VOLLEYBALLERS EARN FOURTH STRAIGHT BERTH IN TSSAA STATE TOURNAMENT



Above: Crockett County is going back to the State Tournament for the fourth straight season … (Photo by Ron Barry)

Everybody in Crockett County knows that volleyball is just Wesley Thornton's "side-hustle."

After all, the affable junior has already committed to play softball at Mississippi State University even before she's seen the first pitch of her third high school season.

But this fall, Lady Cavalier sports fans may have noticed that Thornton's competitiveness in her "other" sport may have ticked up a notch or two.

And after Thursday's night's Sectional victory in straight sets at Covington – which will send Crockett to the TSSAA State Tournament in Murfreesboro next week for the fourth consecutive year – a happy Thornton was able to eloquently state "why."

"This season, this team has been more of a family," she said. "We've all had this weird sense of déjà vu today, because this is exactly the same path we took last time to make the State. But I think this team has really grown together along the way, and the way we played tonight really showed it."

The Lady Cavs played Covington earlier this season and needed to win the last two sets – by the narrowest of margins – to eke out a five-set triumph. But Crockett was so dominant as a unit Thursday night – winning 25-17, 25-20, and 25-10 – that head coach Andrew Laman said afterward that he didn't even think any particular player "stood out."

"Everybody played so well," he said. "I am so proud of this bunch. A major emphasis we had for tonight was to reduce our own errors – and we did. Our service game was particularly good."

The victory gave Laman has second straight 30-win season (Crockett finished 31-11 last year and is currently 30-11 now this fall) and makes this year's Lady Cav squad the first in school history to gain a State Tournament berth for a fourth straight campaign. It will be Crockett's twelfth trip to the post-season's climactic event.

Laman's club took control of Set #1 about midway through, overcoming an early 9-8 deficit and finally gaining some space at 18-15. A Lola Bailey putaway stretched it to 23-17 shortly thereafter, and Carmen Claybrooks served it out from there.

The second set was more of a struggle, with the host Lady Chargers leading 17-15 until a Madi Collins kill and another by Claybrooks evened the score. Collins added two more to keep things deadlocked at 20-20, but a Thornton smash ignited a closing run that included two more kills for the powerful hitter, and the Lady Cavs prevailed 25-20.

The third set was never close, with Crockett jumping out to a 6-1 advantage, maintaining it to 10-5 on an Addie Whitby kill, moving to 14-6 on a Collins slam, and reaching 22-10 on another pair of Thornton smashed. Emilee Chandler added one for a 23-10 margin, and Claybrooks – who's had quite the week after sparking Crockett's big Region 7-AA semifinal win at Lakeland Prep Monday – finished Covington off with two consecutive kills.

Play for Division I-AA teams begins Tuesday at Blackman High School in Murfreesboro. While it is a double-elimination tournament, just one loss knocks a team out of the championship portion of the bracket.

HIGH SCHOOL SOCCER: Five Lady Cavalier players were selected for various honors when the District 13-AA Tournament concluded Thursday night in Medina.

Ruth Gourley and Rebecca Waddey were named to the regular-season All-District Team, along with the coaches' choice of Co-Defensive Player of the Year Skyleigh Qualls. Avery Thornton and goalkeeper Hannah Wede were chosen as All-Tournament Team performers.

By Ron Barry

HIGH SCHOOL CROSS-COUNTRY: Both Crockett teams placed fourth in the team standings in the TCA Invitational in Jackson, with four runners earning medals. Alivia Hale was tenth and Avery Thornton sixteenth in the girls race, while Jose Aguirre was eleventh and Uriel Diaz sixteenth in the boys event.

Hutsen Stephens – who's been chasing the mark for two years – finally broke through the 20-minute barrier for the 5K route, clocking a 19:58.56 for 34th place. Nathan Bailey finished 31st despite losing a shoe somewhere along the way and still barely missed breaking the PR he set in his previous run.

Coach Julie Nass said both teams now see that their season goals – the girls defeating Obion County at the Sectional, and the boys making it to the State Championships – are possible now. Crockett's girls were just four points behind Obion in this race and were missing Caroline Scruggs from their usual lineup. The boys were just six points behind South Gibson in their race.

Girls Team Scores: (1) Hutchison School 43; (2) Obion County Central 77; (3) USJ 79; (4) Crockett County 81; (5) TCA 87; (6) South Gibson County 146.

