 4-3.

Coach Duke Kail's Lady Cavs - now 5-1 on the season - were tied 3-3 entering the fifth frame. Crockett tallied a second-inning run when Addison Killen singled, stole second, and scored on a base hit by Anna McCoy. The hosts added a pair of runs in the third when Caroline Neal singled and eventually came home on a wild pitch, right before Lily Cole drew a walk and wound up scoring on a passed ball.

Piper Ledford went the distance to pick up the pitching victory for Crockett, scattering six hits and allowing just one earned run. The winners managed just four hits themselves, all singles. Kail's team has now won three in a row and will play again Tuesday, hosting Lexington.



Left: Lady Cav senior Deonna Cole (15) hammers this kill shot between several hapless Hall defenders in Monday night's 3-0 sweep over the Lady Tigers. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Senior Keeton Holyfield rains down a tsunami shot onto the Halls front line for another Crockett point in Monday night's 3-0 sweep over the visitors. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Audrey Whitby made the starting volleyball lineup and contributed solid back line play for Coach Andrew Laman's victorious squad Monday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Sometimes when the Lady Cav volleyballers look to the bench for advice from assistant coaches Bobby Rawson and Lainie Riley, they get tickled trying to interpret the gestures. On this play, Lakyn Forsythe (11), Katherine West (back), and Wesley Thornton (20) all display different reactions to the "strategy." (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: Darcy Puffer provided solid back line play for the Lady Cavs in Monday's 3-0 volleyball sweep over Halls. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Freshman volleyballer Lola Bailey (1) is congratulated by her teammates after scoring her first point as a varsity player on just the second play after she entered the match. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Madi Collins goes high for Crockett to drop down a well-placed touch shot and record the point in Monday night's win over Halls. Collins also had a strong power serve working well. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett volleyball manager Tink Willis is all smiles after watching a teammate serve up an ace in the 3-0 sweep over Halls Monday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Freshman goalkeeper Hannah Wede dives to deflect this Huntingdon shot away from the Crockett goal, maintaining the shutout in Monday night's 0-0 draw at Huntingdon. Wede made 10 saves in the match in her high school debut. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



Left: Crockett freshman Catherine Scruggs tries to gain control of the ball with her torso to turn upfield and prevent another Huntingdon offensive attack Monday night. (Photo by Robin Waddey)

Below: Even the nimblefootedness of Crockett offensive star Rebecca Waddey couldn't produce a goal Monday night as two solid teams dueled to a scoreless draw. (Photo by Robin Waddey)

Right Crockett coaches praised the play of freshman Kyleigh Kelley Monday night, who had an outstanding varsity debut despite not playing the sport in middle school. Kelley is an accomplished horsewoman as well as a soccer player. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



Below: Freshman Ruth Gourley slides into this ball to try to keep it in play in Monday night's scoreless draw with Huntingdon. Gourley was one of five freshmen starters for the Lady Cavs. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



Left: Crockett's Avery Thornton -- an accomplished cross-country runner -- tries to outspurt a Lady Mustang defender to this ball in Monday night's 0-0 soccer deadlock in Huntingdon. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



Right Braniya Green advances the ball upfield as Crockett makes another attempt to break the scoreless deadlock with Huntingdon Monday night. (Photo by Robin Waddey)



Above: Another player earning praise from Crockett's soccer coaches was defender Chloe Campbell, here swiping the ball from the Huntingdon offense. Campbell switched from midfield in order for the Lady Cavs to take advantage of her speed and aggression. (Photo by Robin Waddey)