CROCKETT COUNTY DIAMOND TEAMS STILL ALIVE IN TSSAA STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS



Above: Anna Stallings delivered her second straight stellar State Tournament performance in winning her 21st game of the season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

On a miserable weather day that had to rank with the worst nightmares of Murfreesboro's Chamber of Commerce, Crockett County's softball and baseball teams showed their resilience Wednesday and managed to stay alive in the TSSAA State Championships.

As a result, one is somewhat in the driver's seat and the other is desperately clawing its way at least back to the shotgun position.

Coach Baron Jimmerson's Lady Cavalier softballers – trailing 3-0 after two-and-a-half innings, with five of the six Crockett outs by strikeouts – got a two-run homer from Wesley Thornton and additional RBIs from Haley Leforgee and Fallon Beaird in the bottom of the third and made that lone rally stand up in a 4-3 win over Liberty Creek. The victory leaves the Lady Cavs as the only unbeaten team in the top bracket of the draw, meaning that either Liberty Creek or Alcoa would have to defeat Crockett twice to prevent the Lady Cavs from reaching the state title game, which has apparently now been moved to Saturday.

Meanwhile, Coach Brad Smith's Cavalier baseballers – pushed to the brink of elimination after an uncharacteristically "off" performance in an 8-6 defeat to Heritage – scraped themselves off the deck to rally from a 5-1 deficit and post a 12-6 triumph over Liberty Creek in a rain-delayed matchup that didn't end until just before midnight Wednesday.

If it ever stops raining in Murfreesboro, Crockett is now scheduled to duel Heritage again Thursday, needing to defeat the Mountaineers twice to reach Friday's state championship game. Those games are tentatively set for 2 p.m. and then 4:30 p.m. (if necessary), still at Blackman High School.

In softball, the game between Liberty Creek and Alcoa to determine Crockett's next opponent is tentatively set for Thursday morning, with the winner moving on to face the Lady Cavs at 1:30 p.m. at McKnight Field #2. If a second game is necessary, it would be played Friday.

It has been raining overnight in Murfreesboro, and the forecast has a better than 40% chance of rain at every hour of the day Thursday until 11 p.m. – so there's that.

The good news for Crockett County is that both teams have officially reached the "Final Four" in their respective sports in the State Tournament, certainly a noteworthy achievement for the school. The softball team's record is now 34-8-1; the baseball crew is 37-4.

Quick summaries of Wednesday's games:

SOFTBALL: Crockett 4, Liberty Creek 3
After yielding a leadoff double in the top of the seventh to the Wolves' Kenslee Gregory, Crockett's Anna Stallings induced a line-out, pop-out, and ground-out to strand the tying run on base and secure the Lady Cav win. Stallings, now 21-4 on the season, scattered nine hits and gave up just one earned run.

Thornton's homer, her second in as many State Tournament games, came after Macie Teel had reached on an error. One out later, Kiyra Liggins singled and came around to score on a Leforgee double, tying the game. After Leforgee took third on an outfield error, Beaird brought her home with a groundout for the go-ahead tally.

Thornton also had a double and a walk and had two of Crockett's four hits.

BASEBALL: Heritage 8, Crockett 6
The Maryville-based school took full advantage of 10 walks issued by Cav pitching and three Crockett infield errors to gain an early edge and then overcame a Cav comeback with a flurry of extra-base hits, including a home run by Hayden Sanders to tie the game at 6-6. Brady Fronabarger and Carter Winders had delivered RBI hits for the Cavs to rally from the early deficit and take the lead, but it was short-lived.

Fronabarger had three of Crockett's nine hits, while Landry Fronabarger added a two-run single and Sam Proctor was 2-for-3 with a double and RBI.

The Cavs' original game time was delayed by more than four hours, which might have contributed to the lack of sharpness early in the contest.

BASEBALL: Crockett 12, Liberty Creek 6

Down 5-1 after three innings and facing tournament elimination, Nash Kilburn resurrected the Cavs' season by cracking a two-out, three-run homer in the fourth to draw Crockett to within a run. George Randall came on in relief for the Cavs and shut down the Wolves while Brady Fronabarger sent Crockett ahead with a two-run single in the top of the sixth. After he scored on an error, Aiden Austin singled in another run for an 8-5 advantage.

A four-run seventh – highlighted by a run-scoring single from Kilburn, a two-run triple by Winders, and another run-scoring single by Karson Kail, secured the Crockett victory. Randall went four innings, his longest relief stint of the year, and picked up the win with five strikeouts and just one run allowed.

