BASEBALLERS SWEEP LAKELAND PREP TO EARN STATE BERTH; CAV SOCCER WINS REGION TITLE



Above: Callan Willis -- leadoff man extraordinaire -- got his bat going again in the sweep of Lakeland Prep Wednesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)

You know you're having a good night at your high school baseball field when a freshman pitches a no-hitter and it goes almost unnoticed.

Crockett County's Rylan Redding accomplished that feat Wednesday night in Alamo, but it was swallowed up by team achievements as Coach Brad Smith's Cavaliers blanked visiting Lakeland Prep 9-0 and 17-0 to win the best-of-three Sectional Championship and earn the school's first TSSAA State Tournament berth since 2015.

Redding's gem wasn't as evident to spectators as most no-hitters because Crockett scored so many runs so quickly (17) that the game was called after just three innings and then the Cav players shook hands with the Lions, had a brief outfield meeting with Smith (who was eventually doused with the celebratory water cooler remains), and finally produced the traditional dogpile that signifies a championship or a berth in the top event in the sport.

Crockett got there not only because Redding didn't allow a hit in his three-frame victory but also because first-game starter Nash Kilburn allowed just one in a terrific 11-strikeout blanking in the opening contest.

The twin triumphs will send the Cavs to Murfreesboro with a staggeringly impressive 35-3 record. To appreciate the significance of that accomplishment, the all-time Major League Baseball standard for the start of a season is the 35-5 mark achieved by the 1984 World Series champion Detroit Tigers. Crockett's current record is better than even that.

For Smith – who will be taking his ninth team to the State (four as an assistant coach and five as the head man) – the berth is the culmination of a season marked by resilience and the leadership of his great group of seniors.

"These players flat-out deserve this," he said after Wednesday's wrap-up. "When I came here, I was the fourth head coach these guys have had in three years. And even though we began to do things differently than they've done them before, not only did this group buy into it, but they led by example. I've watched these kids work hard all through the school year to prepare for this, and they have absolutely earned everything good that's come their way. And now to go to the State – every player should get to experience something like that, and now they're going to. It's always fun."

Crockett got off to a great start in Game 1 when Kilburn struck out the side in the top of the first and then Brady Fronabarger hammered one of the longest home runs of the season through the teeth of a stiff breeze blowing in from left field in the bottom of the frame.

From that point on, the Cavaliers totally dominated the Lions. Callan Willis doubled home Samuel Proctor to highlight a three-run rally in the second. In the fourth, Proctor doubled and scored again on a Willis single. Kilburn laid down a world-class bunt for a base hit. Fronabarger singled home another run, Carter Winders contributed a sacrifice fly, and Landry Fronabarger singled in a run to make it 8-0.

In the meantime, the visiting Lions weren't touching Kilburn at all. The senior southpaw picked up his tenth win of the year against a single loss, lowering his ERA to 1.82 in the process. Brady Fronabarger and George Randall each had three hits.

That left the Cavs a win away from a State Tournament position, and they acquired it quickly by scoring eight runs in the second inning and nine more in the third. Fronabarger drove in four of the runs and Mason Ray knocked in three, and it was such a rout that Kilburn, Landry Fronabarger, Aiden Austin, and Proctor all also drove in two runs apiece. Willis and Randall both reached base safely every time they batted via hits, walks, or being hit by pitches.

Meanwhile, Redding faced the minimum number of Lakeland Prep hitters, issuing one walk but having that runner erased when Ray and Austin turned a dazzling double play in the second. Just a freshman, Redding is now 6-0 with a 2.46 ERA.

The TSSAA State Tournament runs Tuesday through Friday in Murfreesboro and is a double-elimination event. Eight teams will be divided into two four-team brackets by a blind draw, and the teams never cross brackets until the championship game between the two bracket winners.

The baseball sweep was just one part of a spectacular day among Crockett County spring sports.

SOCCER: The Region 7-AA Championship Game between Crockett County and South Gibson County once again lived up to the hype.

But for the third consecutive time this season, Coach Alex Taylor's Cavaliers edged the Hornets in a tight contest, winning this one 3-2 in overtime to claim the region title and a host role Saturday in a west Sectional. Crockett will entertain the loser of the Brighton vs. Millington Central game, which is being played Thursday.

