CCHS FRESHMAN CALEB FERGUSON GETS US YOUTH SOCCER NATIONAL TEAM OPPORTUNITY



Above: Crockett freshman Caleb Ferguson is the lone Tennessean who still has a chance to make the 2011 US Youth Soccer National Team when it selects its final roster in January. (Photo by Ron Barry)

When a person considers what might be called the soccer hot beds in the United States, certain locations probably quickly come to mind: Miami, Portland, Dallas, the District of Columbia, central North Carolina, Los Angeles, New Jersey, St. Louis, and Kansas City.

So how does a 14-year-old kid from Alamo, Tennessee get an opportunity to make the roster of the US Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program (ODP) National Team for the 2011 birth year?

Spend some time talking to Crockett County High School freshman Caleb Ferguson – or listen to those who have coached him – and you begin to see how the unlikely possibility has arisen.

"I can't say that I'm the least bit surprised by Caleb receiving this incredible opportunity," said Cavalier coach Alex Taylor. "I've known Caleb since he was a sixth grader and coached him for both school and club (Jackson Boom). Aside from his outstanding technical and physical ability, I believe what sets Caleb apart is his game intelligence and his mentality when it comes to training and perfecting his craft. You can look almost anywhere and find technically and physically talented young players. However, many talented young players become complacent and comfortable in their ability and thus eventually stop developing any further. Caleb has a mentality and level of maturity that is not often seen in young players."

Caleb's continued pursuit of his development has resulted in his current standing as the only Tennessean to make the roster for the South Region 2011 ODP Interregional Team that will travel to Orlando in January of 2027 to compete for the honor of representing the United States on its national squad that will play similar teams from other countries in locations all over the world.

He earned his roster spot by his performance with his Jackson Boom club team and then by impressing coaches and selectors at Charlotte, North Carolina for the Region ODP showcase event, where Caleb was alongside the best players from the state associations of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, North Texas, and South Texas. He is the only player from the Jackson Boom program to advance this far in the national team selection process.

"He is always pushing and demanding more from himself in his training," Taylor said. "It is this relentless pursuit of perfecting his craft that has developed him into the extraordinary player and young man that he is. I am so extremely proud of him and the things he has accomplished. The sky is truly the limit for this kid."
Caleb – who has been playing since he was four years old in the recreation league in Bells – displays everything Taylor said about him when asked to assess his own game and skills.

"Playing in these ODP competitions and at Crockett County Middle School are like two different experiences," he said. "And that has given me the chance to be a leader on the field when I'm in Alamo. I like the challenge of that, and after being with my school teammates for the past three years, I realize that we always need to put the team first. We're not going anywhere if I try to play with a 'me first' mentality."

That might seem to fly in the face of what you'd expect from someone who has stood out even among elite players from around the south, but it's also part of the athletic "awareness" that helps set Caleb apart.

"On the field, I just seem to see things that some others don't," he said, the same quality that identifies a great point guard in basketball or a linebacker in football. "I'm good with the ball at my feet, and I've had a lot of assists in middle school because I get just as much satisfaction from seeing a teammate score as I do scoring myself. So being able to see the whole field and make an accurate pass has helped me fit in well when I get with these other ODP players who have mastered the basics, because it's how they live. Soccer is their whole thing."

Graham Mayfield, who has coached Caleb at CCMS, echoes the leadership component of Caleb's game as a key in his development.

"I have seen Caleb grow over the years," Mayfield said. "He has always loved soccer but has grown as a leader on the field. He is willing to give his best effort on the field always. He also showed up and participated mentally and through encouragement for practices even when he was injured."

"The leadership part is important to me," Caleb said, "because I have been blessed to have parents [Lesia and Tommy Harper] who have instilled that in me. I like being able to do what I can to help make my teammates better."

Caleb's progress in the ODP process has been saluted by the Jackson Boom administrators, who even distributed a social media announcement trumpeting his Orlando roster selection.
"This is more than an individual achievement – it's another milestone for soccer in West Tennessee and a testament to what can happen when talent meets relentless work ethic, commitment, and opportunity," the post said. "Congratulations, Caleb. Your Jackson Boom family is proud of you and can't wait to see what comes next. The pathway is real. The dream is alive. The work continues."

The US Youth Soccer ODP states as its purpose: "To identify and provide opportunities for high potential players, facilitate their development, expose them to the next level of their chosen pathway, and motivate their pursuit of excellence."

So – does Caleb think he actually has a chance to make the limited national team roster when January rolls around?
"I have faith in my abilities," he said. "I've been able to hang pretty well with the players at the levels I've been to so far. I always ask the coaches and evaluators at these events what I could do better. I listen to their suggestions and I go back to work. So I'm going to do my best and see how it goes."

Caleb has high praise for two Jackson Boom coaches who have helped mold his progress: Joseph Soriano and Briamst Castro.
"They have both bolstered my confidence so much by working with me individually and insisting that I master the fundamentals," Caleb said.

