KILBURN EXECUTES TO PERFECTION; CAV BASEBALLERS A WIN AWAY FROM SECTIONAL



Above: Crockett senior Nash Kilburn threw the pitches, yielding just four hits, no walks, and striking out 10 … (Photo by Ron Barry)

"That was the best executed game by a pitcher-and-catcher combination that we've had all season."

With those words, Crockett County baseball coach Brad Smith perfectly summarized the four-hit, 10-strikeout performance by Nash Kilburn – giving equal credit to catcher Carter Winders – in a 6-2 victory over Lexington in the opening round Friday of the Region 7-AAA Tournament in Henderson.

The Cavaliers will play Dyer County at noon Saturday for the region championship. If they win, they'll host a Sectional as the top seed from Region 7. If they lose at noon Saturday, they have to win a 5:00 game Saturday to advance as the region's second seed, meaning a road game in the Sectional.

Smith was ecstatic with the performance of his battery in Friday's win over Lexington.

"We had a game plan, but I give Nash and Carter freedom," Smith said. "Carter calls the pitches, and he did a tremendous job today. And Nash executed those calls as well as he has all year. Lexington has an entire right-handed lineup, but Nash isn't afraid to throw breaking balls at righties. He was throwing breaking stuff on the first pitch to slow down their eyes and speed up his fastballs. He stayed ahead of them all day. His change was okay today, but it was the first-pitch breaking ball that made him so outstanding."

Kilburn posted his 10 strikeouts without issuing a single walk. He threw 67 of his 97 pitches for strikes, and the only inning in which he had any trouble – the sixth – was right after he had singled and stolen two bases during Crockett's two-run rally in the bottom of the fifth.

For the first half of the contest, Kilburn and Lexington's Logan Hayes were locked in a pitchers' duel which was breezing steadily along until the Cavs batted in the bottom of the fourth. Then – as they have done all season – the Cavaliers pounced when the opponent made a mistake.

In that fourth, Brady Fronabarger cranked a leadoff double that smacked the base of the right-center fence. Winders then had a two-run homer taken away when Lexington centerfielder Tait Corbitt drifted back on Winders' long fly ball, found the fence with his right hand, and leaped above the railing to make a tremendous backhanded grab. Fronabarger tagged on the play, advancing to third.

Next man up was designated hitter Landry Fronabarger, and he hit a sharp ground ball into the hole at shortstop that would easily score his older brother. But in fielding the ball, Tiger shortstop Jayce Wadley took a peek to see if he'd have a play at the plate. In doing so, he took his eye off the ball momentarily, and consequently committed an error. One Fronabarger scored; the other reached first base.
And the flood gates were opened.

Smith inserted Davis Porter to run for Landry, and he took second as Aiden Austin stroked a sharp single to right. George Randall followed with another liner to left for a single, scoring Porter for a 2-0 lead.

Mason Ray then laid down an effective sacrifice bunt to move the two runners over, but Hayes overthrew first base and the ball sailed into right field, allowing Austin to score and Randall and Ray to take third and second. Continuing the "small ball" attack, Sam Proctor dropped down a perfect squeeze bunt to score Randall with the frame's fourth run.

Now given a lead, Kilburn cruised through the top of the fifth and then led off the bottom with a lined single to right. After Brady Fronabarger drilled a bullet to center that was caught for the first out, Kilburn stole second, prompting Lexington to intentionally walk Winders. Smith made that strategy backfire when he sent both runners on the first pitch to Landry Fronabarger, and the throw to third got away. Kilburn scored and Winders ended up on third, from where Landry immediately singled him home for a 6-0 Crockett advantage.



Left: … while executing the calls made by fellow senior Carter Winders, Crockett's extraordinary catcher. (Photo by Ron Barry)

The Tigers mounted a two-out rally in the top of the sixth on consecutive doubles by Redding Wilson and Jake Goodman and then a single by Wadley, cutting the Cavs' margin to 6-2, but Kilburn struck out the side in the top of the seventh to nail down his ninth victory of the season against a single defeat.

Crockett will now duel Dyer County – a team it has beaten three times already this season, although two of the games were close – for the Region crown at noon Saturday. The Cavs have Winders available to pitch, and the remainder of the starting staff and top relievers (excepting Kilburn) are rested as well.

The winner of the noon game is the Region 7-AAA champion. Friday's losers – Lexington and Chester County – will face off at 2:30 in an elimination game. The winner of that game will then face the loser of Saturday's noon matchup at 5 p.m. for the second Sectional spot. The season will be over for the 5:00 loser



Above: George Randall followed a Lexington infield error and an Aiden Austin single with this RBI liner into left field, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... scoring pinch-runner Davis Porter as the Tiger throw was off-target by a few yards. (Photo by Ron Barry)





left: Sophomore Landry Fronabarger was the Cavs' offensive star, driving in two of the six runs with a pair of hits. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Brady Fronabarger got the Cav rally ignited in the fourth inning with this long leadoff double off the right-center fence. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Mason Ray followed with an effective sacrifice bunt, made even better for Crockett when it was thrown away for another error. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Sam Proctor returns to the dugout -- past a line of dejected Lexington Tigers -- after his squeeze bunt plated George Randall to make it 4-0. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: In the fifth inning, Nash Kilburn led off with a single and then stole second on this play. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: After Lexington intentionally walked Carter Winders, Nash Kilburn stole third (here) and scored when the throw got away. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Landry (28) accepts congratulations from Brady as the Fronabarger brothers continue to be instrumental parts of the Cavalier offense. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Landry Fronabarger singled again to drive home another run and make it 6-0 in favor of the Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Nash Kilburn gets a hand slap from left fielder Brody Parlow (5) to acknowledge the senior lefthander's outstanding outing on the mound. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Crockett heads into Saturday's noon battle with Dyer County for the Region 7-AAA championship knowing that Carter Winders is available to pitch. (Photo by Ron Barry)