BRADY FRONABARGER BLAST SEALS CAVS' 20TH WIN; SOFTBALLERS ROLL PAST HALLS 12-0



Above: Brady Fronabarger leaps in the air to celebrate with Sam Proctor (11) after blasting a three-run homer in the sixth inning to secure Crockett's 17th consecutive victory. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Unflappable.

It's the bottom of the sixth inning. Crockett County is leading district foe Dyersburg 7-5. There's one out. Callan Willis – who always seems to be on base somewhere – is at second. Nash Kilburn is at first, having just been grazed ever so slightly by the previous pitch.

Brady Fronabarger strides to the plate. Crockett's senior first baseman has already sized up the situation. The Cavaliers have won 16 straight games. And while they'll still be ahead going into the seventh, it would be nice to have a bigger cushion. Because Fronabarger knows that Crockett's starting pitcher, an under-the-weather Carter Winders – who has grinded through six tough innings – will not be going back out on the hill for the final frame. Instead, Coach Brad Smith will be entrusting the seventh to reliever Rylan Redding – a freshman.

It would be nice to give him a larger margin of error, just in case. Dyersburg has not been easy to put away on this night, as it was the previous evening when the Cavs prevailed 12-2 after a nine-run first inning. In fact, Crockett had to battle from behind to take the lead in the fifth.

So Fronabarger enters the batter's box like a man on a mission. He's ready to pounce.

He fouls the first pitch off, then the second, then the third. Trojan pitcher Ethan Austin is valiantly throwing strikes, but his fourth pitch bounces into the dirt and away from catcher Alex Page, allowing both Willis and Kilburn to advance.

The count is 1-and-2, but now first base is open. Austin can put Fronabarger on if he wants, setting up a potential inning-ending double play. But he just needs one more strike as well, so he pitches on.

Foul ball. Then another, the fifth of the at-bat. The tension is building, but the Crockett dugout also knows this: If you let Brady Fronabarger swing at five different pitches in an at-bat, and he's still up there? You'd better be careful if you throw him another strike.

Austin did. Fronabarger swung again. And like Artemis II from the Florida coastline, the baseball launched into orbit into the chilly night sky, eventually landing somewhere just to the right of Danny's Deck in left-center as the Cav bench exploded more loudly than booster rockets.

Redding now had a 10-5 cushion – though he didn't need it, pitching around an infield error and a single by posting a pair of strikeouts – and Crockett had its incredible seventeenth consecutive win of its now 20-2 season.

But to get there, Smith had to blend in some well-executed "small ball" to complement the Cavs' usual assortment of extra-base hits and lockdown pitching. A clearly gassed Winders – who threw 112 pitches as he defied the illness that's plagued him the last couple of days – struck out Trojan JP Noblin to wiggle out of a jam in the top of the sixth, stranding the tying runners on base to keep the contest at 7-5.

Crockett's sixth and seventh runs had come on perfectly executed sacrifice squeeze bunts by Aiden Austin and George Randall and equally effectual baserunning by Myles Perkins and Davis Porter, who timed their dashes to home plate beautifully with the bounces of the bunts.

Before all that, it was somewhat of a back-and-forth battle, with Crockett's defense not nearly as sharp as usual and Dyersburg's determination not to be embarrassed two nights in a row evident.

The Cavs jumped on top 2-0 in the first on a Willis leadoff single, another lined safety by Kilburn, a walk to Fronabarger, a sac fly by Winders, and an Austin RBI single. But the Trojans tied it up in the third when Noblin singled and Crockett kicked the ball around in the outfield, allowing two runs to score.

The Cavs quickly regained the edge with a run in the bottom of the frame. Kilburn led off with a double and took third on a smash single by Fronabarger. Winders grounded into a double play, but Willis tallied to make it 3-2.

Dyersburg immediately tied it again in its next at-bat on a single, a sac bunt, and another single by Aiden Chandler. And in the top of the fifth, the visitors actually took the lead when Page singled home a run.

But that lead was short-lived, as the Cavs struck for four in the bottom of the fifth. Ever-on-base Willis smashed a leadoff double into the left-center gap. Fronabarger walked. Winders singled to left, plating Willis, and both Winders and Fronabarger advanced on an outfield error. That brought up Landry Fronabarger, who dropped a single just in front of a hard-charging right fielder as his brother scored and Winders moved to third. Austin and Randall then scored runners with their squeeze bunts for a 7-4 Crockett lead.

When a Dyersburg triple and run-scoring single in the sixth made it 7-5, the stage was set for Brady Fronabarger's seventh home run of the season to seal the victory.

Willis – who has now reached base 56 times in 22 games – had three hits and scored three times to head the Cavalier offensive attack. Kilburn also scored three times and had two hits. Brady Fronabarger – now batting .473 for the season – was 2-for-2 with two walks and his three-run homer. Landry Fronabarger also collected two hits for the hosts, who get a day off before playing McNairy Central on Thursday.



Above: When the Cavs trailed 4-3 in the fifth, Callan Willis got the comeback started with a huge double. (Photo by Ron Barry)

SOFTBALL: The drama was not nearly as intense on the adjacent softball field, where Coach Baron Jimmerson's Lady Cavs pummeled Hall 12-0 in a run-rule game that ended in the middle of the fifth.

