# VOLLEYBALL TEAM SECURES WEST SECTIONAL BERTH BY DEFEATING LAKELAND PREP




**Above:** Crockett's sophomore stars Wesley Thornton (left) and Lakyn Forsythe -- named last week as District 13's Hitter of the Year and Co-Setter of the Year, respectively -- helped carry the Lady Cavaliers to a Region 7-AA Tournament semifinal win Monday night at Newbern, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

When you know you have the best athlete on the court, the contagious confidence that spreads through the rest of the team can have a big positive effect on the match outcome.

Over the last month of its season, Crockett County's volleyball squad has been demonstrating that reality almost nightly.

Monday night in Newbern was no exception, as Coach Andrew Laman's Lady Cavaliers used the outstanding play of Wesley Thornton – Crockett's multi-sport star of softball, basketball, and now volleyball – and her very able teammates to secure a berth in the upcoming West Sectional by claiming a four-set victory over Lakeland Prep in the Region 7-AA Tournament semifinals.

The triumph also sends the Lady Cavs into Tuesday night's region championship game, in which they will once again face host Dyer County in a repeat of the District 13-AA Tournament title match. The winner will host a West Sectional game Thursday night against the Region 8-AA Tournament runner-up, while the loser will travel to the Region 8 champion's gym for the other West Sectional. Winning a sectional gets you into the TSSAA State Tournament.

It was Thornton's consistency – from the back row and behind the service line, along with the front row smashing that earned her District 13-AA Hitter of the Year – that proved as the backbone of Crockett's 28-8 season thus far. She's been a local softball standout for quite a while, and will be counted on to carry much of the load for Coach Kayla Irvin's basketball crew once that season starts. And while volleyball might be considered her "third sport," the progress she's made this fall has been noted by several opposing coaches.
Oh... and she's still just a sophomore.

"Everybody knows what a great athlete Wesley is," Laman said after Monday night's win, "but I don't think we expected her to progress as much as she has this quickly in volleyball. But I've had other coaches watch us – and even officials of the matches – come up to me afterwards and say, 'Who's that #20?!!' She plays softball pretty much year-round, and basketball for the entire school year months, so volleyball is the sport in which she spends the least amount of time. I wish we could have her for more practices and preparations, because she could be even better than she's been. But I also know the other sports make her better in volleyball as well, so I can't complain."

But make no mistake: Crockett is far from being a "one-girl" team. There's talent all around Thornton – but they all play better because of her presence.

Hitters Keeton Holyfield, Deonna Cole, Katherine West, and Madi Collins all benefit from the threat Thornton poses if the ball is set to her. Each of them get their fair share of kills and drop shots. Back row stalwarts Audrey Whitby, Darcy Puffer, and Addie Davidson benefit from Thornton's ability to cover so much of the backcourt when she's positioned there.

Then there's setter Lakyn Forsythe – another sophomore. You can often find her joking with Thornton between points, usually following a Forsythe-to-Thornton set that just produced a gym-shaking smash onto the opponent's side of the court. Forsythe has been so good she was named District 13-AA's Co-Setter of the Year last week.

"Wesley ended up starting for us during the last half of her freshman year," Laman said, "and she just keeps getting better and better. Her athleticism and instincts are just at a much higher level than most players. And she competes – and that just lifts everyone around her."

That was evident Monday night. Lakeland Prep came in with an 18-12 record despite a schedule that features many of the Memphis area's best teams from several classifications. They were unbeaten in their district play, and feature a tremendous senior leader in libero Ella Burd. Yet Crockett got off to an explosive start, leading the opening set by scores of 6-1, 9-4, and 17-8 before closing it out at 25-10.

LPS didn't quit, however, and actually led Set #2 10-5 and 17-15 before the Lady Cavs finally caught up at 17-all. A service run by Thornton pushed Crockett into the lead, and Laman's club eventually prevailed 25-20.