The Cavs grabbed the lead at the midway point of the opening half when Daniel Grajeda headed in a Braulio Marquez corner kick. The 1-0 advantage held up all the way until 16:46 remained in the second half, when South Gibson evened the score. Crockett had held possession of the ball for most of the contest until that point, largely because the Hornets were dropping several of their offensive players back to strengthen the defense.

The game went to the two designated overtime periods of 10 minutes each, Chris Cerda scored at the 6:21 mark of the first extra period for a 2-1 Crockett edge, but South Gibson again answered in the second overtime at 4:39 off a header from a direct kick.

But with just 2:27 remaining, Marquez fed Cerda for the go-ahead goal, and Crockett held on this time for the 3-2 victory. The Cavs put 18 shots on goal in the contest, while Allan Marquez made two saves in the second half for the hosts. A win Saturday will return Crockett to the State Tournament for the second year in a row.

SOFTBALL: With McNairy Central's pitching talent – and a quick six runs on the board in the first two innings – the Region 7-AAA Tournament Championship Game was close to over as soon as it started, with the Lady Bobcats defeating Crockett County 9-2 to earn a host role in one of the West Sectionals. The Lady Cavaliers will go on the road Saturday for their Sectional, facing Millington Central at 2:00.

McNairy's Chanley Steele belted a two-run homer in the opening frame and pitched five innings of three-hit ball for the winners. Bailee Shelton hurled the final two innings, blanking the Lady Cavs on one additional hit.

Fallon Beaird collected two of Crockett's four hits, including a fifth-frame triple. Wesley Thornton singled in Crockett's first run in the third and Macie Teel brought Beaird home in the fifth on a groundout.

For McNairy, Bayleigh Purviance added a two-run homer in the second; Steele was 3-for-3 with three RBIs; and Shelton went 4-for-5, scored three times, and drove in two. Four Crockett errors allowed five of the nine Lady Bobcat runs to be unearned, although McNairy pounded out 11 hits.

The Lady Cavs are now 31-8-1 and can still acquire a State Tournament berth with a win Saturday at Millington.

TRACK & FIELD PENTATHLON: In Knoxville Wednesday, Crockett's Addie Davidson placed eighth in the TSSAA DI Class AA State Pentathlon Championships, breaking the school record held by former Lady Cavalier standout Joy Evans by four points.

Davidson – still only a junior – scored a total of 2,241 points to tie with Gracie Ray of Liberty Creek. But Davidson prevailed in the tie-breaking procedure, having bested Ray in three of the five events that make up the pentathlon competition.

Davidson placed eighth in the 100m hurdles (17.70), sixth in the long jump (4.61 m = 15.12 ft), eighth in the high jump (1.37 m = 4.5 ft), eighth in the shot put (7.22 m = 23.69 ft), and eleventh in the 800m run (2:52.80). Entering the day, Davidson was seeded twelfth among the participants, so she outperformed her seed with her results Wednesday. The overall champion was Marlee Burkley of Signal Mountain, who won four of the five individual events in a dominating display.

The final standings of the pentathlon participants: (1) Marlee Burkley, Signal Mountain 3,421; (2) Rebekah Spierdowis, Knoxville Gibbs 3,011; (3) Harper Gibson, Martin Luther King 3,000; (4) Hollee Wilson, Creek Wood 2,937; (5) Layla Curtis, Fairview 2,810; (6) Chloe Alley, Station Camp 2,608; (7) Camdyn Garland, Elizabethton 2,601; (Addie Davidson, Crockett Co 2,241; (9) Gracie Ray, Liberty Creek 2,241; (10) Emma Curtis, Loudon 2,042; (11) Elizabeth Foster, Lakeland Prep 1,927; (12) Maggie Rives, Liberty Creek did not finish.



