# MARKGRAF GOAL PROPELS CAVALIERS TO DISTRICT 13-AA SOCCER TOURNAMENT CROWN



**Above:** The 2026 District 13-AA Tournament Champions. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Crockett County soccer coach Alex Taylor has been using a slogan all season: "We go on!"
Well, they're still going on.

Taylor's Cavaliers scored their second win in a week over archrival South Gibson Thursday night, claiming the District 13-AA Tournament championship by a 2-1 count on a rebound goal by alert attacker Aiden Markgraf early in the second half.
After Markgraf's score with 34:30 to play, it was all hands on deck to keep the talented Hornets out of the Crockett goal. Aware that time was running out, the determined visitors never gave up, mounting a series of rushes at the Cavalier net. Crockett was even dropping all 11 of its players into the goal box at points, making sure South Gibson couldn't get an unhindered shot.

It was a typical Crockett vs. South Gibson match – physical, hard-fought, well-played, and full of emotion. But when time finally ran out as defender Max Utley booted the last Hornet threat deep away from the Cav box, players celebrated their district title with a reserved exuberance, simply because – as senior Chris Cerda put it – "We aren't finished yet."

Cerda was pointing to the fact that the district championship is nice, but it's just the first step in the post-season journey to a TSSAA State Tournament return. The next rung on the ladder is Round 1 of the Region 7-AA Tournament, which will be Tuesday evening at 6:00 against Haywood at Cavalier Stadium. And unlike the district final, the first region game will be a "win-or-go-home" situation.

For the sleep-deprived Taylor – he just became a new dad this week – Thursday's win was a display of the capabilities this team possesses.

"The other coaches and I are so incredibly proud of this team," Taylor said. "We tell them that every day, but this win – over a very, very good team – shows what can be accomplished when we play together. This team has overcome a lot of adversity this season, but played right through it. And tonight is the first reward."

When these two teams play each other, there usually isn't a lot of margin for error. So when an early foul in the box against Crockett gave South Gibson a penalty kick – converted successfully by Rebel Blackwell barely two minutes into the game – it was an ominous start for the hosts.

Yet it didn't take long at all for Crockett's veteran squad to respond. Inside of two minutes following SGC's PK, Crockett's Braulio Marquez put a perfectly placed direct kick toward the far corner of the net, with enough of a curl to it that it may have gone in without any help. But Cav midfielder Angel Garcia leaped high enough into the air to cause the boot to graze his head, with the slight deflection resulting in the tying goal.

It remained 1-1 even when Crockett was awarded a penalty kick at the 8:34 mark. Hornet goalkeeper Kooper McFarland made the right guess as to which direction Garcia might go with his shot, and made a diving save to sustain the deadlock to the halftime intermission.

In what was largely a defensive struggle, Crockett had just three shots on goal in the opening period, while Allan Marquez made two saves defending the Cav net.

The second half was more of the same. South Gibson possessed the ball more than Crockett in the final period, but couldn't penetrate the more populated defense. Marquez only made one additional official save, as most of the Hornet shot attempts were blocked early on by Cav defenders or just never materialized.

Meanwhile – in the brief time Crockett was in full attack mode in the half – Braulio Marquez steered a direct kick from the left wing from around 30 yards out as Garcia cut toward the goal. He tried to punch it in with his left foot, but McFarland blocked it. Garcia booted the rebound again, but it was again deflected, this time in the direction of the speedy Markgraf, who drilled it into the net at the 34:30 mark.

"Braulio told me to move in to the left when he was about to kick," Garcia said. "I got my left foot on it but it got deflected a couple of times. Finally Aiden got to it."

"I saw Angel move in on Braulio's kick," Markgraf explained, "and then I just saw the ball bounce around a couple of times. When I saw it go through the goalie's legs, I moved in and just knocked it in. I saw the keeper couldn't defend the net after the first couple of blocks. It's why we always remind each other to crash the goal on these kicks."

Markgraf's score made it 2-1, and somehow the Cavs made it hold up for the remaining 34 minutes. Allan Marquez made his save on a hard shot from fairly close range which he smartly punched back out of the box with force, effectively clearing the threat. Had he tried to catch the kick, it likely would have resulted in a deflection which would have presented another scoring opportunity.

After the match, awards were distributed for district play. Taylor was named Coach of the Year; Crockett's Adrian Calderon (with seven goals and three assists) was the district's Offensive Player of the Year. South Gibson's McFarland was named Goalkeeper of the Year. Regular season All-District selections from Crockett were Calderon, Cerda, Markgraf, and Braulio Marquez. All-Tournament choices were Garcia, Allan Marquez, Braulio Marquez, and Luke Carter.

Crockett enters region tournament play with a 10-2-1 record. A Tuesday evening win over Haywood will advance them to a Sectional match after the region championship game. A Tuesday loss ends the season.

**BASEBALL:** Crockett senior Carter Winders has been named as one of three finalists for the Division I-AAA Mookie Betts Mr. Baseball Award for the state of Tennessee.

Winders enters Friday's Region 7-AAA Tournament opener with some rather impressive credentials for the season. As a pitcher, he's 8-0 with an ERA of 0.84 and 70 strikeouts in 50 innings. As a batter, he's hitting .542, slugging .991, has an on-base percentage of .643, and has driven in 64 runs in 34 games with 10 homers and 18 doubles. All of these numbers are team highs. Defensively – well, he's the best catcher in West Tennessee, if not the entire state.

