SOCCER TEAM WINS SECTIONAL THRILLER; THORNTON POWERS STATE-BOUND LADY CAV SOFTBALL



Above: Chris Cerda's soccer teammates celebrate his go-ahead penalty kick goal while members of the Crockett baseball team cheer him on from their perch on the terrace. (Photo by Ron Barry)

It seems somewhat ironic that a team that strong-armed Crockett County all game long should lose a soccer match on a hand ball.

For the uninitiated, a hand ball in soccer is any illegal contact of the hand or arm with the ball. And when Millington Central was called for it with 5:20 to play in the West Sectional Saturday against the Cavaliers – inside the goal box – it gave the hosts an opportunity to break a 1-1 tie with a penalty kick.

Crockett senior Chris Cerda took the kick, and nailed a shot past the diving Trojan goalkeeper that went into the upper right side of the net, providing the difference in a 2-1 victory that sends Coach Alex Taylor's club into the TSSAA State Class AA Tournament this coming week in Murfreesboro.

Millington – an extremely physical team – was the obvious aggressor for much of Saturday's contest even though Crockett possessed the ball as much as the Trojans. But the visitors were getting to more 50/50 balls and forced Cav goalkeeper Allan Marquez to make some spectacular saves to keep the game at 1-1 until Cerda's PK.

But shortly after time had been stopped to tend to a Trojan injury near the right sideline, Crockett's Mason Wood wisely used a throw-in to launch a very high toss as far into the goal box as he could, hoping the resulting scramble might result in a Millington mistake. It did, as the ball bounced around in traffic long enough for a defender to illegally touch it, setting up the PK at 5:20.

Cerda's true kick – he scored both Crockett goals – sends the Cavs into the State Championships as the fourth Crockett spring sport making the trip this time, joining track& field, baseball, and softball, which also gained its berth Saturday by going on the road to Millington and run-ruling the Lady Trojans 15-2 behind a two-double, two-home run, seven-RBI performance from sophomore Wesley Thornton.

The Cavs will begin play Tuesday night at 6:30 on Field #1 of the Siegel Soccer Complex in Murfreesboro, taking on Elizabethton. If they win, they'll play again Wednesday night at 6:30 on the same field against the winner of Station Camp (from Gallatin) and Hume Fogg (from Nashville). The soccer tournament is a single-elimination event.

Crockett put nine shots on goal in the first half, while Marquez made three saves for the hosts. Cerda netted his first tally at the 15:19 mark, but the Trojans responded at 6:13 on a ball that was deflected several times in front of the Cav net before it was punched in.

The second half featured more back-and-forth play as Crockett had five shots on goal and Marquez made three more saves, two of which required full-extension dives to knock away Millington attempts. Wood also made a hustling move to deflect a ball that was going in and prevented what would have been the go-ahead Trojan goal with about 12 minutes remaining, but Millington was offside on the play anyway and it was negated.

Cerda said Millington surprised the Cavs a bit with their toughness and scrappy play.

"They worked, man," he said. "I mean, we worked too, but they were going hard after everything and forced us to go all out too. They were better than people think they are, but we were able to get past them. It shows that we still have more work to do, but we're going back to State."

Taylor saluted his team's ability to "find a way to win, whether things are going well or whether they're not." He said that's the mark of a good team.
"It shows that we have the capability to do whatever it takes in the moment to survive," Taylor said. "This wasn't our prettiest game, but we found a way. That's what it's all about."

The Cavs will carry a 13-2-1 record into the State event.

SOFTBALL: Thornton's first swing of the day – on a 1-and-0 count leading off the game – drove the ball over the centerfield fence, and the Lady Cavaliers never looked back.

They quickly added seven more runs in the second, highlighted by a two-run double by Thornton and a two-run homer to center by Kiyra Liggins. Haley Leforgee and Madison Stitts also doubled in runs in the rally.