Above: That swing produced a double, and once Callan Willis reaches second, he's going to do his thing. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Chris Cerda scored both of Crockett's overtime goals to lead the Cavs to the Region 7-AA Tournament Championship. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Cav first baseman Brady Fronabarger circles the bases after belting his tenth homer of the season in the first inning to ignite Crockett's 9-0 win in Game 1. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Freshman Rylan Redding may have just thrown the sneakiest no-hitter in quite a while. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: A key play in the Cavs' soccer win came when the Hornets' Richard Addo got behind the defense and had this breakaway opportunity for a point blank shot, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: ... but Crockett goalkeeper Allan Marquez snuffed it, blocking it off his leg and then receiving congratulations from Daniel Grajeda. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Senior southpaw Nash Kilburn took it from there, securing his tenth victory of the season with a one-hit shutout, striking out 11 Lions. (Photo by Ron Barry)





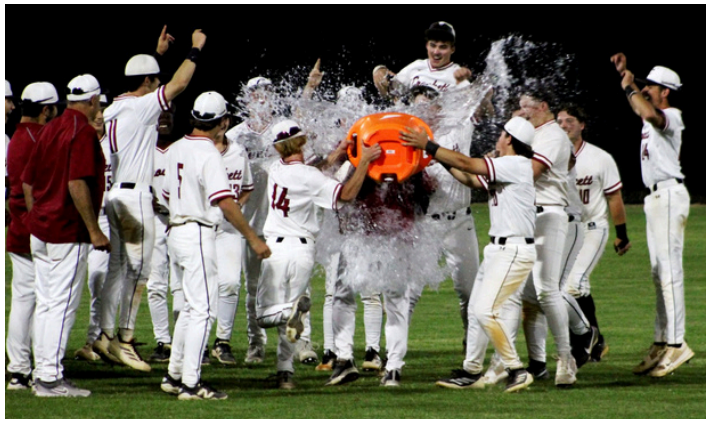
Above: Lakeland Prep had the hardest time getting Crockett's George Randall out; it only happened once over the doubleheader. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Second baseman Aiden Austin tried to sneak an out when he noticed Lakeland Prep's Brett Godwin overslid the sack, and it became a race to the bag ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... but Godwin barely got his hand back in there just before Austin could apply the tag. (Photo by Ron Barry)



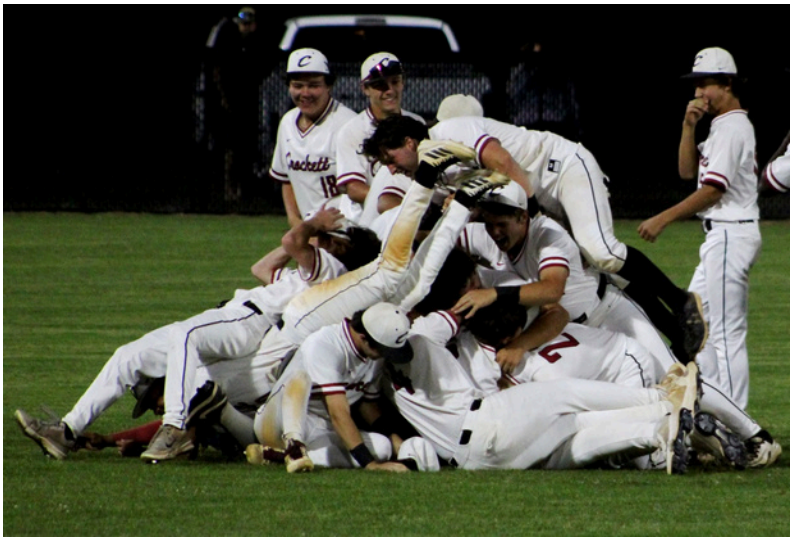




Left: Samuel Proctor was another guy the Lions couldn't seem to get out. Here he celebrates a double in Game 1. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Mason Ray was 2-for-3 with three RBIs and started a nifty double play in Game 2 for the victorious Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: When the Cavs had clinched the State Tournament berth, it was dogpile time! (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: Coach Brad Smith was the willing victim of the celebratory water cooler bath. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Back at the soccer pitch, this corner kick had everybody jumping, notably Crockett's Angel Garcia and Aiden Markgraf. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: While not much was going well for Crockett over on the softball field, Fallon Beaird managed to go 2-for-3 with a triple and a run scored. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Nataly Amador gets ready to run from second base as McNairy delivers its next pitch. The Lady Bobcats defeated Crockett 9-2. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Early in the second half, Cav goalkeeper Allan Marquez watches his picture come up on the giant scoreboard. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Davidson will join the rest of her teammates in the State Track & Field Championships next week and will be coming in as the West Sectional champion in the pole vault. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Addie Davidson broke the school record while competing in the State Pentathlon Championship in Knoxville Wednesday and finished eighth with 2,241 points. (Photo by Ron Barry)

