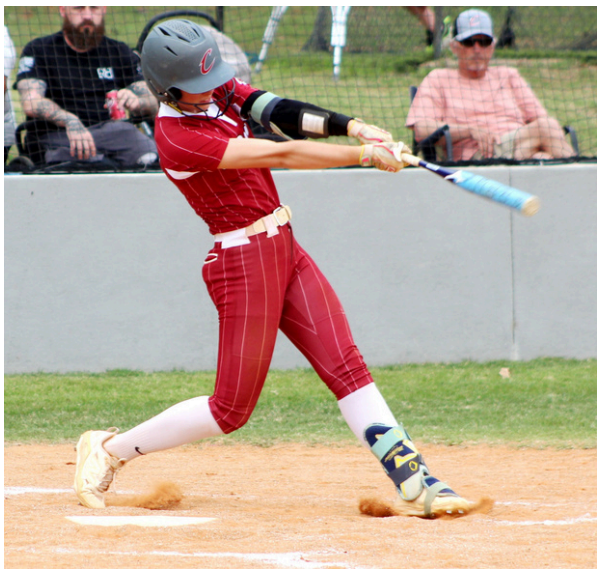
LADY CAVALIERS BLAST THEIR WA TO REGULAR-SEASON SOFTBALL DISTRICT CHAMPIONSHIP



Above: Crockett's Wesley Thornton absolutely pulverizes this pitch for her seventh home run of the season Monday against South Gibson. (Photo by Ron Barry)

You may have thought that loud noise you heard Monday afternoon was just thunder from the approaching storms over Crockett County.

But it also could have been the sonic boom created when the Lady Cavaliers' Wesley Thornton absolutely pulverized a second-inning South Gibson pitch that, had the Artemis II spacecraft still been orbiting the moon this week, might have glanced off it. When last seen, Thornton's home run ball was headed toward Humboldt, and may have had a couple of flight attendants aboard.

Her blast – and another four-bagger in the first frame from Haley Leforgee – gave Crockett an 8-4 win over the Lady Hornets and clinched the regular-season district championship and the top seed in the post-season tournament, scheduled to begin Wednesday in Alamo although the week's weather forecast is not promising.

The victory was also Coach Baron Jimmerson's 202nd as a high school head man, with many of them occurring as leader of Crockett's victim Monday, South Gibson. Jimmerson picked up his 200th triumph last Thursday in a district romp over Haywood and added another one Saturday against Munford.

Crockett's softball and baseball teams will be hosting post-season district tournaments side-by-side this week if the weather cooperates. As the top seed in both sports, the Cavalier squads will have first-round byes Wednesday and won't actually play until Thursday. Coach Brad Smith's baseball club will begin at 4:30 Thursday, and the softballers start at 5:00. Both tournaments are double-elimination affairs.

Jimmerson's crew got off to an impressive opening Monday with a big four-run first inning. Thornton watched four pitches sail nowhere close to the strike zone – a scenario becoming all too familiar this time of year for her – to draw a leadoff walk. She took second on a groundout by Nataly Amador before stealing third, preceding another walk to Kiyra Liggins. After Liggins had stolen second, Gabby Bursey plated Thornton with a fielder's choice grounder to short for a 1-0 lead.

Up stepped Leforgee, who's had a proclivity lately for delivering extra-base hits – she's slugging .662, and more than half of her hits have gained multiple sacks – and she took advantage of a stiff breeze blowing out to left field by slamming a long, high fly ball right into its wave. The ball just kept going and going until it had cleared the fence for a two-run shot, Leforgee's second bomb of the season.

Following a walk to Madison Stitts, Emilee Chandler almost duplicated Leforgee's feat, lifting a high fly into the left-field Jetstream. It carried for a double as Stitts raced home all the way from first, and the Lady Cavs had a 4-0 advantage.

Shortstop Thornton and second baseman Piper Smith turned a slick double play to highlight the top of the second, and Thornton celebrated in the bottom of the inning by crushing one of the longest home runs the host field has yielded, landing alongside the back edge of the middle school animal science barn well beyond the fence. The titanic belt was the seventh of the spring for the sophomore infielder.

Crockett starting pitcher Emmalynn Medlin made the 5-0 lead stand up easily through her three innings, offsetting three walks by not allowing a hit. She would be credited with the win at game's end, improving her season mark to 12-2.

Senior Anna Stallings came on in the fourth and yielded a pair of unearned runs when a catcher's interference call on a South Gibson swing and an outfield error on a Leah Prescott single put the Lady Hornets on the scoreboard. A Parker Penny groundout knocked in the second SGC tally.

The Lady Cavs quickly got both runs back in their half of the fourth. Macie Teel led off with a single to center and Fallon Beaird – who immediately stole second – entered as a courtesy runner. A hard Thornton grounder deflected off an infield glove and allowed her to reach second base as Beaird sped home to make it 6-2. An Amador groundout sent Thornton to third, from where she scored on a Bursey single to left.