Coach Baron Jimmerson's crew struck for three more runs in the third. Thornton doubled home the first one after a Macie Teel single and Liggins sent home the next two with a single. Millington scratched out a couple of runs off Crockett winning pitcher Anna Stallings – one of which was unearned – but the Lady Cavs erased them when Thornton belted a three-run homer on a full-count pitch when the Trojans elected to pitch to her with first base open.

Fallon Beaird doubled in the final Crockett tally in the top of the fifth, and when Stallings notched a strikeout for the final out in the Lady Trojan fifth, the run rule took effect and the Lady Cavs were headed to the State.

While Thornton's 4-for-5, 2-HR, 7-RBI effort (she also scored four times) was a stat stuffer, she wasn't the only one doing damage. Liggins drove in four runs; Stitts was 3-for-3 with a pair of doubles; and Leforgee and Nataly Amador had two hits each. Crockett totaled 16 hits in the lopsided duel, while Stallings limited the hosts to six safeties and struck out nine in her five-inning stint.

As of midnight Saturday, the softball State Tournament brackets were available, but teams had not yet been assigned their slots. Crockett will open play Tuesday at 2:00 in the afternoon as the double-elimination event begins at both the Starplex and McKnight fields. The Lady Cavs are now 32-8-1 on the season.

BASEBALL: Coach Brad Smith's Cavs (35-3) will open Tuesday at 4:00 at Murfreesboro's Blackman High School, facing Gibbs (31-10). If they win, they'll play Wednesday at 12:30 against either Liberty Creek (30-8) or Heritage (33-12), the other two schools in their half of the bracket. If they lose Tuesday, they would play at 10:00 a.m. Wednesday and again at 5:00 p.m. with a victory.

TRACK & FIELD: These State Championships are at Tom Black Stadium on the campus of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, and all of Crockett's competition takes place on Tuesday. Addie Davidson will pole vault at 10:30 a.m., and the first of the running events begins at 4:00 p.m. All of the Class-AA races are Tuesday afternoon and night.



Above: Wesley Thornton had her long-ball swing working in Millington: 4-for-5, two doubles, two homers, four runs scored, and seven RBIs. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Saturday's soccer Sectional was an extremely physical game. Here Crockett's Adrian Calderon collides with Millington's goalkeeper and another defender as he was trying to head a high pass. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Allan Marquez (in black) is on the ground after making a diving save while a Millington attacker can't believe the ball didn't go in the net. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett's Luke Carter was sprinting in to try to punch in a loose ball before the Trojan goalkeeper (in pink) dove on it. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Aiden Markgraf is full speed ahead to try to find an opening in the Millington defense. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Chris Cerda is set to fire as he rushes the net in Saturday's Sectional match with Millington. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett senior Max Utley patrols the back line of defense for the 13-2-1 Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Braulio Marquez tries to maneuver his way past a Millington defender. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Five different guys have a shot at getting to this loose ball, and Crockett's Aiden Markgraf (23) won the race. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: No, it's not a new dance -- Crockett's Luke Carter and his Millington foe are both trying to stop their momentum from overrunning this ball. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: When the game got inside of six minutes, Crockett's Mason Wood -- here possessing a ball prior to a pass -- made a wise, high throw-in toward the Trojan box that resulted in a hand ball and a penalty kick. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Wesley Thornton poses with the two home run balls she launched over Millington Central's fence Saturday, leading Crockett to a 15-2 Sectional win. (Photo courtesy of the Thornton family)





Above: Madison Stitts was 3-for-3 with a pair of doubles. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Chris Cerda nailed the kick for the go-ahead goal ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: ... and the celebration was on as Luke Carter lifted Chris Cerda high into the air. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: At the game's conclusion, Angel Garcia (left) and Chris Cerda share a laugh as they think about returning to the State Tournament in Murfreesboro. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Anna Stallings -- who picked up her 500th career strikeout last week -- scattered six hits for her 19th win this season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