Girls Individual Top 20: (1) Carlisle Martin, Hutch 19:55.98; (2) Autumn Haywood, McKenzie 20:01.65; (3) Hadley Haltom, USJ 20:23.69; (4) Caroline Fisher, Hutch 20:55.61; (5) Addyson Kirkland, USJ 21:28.14; (6) Farrah Carson, TCA 21:44.50; (7) Klicey Campbell, Obion 21:56.57; (8) Peyton Tharp, SGC 22:14.44; (9) Julia Campbell, West TN Home Education Association 22:17.59; (10) ALIVIA HALE, Crockett Co 22:19.28; (11) Adley Thompson, Gibson Co 22:30.83; (12) Eva Lewis, Lexington 22:31.28; (13) Neela Wilson, TCA 22:50.03; (14) Anne Olsen, Hutch 23:05.71; (15) Avery Coffey, Obion 23:24.55; (16) AVERY THORNTON, Crockett Co 23:26.52; (17) Morgan McMahon, Hutch 23:45.01; (18) Anna Fox, WTHEA 23:51.37; (19) Chloe Adcock, Obion 23:57.53; (20) Aven Trammell, USJ 24:30.75. Other Crockett Runners: (22) Olivia Barger 24:39.13; (24) Ruth Gourley 24:44.54; (34) Anahy De La Rosa 26:34.91; (41) Hannah Wede 27:41.79; (43) Marley Thornton 28:00.74; (46) Cesia Sanchez 28:46.68; (54) Isabella Aguirre 31:52.18; (55) Catherine Scruggs 32:01.88; (58) Britzel Perez 37:24.00.

Boys Team Scores: (1) Obion County Central 67; (2) WTHEA 75; (3) South Gibson County 100; (4) Crockett County 106; (5) Lexington 125; (6) Augustine 125; (7) Milan 153; (8) TCA 181; (9) Scotts Hill 224.

Boys Individual Top 20: (1) Malik Williams, Adamsville 16:43.02; (2) Clay Pruett, SGC 16:50.24; (3) Liam Johnson, Augustine 17:22.86; (4) Sammy Williams, Augustine 17:38.23; (5) Cal Fawcett, McKenzie 17:39.66; (6) Jason McNair Jr, USJ 17:54.92; (7) Jacob Pace, Lexington 17:55.63; (8) Carter Molands, Obion 17:56.48; (9) Duncan Brake, Milan 17:59.95; (10) Caleb Smith, WTHEA 18:00.65; (11) JOSE AGUIRRE, Crockett Co 18:04.90; (12) Briar Lofton, Obion 18:06.99; (13) Alister Wallace, McKenzie 18:07.21; (14) Ashton Wilson, WTHEA 18:10.64; (15) Gray Vance, TCA 18:15.16; (16) URIEL DIAZ, Crockett Co 18:16.22; (17) William Dahl, WTHEA 18:21.17; (18) Easton Nelson, SGC 18:26.86; (19) Zach Chumley, Obion 18:28.68; (20) Levi Dahl, WTHEA 18:29.23. Other Crockett Runners: (31) Nathan Bailey 19:40.50; (34) Hutsen Stephens 19:58.56; (42) Gabe Williams 20:29.75; (45) Jose Diaz 20:41.08; (48) Mase Utley 21:18.36; (59) JJ Aguirre 22:46.45; (76) Joseph Melendez 25:19.65.



Above: ... after Carmen Claybrooks slammed this match point kill shot through the Covington defense. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Setter Lakyn Forsythe hollers encouragement at her server as the Lady Cavs try to slam the door on the host Lady Chargers. (Photo by Ron Barry)



By Ron Barry



Above: Wesley Thornton is known for her booming kill shots, but she's also good for a few backward, over-the-head rescues per match. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Madi Collins had a number of kills in this three-set match, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... including this one, in which she annihilated the ball. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Jentry Elmore's hustle in the libero position has been a plus for the Lady Cavs, as she shares the spot ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: ... with acrobatic senior Addie Davidson, who somehow returned this diving dig over the net to set up a Crockett point. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: It's another season of at least 30 wins for Coach Andrew Laman. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry



Above: Kira Bray's improvement -- and her infectious smile -- have been Lady Cavalier highlights this season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

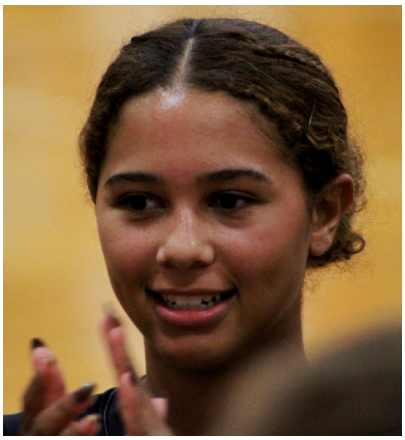
Below: Nataly Amador's athleticism and enthusiasm help keep the back row active for Crockett. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Lola Bailey helped Crockett regain the lead in the opening game, which set Crockett on the right path to the Sectional victory. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Carmen Claybrooks has had a magical week. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Emilee Chandler scores an early kill for the Lady Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: If you see Wesley Thornton smiling on the court, odds are it's because Lakyn Forsythe has gotten her tickled. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: When Wesley Thornton finished off the second set with this slam, the Lady Cavaliers knew they were on their way. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry



Left: Sectional champions for the fourth consecutive year, a school record. (Photo by Beth Williams)



Above: Crockett's Skyleigh Qualls was selected as Co-Defensive Player of the Year by District 13-AA soccer coaches for the regular season. (Photo by Robin Waddey)

Below: Ruth Gourley was an All-District Team choice as well for the Lady Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett medalists at the TCA Invitational Thursday (left to right): Uriel Diaz, Jose Aguirre, Avery Thornton, and Alivia Hale. (Photo by Julie Nass)