Caleb's 2011 Jackson Boom team gained the number #1 statewide ranking by Got Soccer in 2024 after winning the Gold Division Championship of the Ninth Annual Premier Invitational Tournament at the Mike Rose Soccer Complex in Memphis, defeating the DC Panthers 5-0 in the semifinals and St. Louis Developmental Academy 4-0 in the title game. They also went to the Disney ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex and finished second out of 20 teams in a national competition there.

Lest anyone think Caleb is obsessed with soccer to the point of exclusion of everything else, just a year ago (August 2025) he was named the Eighth Grade Student of the Month at CCMS and has also appeared in productions for the Arts Council of Crockett, such as portraying the Tin Man in the "The Wiz."

But his focus will narrow as January approaches, because he wants to represent his family, his club organization, and his school well in Orlando.

"We'll have a chance for a few practices, and then we'll be playing teams from the other national regions," Caleb said. "But one of the best things about this is that even though all of these players have distinguished themselves individually, when they get together, they are 'team-first' players. Success in soccer demands that. And I am blessed to have this opportunity to be the first from around here to make it at this level."

The 2011 South Inter-Regional Team Roster
Sean Hargreaves, Florida; Henry "Pierce" Perret, Louisiana; Gonzalo Quiroz Sanchez, Florida; Parker Rapp, Alabama; Juan Pablo Hernandez Savedra, South Texas; Noah Villarete, South Texas; Korbyn Landry, North Texas; Evan Barrere, Louisiana; Charlie Voss, Georgia; Rodrigo Gil, Arkansas; Tiago Villatoro, Louisiana; Ángel Baca, Louisiana; Caleb Ferguson, Tennessee; Kyle Simpson, Georgia; Jacoby Bonkowske, North Carolina; Jayden Maldonado, North Carolina; Finn Stubbendorff, Mississippi; Zayn Haddad, South Carolina.

Head Coach: Andy Aulick, Head Men's Soccer Coach – North Greenville University; Assistant Coach: Giovanni Vlahos, Head Men's Soccer Coach – Cape Fear Community College; Goalkeeper Coach: Rich Weber, Assistant Men's Soccer Coach – Newberry College.

MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS SOCCER: CCMS scored its first victory of the season Thursday with a remarkable display of perseverance and a banner night from Kalynn Lewis. The match required a heat-index delay, two fields, and two overtimes before Crockett prevailed over Trenton 3-2.

The game began on the grass field at 6:15 to let the heat abate to a playable temperature, and the visitors scored the only goal of the first half at the 12-minute mark. But Lewis took advantage of a hand ball infraction and successfully nailed a penalty kick to tie the contest at 1-1 with 26:27 left to play in the second half.

With just 4:27 remaining, Trenton recaptured the lead, but Lewis beat the clock countdown and drilled in another tying shot with only 37 seconds to go. Since it was a district game, a tie would not suffice, but with darkness prevailing, the two teams moved over to Cavalier Stadium and hit the light switch, since the freshman football game had been canceled by the heat.

There would be two full 10-minute overtime periods before going to penalty kicks if the contest was still tied. But in the second one, Lewis booted in a free kick from just outside the top middle of the 18 with 4:27 remaining, and the defense held the rest of the way. Reese Rauchle made five saves in goal to aid the Lady Cavaliers' cause.

MIDDLE SCHOOL SOFTBALL: Crockett's record dropped to 5-4 on the season Thursday evening when Milan scored four times in the bottom of the fifth inning to defeat the Lady Cavs 7-5. CCMS had built a 5-3 advantage on the strength of two RBIs apiece from Mahaley Hicks and Sami Dew, but the late Lady Bulldog uprising surpassed them.

Hicks had a triple, Hadleigh Uselton a double, and Piper Ledford a single and three walks for the Lady Cavs. Milan overcame 14 Crockett baserunners to gain its victory.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CROSS-COUNTRY: CCMS was a runner short of qualifying for a team score, but Reed Eison and Holden Eison achieved Top 30 finishes (out of 101 total runners) Monday at the Martin Middle School Charger Invitational. The race was a 2400-meter run, and Reed (27th, 10:21.27) and Holden (30th, 10:22.43) were Crockett's top finishers. Harrison Duvall (48th, 11:03.06) and Easton Kinney (92nd, 13:38.53) also competed for the Cavs.



Above: Caleb Ferguson surveys his options before delivering a pass in this CCMS match from last spring. (Photo by Beth Williams)

Below: Caleb (far right, top row) was on this 2024 Jackson Boom team that finished second out of 20 teams at the Disney/ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex tournament. (Photo courtesy of Lesia Harper)



Below: Caleb Ferguson was even a "cover boy" for the Disney Memorial Tournament social media a few years ago. (Photo courtesy of Lesia Harper)





Left: Caleb is excited for his January opportunity and for his initial year playing for the high school varsity in the spring of 2027. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Just a year ago, Caleb was an eighth grade student of the month for CCMS. (Photo courtesy of Lesia Harper)





Above: Pictured here next to Coach Joseph Soriano, Caleb and his Jackson Boom team were ranked #1 in the State in 2024. (Photo courtesy of Lesia Harper)