The Cavaliers are 31-3 for the season and play Lexington in Henderson at 3:00 Friday in Round 1 of the region tournament.

**COLE HONORED IN ARKANSAS:** Former Lady Cavalier softball catcher Lynden "Lou" Cole has been named to the NJCAA All-Region 2 Team for her extraordinary sophomore season at the University of Arkansas-Rich Mountain. Cole has a .425 batting average with 15 home runs and 60 RBIs, and yesterday began play in the Southwest Plains District Tournament by catching a no-hitter and driving in two runs with a pair of doubles. Cole was a standout in both softball and volleyball at Crockett County, reaching the State Tournament in both sports.




**Above:** Crockett defender Max Utley (21) clears the ball away from the Cavalier net with one second left to quell South Gibson's final threat as the hosts won the District 13-AA Tournament championship. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below**: Over the game's last 25 or so minutes, the Cavs even had their offensive players -- here, Chris Cerda and Braulio Marquez -- dropping back into the box to help out the defense. (Photo by Ron Barry)



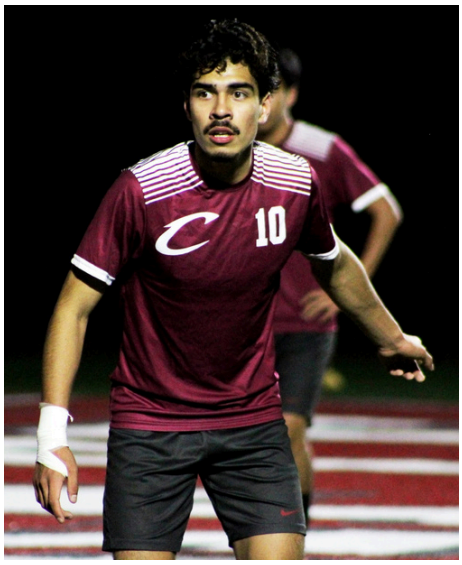


**Above:** Aiden Markgraf (23) punched in the eventual game-winning goal on this play, moving in after a couple of deflections of previous shots. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Above:** Goalkeeper Allan Marquez allowed only a single penalty kick goal in two victories (2-0 and 2-1) over South Gibson in the past week. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below**: In the game's fading minutes, Chris Cerda alertly watches a South Gibson throw-in, ready to do whatever it takes to keep the ball away from the goal area. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Below:** Braulio Marquez clears a ball away from the Crockett net early in the contest for the Cavaliers, who are now 10-2-1. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Left:** Midfielder Angel Garcia scored Crockett's first goal when he used his head to slightly redirect ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** ... this perfectly hooked free kick from Braulio Marquez, which might have gone into the net on its own -- but the push from Garcia sealed the deal. (Photo by Ron Barry)





**Below:** Max Utley made some big defensive plays down the stretch for the victorious Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Left:** When it was all over, the Cavaliers ran across the field as a unit to thank their fans for the wonderful support they provided. (Photo by Ron Barry)



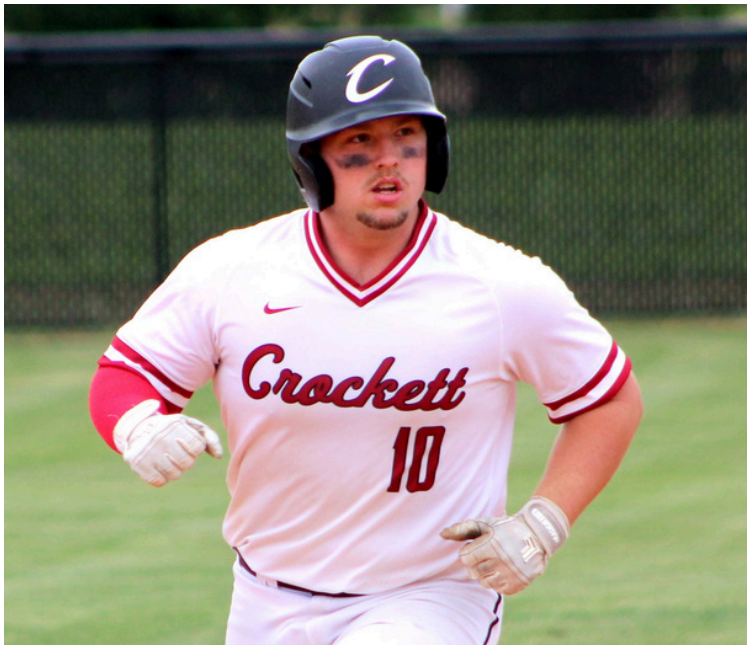
**Above:** Mason Wood gives up his body -- and takes a slap on the back of the head -- as he slides and knocks the ball away during a Hornet attack. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Right:** Midfielder Angel Garcia scored Crockett's first goal when he used his head to slightly redirect ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... this perfectly hooked free kick from Braulio Marquez, which might have gone into the net on its own -- but the push from Garcia sealed the deal. (Photo by Ron Barry)






**Above:** Crockett's Carter Winders is one of three finalists for the Division I-AAA Mookie Betts Mr. Baseball Award for the state of Tennessee. (Photo by Ron Barry)



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