KEETON HOLYFIELD THREES PUSH LADY CAVALIERS INTO HUB CITY CLASSIC FINALS

Above: Keeton Holyfield sprints up the court as Crockett tries to break the Covington press in Monday evening's HUB City Classic win, in which Holyfield scored 20 points. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Playing scared will get you basically nowhere in the sport of basketball.

Fortunately, Crockett County's Lady Cavaliers had an experienced senior athlete Monday evening to right a rapidly sinking ship – and then take it on a cruise into the championship game of the HUB City Classic at Jackson's Liberty Tech.

Coach Kayla Irvin's club had played all of six-and-a-half jittery minutes against Covington's over-aggressive press Monday and found itself trailing 10-2, with each Lady Charger basket coming as the result of a turnover that led to a fast break. The game was breaking the only way it could end positively for Covington, as making any shot that wasn't a layup would prove to be a major accomplishment for the Lady Chargers.

At that point – with 1:22 on the first-quarter clock, to be more precise – Crockett's Keeton Holyfield managed to draw a foul and calmly drain both ensuing free throws, making the score 10-4.

Holyfield, an All-District volleyball player who has stared down several intimidating foes from the front row in helping take the Lady Cavs to some State Tournament berths, doesn't get rattled very easily. Her free throws bought some time for her teammates to relax for a few seconds and perhaps soak in some admonition from Irvin to stop being so intimidated by a team that was trying to steal every pass and double-team a dribbler every chance it got.

More importantly, the free throws gave Holyfield a couple of unchallenged shots to loosen up her own shooting form, which less than a minute later produced a long three-pointer that cut the margin to 10-7 and seemed to send the message to her teammates that things were about to turn around.

It would be nice to say Crockett's fortunes reversed immediately – but that would be a lie. The sad truth is that the second period was even more excruciating for a basketball fan to watch than the first, as both squads hinted strongly that they would find it difficult to score if locked in a gymnasium by themselves. The half ended with Covington – despite scoring just five points in the quarter – clinging to a 15-14 lead, and fans checking schedules to make sure they were actually watching a winners bracket semifinal in the annual holiday tournament.

But in the third period, Holyfield decided to get a bit more assertive, and at the 3:48 mark drained another three-pointer that gave the Lady Cavs a 24-21 advantage. They would not trail again.

Ellie Henderson snaked in for a layup and then Holyfield netted another bomb that gave Crockett a 29-23 edge. Although Covington's Arianna Whiten managed to offset it with a trey of her own, the Lady Cavs' Wesley Thornton made a heads-up play at the quarter's buzzer, noticing she was being way too closely guarded as she brought the ball up the floor. She suddenly launched a shot from 40 feet away, drawing a three-shot foul from her surprised defender. The sophomore hit two of the three, sending Crockett into the final stanza with a 31-26 margin.

Less than 15 seconds into the fourth, Holyfield banged in her fourth three-pointer of the night. The Lady Cav lead was never less than eight from that point on – aided by a perfect 6-of-6 performance from the free throw line by Holyfield – and Irvin's crew produced a 42-31 triumph.

That puts the Lady Cavs (now 10-4) into Tuesday night's 6:00 championship game against Trinity Christian Academy (10-3), a 68-58 winner over Decatur County Riverside. The contest is a rematch of the title game from the 2024 HUB City event.

Holyfield's 20-point effort for Crockett was ably supported by Thornton, who scored 13 points and spent much of the decisive second half dribbling time off the clock as the Lady Cavs moved to force Covington to chase and foul, knowing the Lady Chargers likely didn't have the offensive firepower to mount a serious comeback. Thornton also canned several key free throws in the final two minutes to seal the victory.

Only two other Lady Cavs scored in the triumph, with Audrey Whitby netting five and Henderson four. Takyra Boddie, Covington's only serious scoring threat, led the Lady Chargers (now 9-4) with 16.

In holiday event boys action, Crockett County dropped a 48-43 decision to Millington Monday night in the Rip-Town Holiday Classic at Ripley. It was the second defeat of the three-night affair for Coach Spencer Bursey's Cavs, who fell to 8-7 for the season.

