DYER COUNTY NOT YIELDING ITS WEST TENNESSEE CLASS AA VOLLEYBALL DOMINANCE JUST YET



Above: The flow of emotions in Thursday night's first set with Dyer County is best seen on the face of Addie Whitby (2). (Photo by Ron Barry)

For one glorious set, it's hard to imagine that any match, anywhere in West Tennessee this season was played with an all-out intensity and competitive spirit that could surpass what took place Thursday night in Newbern at Dyer County High School in the championship game of the District 13-AA Tournament.

The Lady Choctaws – who have been to five consecutive TSSAA State Tournaments – sent their senior-laden squad onto their home court to battle Crockett County's defiant Lady Cavaliers, who have made the State event the last two years themselves. They've been the only district team to even claim at least one set off Dyer County recently, but haven't been able to get beyond that achievement against the hosts.

But the way Thursday's duel began… and continued… and continued… for a while… maybe, just maybe, an upset was brewing.

Things went so well for Coach Andrew Laman's Lady Cavs that a vicious kill shot from the Lady Choctaws drilled Crockett libero Jentry Elmore flush in the face on the back row – and then bounced straight up into the air, allowing teammates to make a set and a kill of their own for a 4-2 lead. Once everyone knew that Elmore was okay – she was smiling broadly, even as the ball's impact was beginning to redden her face – her teammates burst out laughing, teasing her and shoving her around by the shoulder.

As play resumed, Crockett went ahead 7-4 on a Wesley Thornton smash and then 8-4 on a putaway by Lola Bailey. Soon it was an 11-7 Lady Cav advantage, courtesy of a kill by Kira Bray. It grew to 15-12, with the quality of play and the lengths of the rallies growing longer with each point as the fan bases of both teams were totally invested.

When Dyer County gets challenged, however, it knows how to respond – all six starters are seniors – and eventually the Lady Choctaws eased ahead 17-16 until another Thornton kill tied it up again.

The score went to 18-18, then suddenly 21-18 in Crockett's favor, and each rally alternated moments of held breath and bursts of joyous screaming. But – as Dyer County does so well – soon it was tied at 21-21.

Crockett's Madi Collins scored a kill to push the visitors back in front, and a couple of minutes later, Laman's club was serving for the set with a 24-22 lead. But the Choctaws' Katie Beth Caldwell and Blair Acree stepped up with big plays, and Dyer County went back up 25-24. (You must win by at least two points in high school volleyball.)

Thornton kept the upset hopes alive with yet another kill to tie the game at 25-25, but Acree took charge on the next two rallies until the hosts had secured a 27-25 first-set triumph.

"The quality of play in that set was as good as it gets," Laman said after the match. "We played so well, but I feel when Dyer County's girls see a run of points against them, they dig deep and find some extra fight that enables them to snap back every time. Our girls don't quite have that mindset yet, since we still have a lot of players who don't have the experience that a senior group has. But I hope we learn it soon. Our future is bright, but we've got to step up our determination if we're going to succeed against the best teams."

Dyer County steadily stretched a lead throughout a second set in which Crockett had lost some of its fire, and the Lady Choctaws took it 25-16.

"It's understandable," Laman said. "Our girls played so hard in that first set, only to see it slip away. It hurts, and it showed in that second set. But we've got to learn to sustain the effort, no matter what the scoreboard says. We'll get there. I thought we played much better in the third set."

Better, but not as well as Dyer County. After fighting to a 10-10 deadlock, the Lady Cavs saw the Lady Choctaws grab 15 of the next 23 points to win Set #3 25-18 and claim the district title yet again. It's one they'll relish, because it may be a while before it happens again. With the six seniors graduating, and the school reclassified to AAA next season, a rebuilding effort is probably in order.

By Ron Barry

Several Crockett players received individual awards after the match. Thornton, Collins, Lakyn Forsythe, and Addie Davidson were named to the season's All-District Team. Forsythe was selected as the Setter of the Year and Collins as the Server of the Year in district play. Thornton and Bray – both of whom earned high praise from Lady Cav assistant coach Bobby Rawson – were chosen to the All-Tournament Team.

"Kira has improved so much this year," Rawson said. "Even though she's a senior, she's barely played up until now because of injuries and the talent we had on the front line when she was younger. But she completely changed the game plan that Milan had for us in the semifinal, because they were trying to avoid her. And Wesley – let's just say if you were going to pick a player from this district to build a team around, and you could only pick one, it would be her, because of her versatility and her athleticism."

Davidson and Carmen Claybrooks were named as District Scholars – an award to seniors at the top level of academic grade point averages (GPAs) – and Collins and manager Tink Willis earned All-Academic Team honors.

Crockett is now 28-10 but advances to the Region 7-AA Tournament, where they will face District 14-AA champion and tournament host Lakeland Prep on Monday in the semifinals in an elimination game. It is tentatively set for a 6:30 start, following a 5:00 duel between Dyer County and Bolivar Central.



Above: Carmen Claybrooks (right) jokes with Crockett's Jentry Elmore after a Lady Choctaw kill shot went flush off Elmore's face and was turned into a point for the Lady Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: That weird occurrence prompted some serious razzing from teammates Kira Bray and Wesley Thornton, who couldn't contain their laughter at Elmore's expense. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: The intensity of the competition can be seen in the eyes of Crockett's Lakyn Forsythe as she talks with Lola Bailey between points. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Lakyn Forsythe (11) -- conversing here with Wesley Thornton and Madi Collins -- was named All-District and the Setter of the Year. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Named as the district's Hitter of the Year was another thorn in Crockett's side, Dyer County's outstanding Katie Beth Caldwell. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Big hits and blocks by Blair Acree swung the first set in Dyer County's favor in a superbly-played 27-25 decision. (Photo by Ron Barry)

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By Ron Barry





Left: Carmen Claybrooks goes low to make a dig for the Lady Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Nataly Amador was trying to keep her teammates fired up after the disappointment of letting the opening set slip away. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Addie Davidson, named to the All-District Team for the regular season, makes another one of her acrobatic moves to keep a ball up in the air. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Madi Collins -- a force for the Lady Cavs all season -- was another Crockett player named to the All-District Team, also chosen as Server of the Year. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Wesley Thornton -- another All-District Team and All-Tournament Team selection -- was making her usual delivery of several smashes. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Your 2026 District 13-AA Tournament Runners-Up: the Crockett County Lady Cavaliers. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Kira Bray -- celebrating a point here with Nataly Amador -- was a worthy All-Tournament Team selection. (Photo by Ron Barry)