Offensively, Kilburn was 3-for-4 with four RBIs and Winders had three hits and three RBIs. Mason Ray walked three times and scored twice.



Above: The power swing of Wesley Thornton brought the Lady Cavs back from a 3-0 deficit Wednesday. (Photo by Beth Williams)

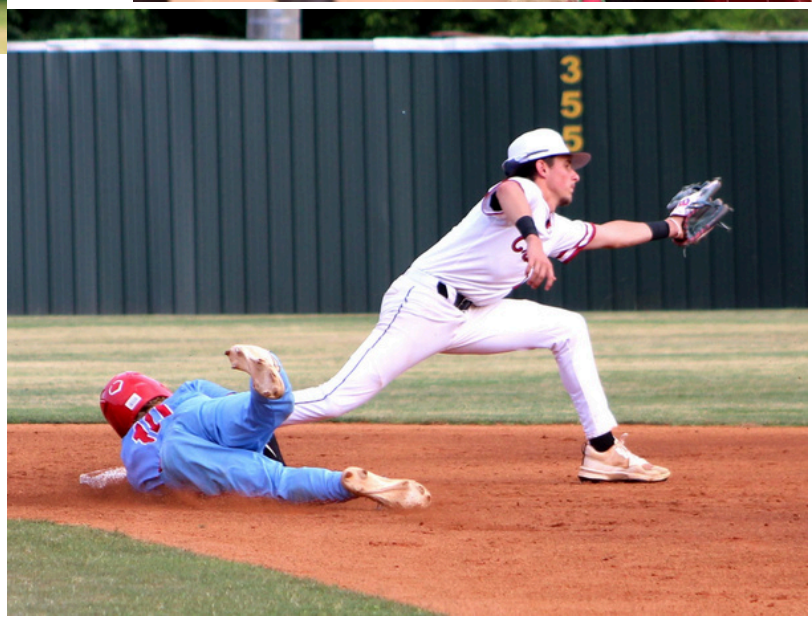
Below: It also brought a big smile to the sophomore shortstop's face and to the Crockett fans. (Photo by Beth Williams)



Above: While Nash Kilburn fought some control problems on the mound in Crockett's first game Wednesday, his three-run homer brought the Cavs back from the brink of elimination in the second one. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Mason Ray makes a first baseman stretch from his shortstop position at second base to get this force-out on a short pop fly into right field. (Photo by Ron Barry)



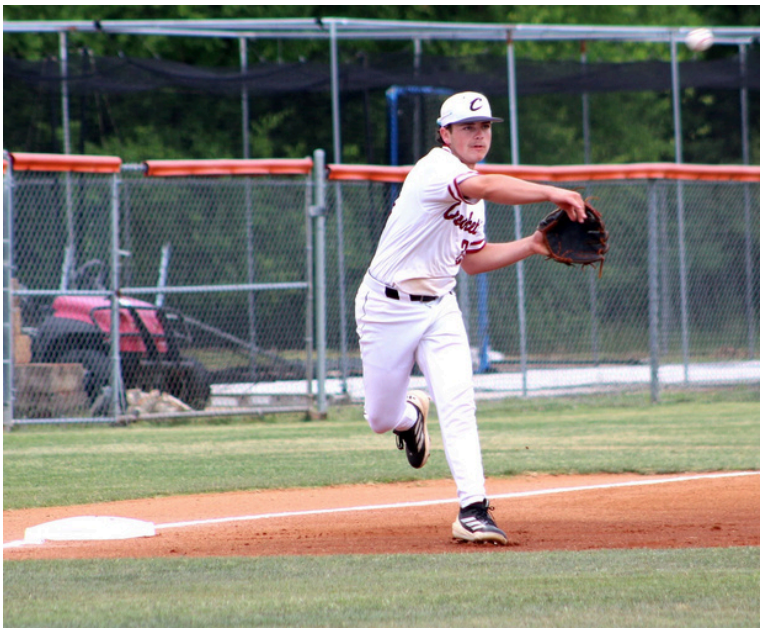




Above: Brady Fronabarger celebrates the hit that tied the score against Heritage ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... just before Carter Winders put the Cavs ahead with the next hit and the next celebration. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: George Randall, shown here making a defensive throw in the first game Wednesday, threw four key innings of relief in the second to pick up the win. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Fallon Beaird knocked in the go-ahead run Wednesday with a timely groundout after an extra-base hit by Haley Leforgee. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett's Sam Proctor talks things over with first base coach Jacob Clark after one of his hits Wednesday. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Karson Kail scored this run against Heritage in Game 1 Wednesday and then drove in a run with a seventh-inning hit in Game 2. (Photo by Ron Barry)