A sparkling defensive play by Annie Whittemore prevented the hosts from tacking on even more runs in the fourth, and then she singled in a run in the top of the fifth to cut the margin to 7-3 before Stallings recorded back-to-back strikeouts to quell the threat.

Another RBI groundout by Penny after a Crockett infield error made it 7-4 in the South Gibson sixth, but the Lady Cavs bounced right back when Thornton walked, stole second, moved to third on an Amador groundout, and came home on a sacrifice fly by Liggins which was mishandled in the outfield, allowing Liggins to reach second.

Bursey then lined a bullet straight up the middle, nailing South Gibson pitcher Lydia Hall in the chest, knocking her to the ground. After gaining time to catch her breath again, Hall gamely remained in the contest. Bursey stole second on her next pitch, but then Lady Hornet second sacker Keeleigh Puckett speared another bullet off the bat of Leforgee, just inches above the dirt line, for the second out. Then Stitts rifled another shot down the third base line, but Whittemore brilliantly snared it and kept the game at 8-4 heading into the final frame.

Stallings retired the visitors in order in the seventh to post the four-inning save, and the Lady Cavs had their regular-season title.



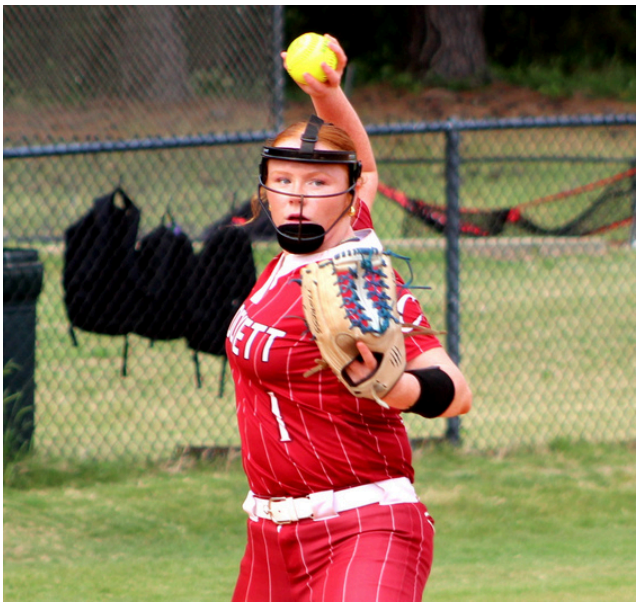
Above: As Wesley Thornton takes her home run trot around second base, if you look to the far right of this photo, you can see where the ball landed -- almost up against the middle school. (Photo by Ron Barry)

The full schedule for the District 13-AAA Softball Tournament (all games in Alamo):
Wednesday, April 29
Gm 1: South Gibson vs. Obion County, 5 pm
Gm 2: Dyersburg vs. Haywood, 7 pm
Thursday, April 30
Gm 3: Crockett County vs. Winner Gm 1, 5 pm
Gm 4: Dyer County vs. Winner Gm 2, 7 pm
Friday, May 1
Gm 5: Loser Gm 2 vs. Loser Gm 3, 5 pm
Gm 6: Loser Gm 1 vs. Loser Gm 4, 7 pm
Saturday, May 2
Gm 7: Winner gm 3 vs. Winner Gm 4, 11 am
Gm 8: Winner Gm 5 vs. Winner Gm 6, 1 pm
Monday, May 4
Gm 9: Winner Gm 8 vs. Loser Gm 7, 5 pm
Gm 10: Winner Gm 7 vs. Winner Gm 9, 7 pm
Tuesday, May 5
Gm 11: Rematch of Gm 10, played only if Winner Gm 9 wins Gm 10; 5 pm.



Above: Haley Leforgee got in on the long ball act as well, hammering her second of the year in the opening inning. Over half of Leforgee's hits have been for extra bases. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Emmalynn Medlin put in a solid three hitless innings to improve to 12-2 inside the circle, and proved she could throw overhand as well after fielding this hot grounder in the third. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: First baseman Emilee Chandler had a long double in the contest as Crockett improved its record to 28-5-1. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Madison Stitts fielded this hard one-hopper and prepares to fire it over to Emilee Chandler at first base for the out. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Speedy Fallon Beaird stole her sixteenth base of the season, beating this tag from South Gibson shortstop Kynleigh Reese. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The win over SGC gave Crockett a regular-season District 13-AAA championship and was the 202nd career victory as a head coach for Baron Jimmerson. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Lady Cav catcher Macie Teel peeks over the top of her bat as she takes this vicious swing during Crockett's second time through the batting order. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Senior Anna Stallings came on to post a four-inning save in relief for the Lady Cavaliers in her final regular-season contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Gabby Bursey got the scoring started for Crockett in the first inning with this line-drive single to left field. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Kiyra Liggins took this Lady Hornet pitch right off the helmet and also had a sacrifice fly and a walk in the victory. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Nataly Amador advanced baserunner Wesley Thornton on all three opportunities she had, helping Thornton score four times (once on a homer) in the game. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Wesley Thornton swipes second base as this throw eludes Lady Hornet second baseman Keyleigh Puckett. (Photo by Ron Barry)