LADY CAVS MAKE SCHOOL HISTORY AT TSSAA STATE XC CHAMPIONSHIPS



Above: Caroline Scruggs (left) slips past a Valor Collegiate Prep runner near the 3K mark Friday on her way to a new personal record that helped launch Crockett to school history. (Photo by Ron Barry)

At the beginning of the cross-country season, Julie Nass set an audacious goal for her Lady Cavaliers.

The Crockett County head coach told her girls she believed they could win the West Sectional this year. That would mean, of course, beating Obion County Central, which Crockett had never done – not even in another school's invitational meet somewhere.

Well, it didn't happen. Even though the Lady Cavs did finally defeat the Lady Rebels in a meet early in the season, Obion rebounded to once again claim the West Sectional crown as Nass's girls placed second. Some of the Crockett girls joked at the time "let's just beat them at the State."

Fast forward to Friday's TSSAA Division I Class AA State Championships, held at Shelby Farms Park in Memphis. Nass's squad was making its third straight appearance at the event, so she had a reasonable level of optimism – until, at just the 2K mark of the 5K race, senior Avery Thornton, one of Crockett's top performers, was forced to pull out of the contest due to severe congestion from a cold she'd been fighting all week. She ended up in a nearby ambulance getting an oxygen treatment (and is all right now).

Without Avery, the Lady Cavs' chances of defeating Obion went from slim to razor thin. Except for one thing: the remaining Crockett runners cranked up a "team effort" performance for the sport psychology textbooks.

Nass's top five finishers ALL set personal records for covering a 5K distance. It began with top Lady Cav runner Alivia Hale – still a junior – finishing a respectable 65th overall, but more importantly coming in ahead of Obion's best finisher Klicey Campbell.

Next – in an even bigger surprise – was the run produced by sophomore Caroline Scruggs, who had missed the West Sectional while rehabbing a knee injury she had suffered during Crockett's soccer season. With athletic tape surrounding her kneecap, Caroline convinced Nass she could hold up over the hilly Shelby Farms course and proceeded to place 84th, ahead of every Lady Rebel racer except Campbell.

Right on her heels was freshman Olivia Barger, who also beat all of Obion's runners except Campbell and finished 90th overall. And when sophomore Ruth Gourley (105th) and senior (but XC "rookie") Anahy De La Rosa (123rd) turned in their personal record times, their bunching offset the remainder of the Lady Rebel racers and slipped Crockett ahead of Obion in the final standings. Anahy, who has cut minutes of her 5K times as her initial season in the sport has progressed, knocked another 32 seconds off her previous PR in Friday's run.

When all the final calculations were completed, school history was achieved in at least three ways: (1) Crockett placed 13th as a team overall, the school's highest finish ever at the State meet; (2) the Lady Cavs finished as the highest-placing Class AA school in all of West Tennessee; and (3) Nass said it was the first time she could recall having five runners break the 25-minute barrier during a State meet. And sophomore Marley Thornton wasn't that far off from making it six.

"I'm incredibly proud of this team for what they accomplished here," Nass said. "For them to pull this off even with Avery going down is just amazing. I hate it for Avery that her final race had to end this way, but she made a gallant effort just to even try for a while. What more can you ask for at a State meet? Five PRs and our best finish ever – and these girls are already talking about what they need to do next summer to be even more ready for next year. It's an exciting time in this program."

In the boys 5K race, Crockett had a pair of freshmen earn their way into the field and gain some valuable experience for the rest of their careers. Jose Aguirre finished in 94th place and Nathan Bailey was 171st.

Cross-country as a sport has been dominated by teams from East and Middle Tennessee, where training in more mountainous areas produces tremendous benefits. But Nass remains hopeful that the Crockett program can continue inching closer to the standards established by the other regions of the state.

Complete results from Friday's State Championships in Division I-AA:

Girls 5K Team Scores: (1) Signal Mountain 77; (2) Hume-Fogg Academic [Nashville] 78; (3) Liberty Creek 103; (4) Central Magnet 114; (5) Cherokee 204; (6) Anderson County 211; (7) DeKalb County 291; (Sullivan East 312; (9) Montgomery Central 316; (10) Cumberland County 323; (11) Greeneville 325; (12) Volunteer 364; (13) CROCKETT COUNTY 369; (14) Obion County Central 372; (15) Lakeland Prep 375; (16) Heritage 389; (17) Lawrence County 416; (18) Alcoa 428; (19) Martin Luther King 429; (20) Lexington 447; (21) Millington Central 503; (22) South Gibson County 563; (23) Memphis East 580; (24) Raleigh Egypt 682.