After an explosive second half against Brighton led Crockett to its lone win in Ripley, the Cavaliers again found themselves in a scoring drought against Millington, never managing more than 13 points in a single period as the Trojans pulled away in the fourth to post the victory. John Thomas netted a team-high 14 points for Millington, while Crockett's Kevin Pledge countered with 16. Jayden Frye added 10 for Crockett.

CCHS Girls GM 14: Dec 29 at Jackson
Crockett 7 7 17 11 - 42
Covington 10 5 11 5 - 31

Crockett – Keeton Holyfield 20, Wesley Thornton 13, Audrey Whitby 5, Ellie Henderson 4, Torey Savage 0, Ruth Gourley 0, Tink Willis 0, Kira Bray 0, Halle Holyfield 0, Callie Freeman 0. 2-Pt FG: 7. 3-Pt FG: 5 (K Holyfield 4, Whitby). FT: 13-17. Record: 10-4.

Covington – Takyra Boddie 16, DaYauna Mason 7, Arianna Whiten 6, LeNiya Jones 2, Tanya Flowers 0, Hope Tobar 0, ShaMiya Boyd 0, Akayvia Joshua 0. 2-Pt FG: 9. 3-Pt FG: 2 (Whiten 2). FT: 7-12. Record: 9-4.

CCHS Boys GM 15: Dec 29 at Ripley
Crockett 11 13 10 9 - 43
Millington 10 9 13 16 - 48

Crockett – Kevin Pledge 16, Jayden Frye 10, Andre Garduno 5, DK Woods 4, Squirt Pickens 3, Carter Wren 3, Karson Kail 2, Jeremiah Young 0. 2-Pt FG: 12. 3-Pt FG: 3 (Frye, Wren, Pledge). FT: 10-21. Record: 8-7.

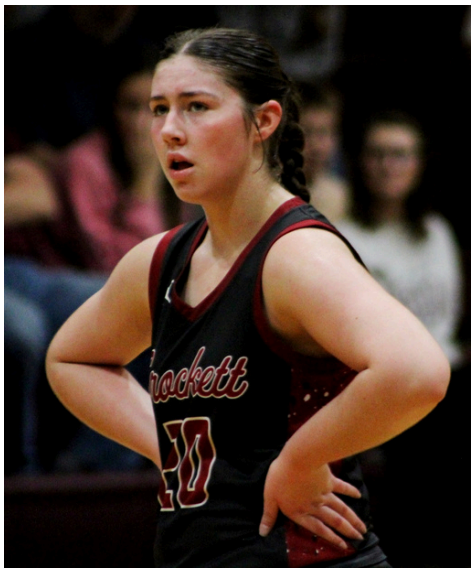
Millington – John Thomas 14, Darryl McDonald 9, Javohn Jackson 9, Tayshaun Dye 8, Nik Massey 6, Eli Griffin 2, Lawson Barger 0, Jonathan Jeremie 0. 2-Pt FG: 14. 3-Pt FG: 3 (McDonald 3). FT: 11-17. Record: 4-7.

Above: Wesley Thornton gets off a shot for two of her 13 points in the Lady Cavalier victory Monday over Covington at Liberty Tech in Jackson. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Did Crockett play a game Monday? Then Ellie Henderson is going to be on the court floor, fighting to possess a loose ball in traffic. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: Ruth Gourley was one of the Crockett ballhandlers aggressively pressured by the frenetic Lady Charger defenders. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Audrey Whitby hustles over to the corner to save a wayward pass from going out of bounds in front of the Covington bench. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Halle Holyfield catches a breather during a Lady Cavalier free throw attempt by a teammate. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Keeton Holyfield drive around a high-post screen set by Ellie Henderson as Covington defenders give chase in Monday's semifinal win. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Above: Wesley Thornton earned a couple of bonus points for Crockett by drawing a heads-up foul at the third-quarter buzzer, sending her to an empty free throw line to build a 31-26 lead. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: And in the final quarter, it was primarily Wesley Thornton's job to play "keep-away" from the Covington defense, eating minutes off the clock and forcing the Lady Chargers to foul. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: But this game was Keeton Holyfield's night, showing the senior leadership to overcome an early 10-2 deficit and helping her teammates believe in themselves. (Photo by Ron Barry)