Lakeland still refused to buckle, knowing now that their season may be down to its last set. Burd rallied LPS to a 15-12 advantage before Crockett again caught up at 17-all, but the Lady Lions then ran off eight straight points to seize Set #3 25-17.

The Lakeland Prep comeback jolted the Lady Cavs back to their senses, with Holyfield and Cole leading the way to a quick 16-6 edge in Set #4. Crockett got it to 20-11 before LPS began chipping away again to narrow the deficit to 23-17. A Holyfield kill pushed Crockett to a match point, but the Lady Lions ran off four more until Cole finally took a perfect Forsythe set and hammered it down from the left side to seal the 25-21 win.

"I'm glad it's over," a relieved Laman said. "That's a really good team. Now we get another shot at Dyer County Tuesday and a chance at another state tournament trip Thursday. It would be nice to not have to go on the road for that sectional."

Crockett is now 28-8 for the season. Dyer County – currently on a four-year state tournament streak – has beaten the Lady Cavaliers three times this fall.

**SOCCER:** Coach Carli Branson's Lady Cavalier kickers travel to Dyersburg Tuesday night to face South Gibson in the semifinals of the District 13-AA Tournament. Crockett is the third seed, while the Lady Hornets are the #2 seed. The contest is set for a 5:30 start, with the winner gaining a berth in the championship game Thursday. Tuesday's semifinal losers will see their seasons come to an end. Top seed Dyersburg hosts Dyer County in the other semi.



**Left:** ... teaming up for a number of great plays, like this block against the Lakeland Prep front line. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** Crockett's Keeton Holyfield (14) belts a winning kill past Lakeland Prep's Madeline Reynolds (4) as fellow Lady Cav seniors Deonna Cole (15) and Katherine West (3) back up the shot. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Above:** Crockett had its hands full combatting Lakeland Prep's outstanding senior leader Ella Burd, but managed to defeat the Lady Lions in four sets. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Above:** Senior Deonna Cole hammered home Crockett's final point of Set #4 to clinch the semifinal victory for Coach Andrew Laman's crew. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** Darcy Puffer was stretching herself to the limits in Monday night's triumph over Lakeland Prep. (Photo by Ron Barry)




**Right::** Coach Andrew Laman surveys the action in Set #4 as Crockett built a 16-6 advantage before hanging on for a 25-21 triumph over Lakeland Prep. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Left:.** Audrey Whitby (10, on the floor) made an incredible diving save to elevate the ball back up to teammate Wesley Thornton (20), who was then able to set it to another Lady Cav for an attack. (Photo by Ron Barry)




**Left:** Katherine West attempts to set up the right defense for an upcoming Lady Lion serve in Monday night's Region 7-AA Tournament semifinal. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** Wesley Thornton (left) and Audrey Whitby almost collide, but somehow got this short serve dug back up into the air for their teammates to keep the point going. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Left:** Keeton Holyfield (14) and Madi Collins (6) take a pleasant break on the bench during a rotation in Monday night's match. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Above:** Lakyn Forsythe (11) tosses up the perfect set for teammate Wesley Thornton ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** ... and her steady fellow sophomore knows what to do with it when it descends. Wesley Thornton's kills have been a key to several Crockett victories. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Above:** But at the end of the day, if Wesley Thornton is getting enough opportunities for smashes like this one, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Right:** ... Wesley Thornton's resulting smile is because of another pending Crockett County victory. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Below:** Deonna Cole doesn't always agree with the line calls, and sometimes gives a wayward glance just to keep the officials thinking. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Left:.** Ellie Henderson was bringing consistent and enthusiastic energy from the bench area throughout Monday night's contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** Audrey Whitby awaits a serve from Lakeland Prep in Monday night's match. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Right:** Lakyn Forsythe is always communicating between points; somehow, humor is frequently involved. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Left:.** And the smiles then become contagious, as demonstrated here by Katherine West (left) and Keeton Holyfield (14). (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** When it's over, the whole bunch is ready to celebrate that Crockett has lived to play at least two more matches, with a state tournament berth still a possibility. (Photo by Ron Barry)