Girls Individual Top 20: (1) Chaiti Ainapure, Liberty Creek 18:49.81; (2) Ella Tyler, Anderson Co 18:51.99; (3) Alaina Uselton, Westview 18:57.00; (4) Rachel Benefield, Central Magnet 19:01.22; (5) Addy Stannard, Liberty Creek 19:15.85; (6) Braydin Baresel, Unicoi Co 19:19.22; (7) Eliza Albrechtsen, Signal Mtn 19:24.14; (Maggie Moore, Greeneville 19:26.66; (9) Violet Evans, Hume-Fogg 19:31.00; (10) Adelyn King, Central Magnet 19:33.96; (11) Caylin Hale, Cumberland Co 19:40.55; (12) Avis Malone, Signal Mtn 19:43.11; (13) Polly Kalonick, Hume-Fogg 19:46.28; (14) Rachel Ostrander, Cumberland Co 19:47.82; (15) Arvella Nave, Elizabethton 19:49.56; (16) Jordan Walker, Anderson Co 19:58.04; (17) Alasia Perriera, Creek Wood 19:58.69; (18) Anna Mae Boyd, Cherokee 20:00.97; (19) Sarah Edwards, Fairview 20:02.16; (20) Eloise Poag, Hume-Fogg 20:08.15.

CROCKETT COUNTY FINISHERS: (65) Alivia Hale 22:19.79; (84) Caroline Scruggs 23:22.78; (90) Olivia Barger 23:34.61; (105) Ruth Gourley 24:10.95; (123) Anahy De La Rosa 24:45.70; (136) Marley Thornton 25:24.61. Total Number of Finishers: 175.

Boys 5K Team Scores: (1) Central Magnet [Murfreesboro] 69; (2) Liberty Creek 75; (3) Martin Luther King 109; (4) Signal Mountain 112; (5) Greeneville 237; (6) Chester County 269; (7) Unicoi County 269; (Cumberland County 272; (9) Hume-Fogg Academic 291; (10) Volunteer 294; (11) Heritage 299; (12) Anderson County 302; (13) Fairview 310; (14) Lakeland Prep 342; (15) Red Bank 364; (16) Elizabethton 382; (17) DeKalb County 405; (18) Obion County Central 459; (19) Lexington 490; (20) Westview 507; (21) Marshall County 523; (22) Memphis East 550; (23) Millington Central 586.

Boys Individual Top 20: (1) Trey Bailey, Greeneville 14:54.80; (2) Avery Young, Montgomery Central 15:01.38; (3) Cameron Hardy, Anderson Co 15:43.82; (4) John Ferguson, Liberty Creek 15:54.84; (5) Brent Ferrell, MLK 16:06.10; (6) Parker Ward, Central Mag 16:10.62; (7) Nate Dyer, Central Mag 16:10.79; (Mckinley Norris, Unicoi Co 16:11.71; (9) Josiah Aman, Valor Collegiate 16:16.61; (10) Jackson Oliver, Liberty Creek 16:17.11; (11) Jason Dyer, Central Mag 16:20.76; (12) William Edwards, Fairview 16:24.44; (13) Miles Fowler, MLK 16:34.07; (14) Joshua West, Liberty Creek 16:35.52; (15) Logan Pendergrass, Red Bank 16:42.98; (16) John Cutler, Anderson Co 16:44.87; (17) Carson Phillips, Central Mag 16:51.48; (18) Franklin Randa, Sycamore 16:53.50; (19) Jules Richard, Greeneville 16:53.65; (20) Mitch Simmons, Signal Mtn 16:56.85.

CROCKETT COUNTY FINISHERS: (94) Jose Aguirre 18:44.37; (171) Nathan Bailey 21:19.74. Total Number of Finishers: 190.



Above: Alivia Hale finishes with a flair Friday at the TSSAA State XC Championships, leading the Lady Cavaliers to the best finish among West Tennessee Class AA schools. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett's TSSAA State Championships contingent Friday in Memphis. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Freshman Olivia Barger -- who goes all out in virtually everything she does -- finishes with a mad sprint at the end of Friday's State 5K at Shelby Farms Park. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Anahy De La Rosa, who has made incredible strides as a senior "rookie," knocked 32 seconds off her previous PR in Friday's State run. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Sophomore Marley Thornton (far left) leads a pack of runners near the 3K mark of Friday's race. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Greeneville's Trey Bailey was the boys individual champion in Division I Class AA. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Sophomore Ruth Gourley (second from right) flies past a handful of racers down the final stretch to help the Lady Cavs gain their highest finish ever in a State meet. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: This final sprint down the stretch earned Liberty Creek's Chaiti Ainapure the girls individual title. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Below: Jose Aguirre, a medalist as a freshman in every regular-season meet Crockett attended, got his first taste of running in the TSSAA State Meet and placed 94th. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Barely a year removed from a bone marrow transplant, Cav freshman Nathan Bailey was running in the TSSAA State XC Championships Friday. (Photo by Ron Barry)