As soon as Wesley Thornton rattled the right-center fence with a leadoff triple in the bottom of the first, it was curtains for the visiting Lady Tigers. Nataly Amador quickly beat out a bunt, scoring Thornton and taking second on an errant throw. Kiyra Liggins singled, and Amador scored on a passed ball. A Gabby Bursey groundout eventually scored Liggins, and Crockett led 3-0.

Another mishandled Amador bunt allowed two of Crockett's four second-inning runs to score. In the third, Emilee Chandler smoked a leadoff triple and scored on a passed ball, while Thornton doubled home courtesy runner Tink Willis for another tally.

Jimmerson swapped out nearly his entire lineup in the fourth inning, but the Lady Cavs kept hitting. Ruthie Tucker, Naudia Turner, and Maddie Haynes smacked consecutive singles to make it 10-0. Mae Parker beat out a bunt that scored Turner, and Haynes raced home on a passed ball for the final Lady Cav run.

Meanwhile, senior stalwart Anna Stallings was tossing a one-hit shutout, striking out six in improving her season record to 11-2, with a 2.07 ERA. Thornton – currently batting .623 with an on-base percentage of a staggering .701 – led the offense with a double and triple. Amador and Liggins also had two hits for the winners, who are now 19-4.

Crockett hosts Martin Westview Wednesday at 5:00.



Above: On a Carter Winders single, Callan Willis slides in under a high throw to tie the game at 4-4 in the fifth frame. (Photo by Ron Barry)



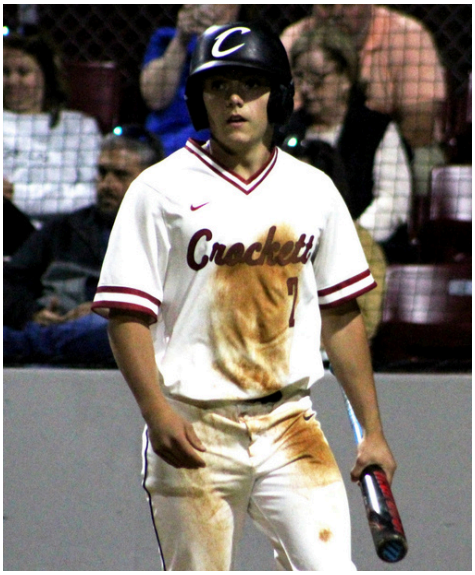
Above: Landry Fronabarger punched this single to right field to plate the go-ahead run in Tuesday's 10-5 win over Dyersburg. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Carter Winders was under the weather Tuesday, but gave Crockett six gutty innings and got emotional on the strikeout that ended his final frame. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: George Randall pushed a perfect squeeze bunt down the first base line to bring home Crockett's seventh run of the game. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Davis Porter gave Crockett a 6-4 lead when he slid into home with perfect timing on an Aiden Austin squeeze bunt in the fifth. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Freshman reliever Rylan Redding came on in the seventh and closed out the contest for the Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: But it was all made easier when Brady Fronabarger took this mighty swing in the bottom of the sixth ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: ... and launched a titanic home run over the left-centerfield fence ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: ... boosting Crockett's lead to 10-5 as the senior first baseman rounds the sacks. (Photo by Ron Barry)

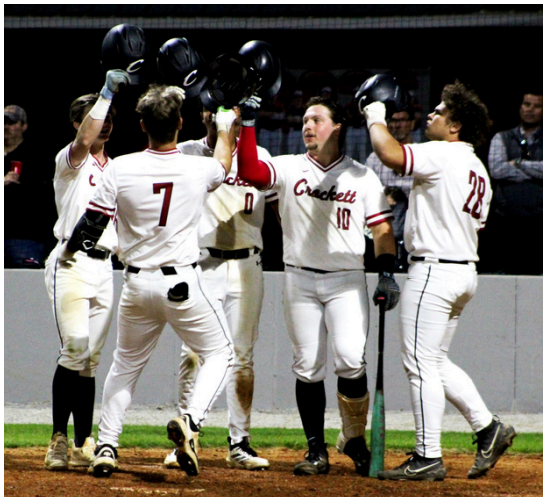
Below: Wesley Thornton races around the bases on her first-inning leadoff triple to set the tone for the rest of the Crockett lineup. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Naudia Turner got into the first hit act also with this swing. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Nataly Amador dropped a couple of well-executed bunts for hits in the win over Halls. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Brady Fronabarger taps helmets with Nash Kilburn, Callan Willis, Carter Winders, and Landry Fronabarger after circling the bases on his sixth-inning blast. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Anna Stallings tossed a one-hit shutout over five innings as the Lady Cav softballers hammered Halls 12-0 Tuesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Emilee Chandler ripped a triple later in the game for the Lady Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Mae Parker dropped a perfect bunt and beat it out with this sprint for her first varsity hit this season as well. (Photo by Ron Barry)









Right: Ruthie Tucker posted her first hit in a varsity game this season on this pitch. (Photo by Ron Barry)