

CAV FOOTBALLERS WIN ONE FOR REESE



Above: Antuan Hobson (2) breaks through the banner.



Above: Deuce Greenhill (0) returns the opening kickoff for a touchdown, with Amarion Hobson (4), Carson Pruitt (34), and Demo Pickens (3) clearing the way.

By Ron Barry

God invented a word for humans to use when they have trouble describing what they just saw.

That word is: **Wow!**

And that's about the only word in the existing vocabulary that comes anywhere close to summarizing what Coach Kevin Ward's Crockett County football team - after a week that would sap the strength out of the sturdiest of hearts - managed to accomplish Friday night in its first game after the passing of beloved manager Reese Barker, the 16-year-old daughter of assistant coach David Barker.

The Cavaliers steamrolled visiting Jackson North Side 39-15, fueled by a "togetherness" that Ward said he had not seen prior to the tragic event of the past week.

"These young men changed this week," Ward said after the game. "They were pulling for each other, leaning on each other. What they experienced has been so hard, for everyone. But they proved tonight that they have the character to embrace hard, because that's what it takes to get through so many challenges in life."

Ward thanked the players, the school, and the community - "anyone who's had anything to do with supporting the Barker family and this team through this situation" - and told them all he was so grateful to be a part of a place that comes together so strongly and graciously when a helping hand is needed.

"I am so proud of the way you guys handled this all week," he told the team. "And I saw you tonight flying around on that field with a purpose and a focus that I haven't seen in a while. You wanted to #LiveLikeReese tonight, and honor her memory. Well, we need to make that the standard around here now. We need to be that way all the time."

No one was sure how a group of teens would perform after losing a classmate who touched so many lives and, as the team manager and the daughter of one of the coaches, was tremendously invested in their program. But from the opening kickoff - a moment that fans will remember the rest of their lives, like the Kirk Gibson World Series homer, the Olympic hockey team "Miracle on Ice," the Tiger Woods putt finally dropping to clinch the Masters, or President Bush throwing out the first pitch in New York after the 9/11 attack in 2001 - there seemed to be an invisible power lifting the players throughout the contest.

Caden "Deuce" Greenhill gathered in the opening boot at his own 15-yard-line, burst straight toward the middle of the field, and then looked like he was being drawn to the end zone by a super-energized magnet or pulled toward it by a gigantic vacuum cleaner. With only 11 seconds off the clock, the Cavs had scored, and Richter machines may have been tracing reports of the ground shaking in Crockett County.

But there were other "miraculous" things going on.

How about one identical twin throwing a touchdown pass to his identical twin brother? How about the Cavs only punting twice, and each time they never lost possession because North Side receivers muffed both catches and Crockett recovered? How about a freshman - Dakylan Woods - coming up with two of the four lost fumbles from the visitors? And how about another guy who'd never played a game of varsity football rushing for 103 yards on 10 carries - almost all of it in the second half - and scoring a pair of touchdowns? And how about the pressure-packed performance of assistant coach Tyler Gadlen - the man tasked with sending in plays to the offense in the absence of his colleague?

It was a night to remember, no less for the number of people visibly weeping on the field after the new video board flashed up "This One's for Reese." There were more tears than at an onion peelers convention.

"This One's for Reese" was pretty much the emotion of the evening. It's how Greenhill and Gabe Dupree - the previously mentioned "rookie" who'd completed his first game - expressed the players' mindset. "That was it," Greenhill said succinctly as Dupree nodded. "We just wanted to do it for Reese."

After Avery Hurst's extra point kick made it 7-0 Crockett with just the 11 seconds gone - and moments after Cavalier Stadium stopped shaking from Greenhill's speedy touchdown - North Side temporarily returned some doubt to the eventual outcome by responding with a 64-yard scoring drive of its own, capped by a one-yard quarterback sneak from Carson Graves. Kaden Barlow's kick tied it at 7-7.

Following an exchange of fumbles, North Side shanked a punt from its own 24. It went out of bounds just three yards upfield, and on the second ensuing play, Greenhill broke around the left side for a 24-yard touchdown gallop. The talented sophomore was on his way to 148 yards in only 16 carries - not even including his opening kickoff dash. Hurst again added the extra point for a 14-7 Cav advantage with 2:29 remaining in the first period.

Early in the second quarter, Crockett's Demo Pickens intercepted a Graves pass at the Cav 30, and the hosts marched 70 yards to another tally. The final 34 came when quarterback Grayson Lambert, after a play-action fake, tossed a beautiful throw to his wide-open brother Preston Lambert, and the twins got to celebrate their first varsity connection together.

Following a scoreless third quarter, Crockett dodged a bullet when Woods leaped on a North Side fumble in the end zone Crockett was defending. One play after the touchback, Greenhill exploded for a 79-yard touchdown and pushed Crockett's lead to 26-7. Blocks from the likes of Jordan Rainey, Joseph Gould, Kevin Garduno, Preston Vernon, Zerafin Guardian, Carson Pruitt, Ethan Allen, and other linemen provided the opening, as it did also when Dupree raced 56 yards for another tally barely a minute later.

North Side trimmed the advantage to 32-15 with a four-yard score from Cortez Manley and a two-point conversion, but Preston Lambert recovered another visitors' fumble on a punt return and set up another Dupree touchdown, this one from five yards out with just 45 seconds left in the game. Hurst's extra point set the final score at 39-15.

Several of Crockett's defensive stops in the contest were keyed by sophomore linebacker Jacob Knox, who made numerous tackles. The Cavs outgained North Side 303-295 in total yards, but also forced five turnovers to cause the lopsided scoring margin.

Crockett travels to Ripley this coming Friday night for a 7 p.m. contest. "They're a good team with a lot of talented athletes," Ward said. "We'll have to play a very solid game to be successful."

Final Statistics

Rushes-Yards: CC - Deuce Greenhill 16-148, Gabe Dupree 10-103, Demo Pickens 2-7, Grayson Lambert 6-(-5), **Team 34-253**. **NS** - Kelyn Pittman 21-80, Carson Graves 10-45, Javonte Smith 1-21, Kylan Roberson 3-13, Cortez Manley 1-4, Korliss Hudson 1-2, Davien Caruthers 1-(-6), **Team 38-159**.

Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC - G. Lambert 3-5-50-0. **NS** - Graves 9-20-136-1, Smith 0-1.

Receptions-Yards: CC - Preston Lambert 1-34, Antuan Hobson 1-10, Willie Walker 1-6. **NS** - Caruthers 5-60, Roberson 3-62, Miles Howard 1-14.

Total Yards: CC 303, **NS** 295.

First Downs: CC 9, **NS** 14.

Fumbles-Lost: CC 2-1, **NS** 6-4.

Penalties-Yards: CC 3-24, **NS** 8-52.

Punts-Yards: CC 2-85, **NS** 2-21.

Below: Gabe Dupree (29) takes a handoff from Grayson Lambert (1) and cuts behind blocks by Joseph Gould (71) and Jordan Rainey (70).





Above: Demo Pickens (3) intercepts a North Side pass



Above: Preston Lambert (13) celebrates his TD reception with twin brother Grayson Lambert (1), who threw it.



Above: Coach Kevin Ward addresses his team after the game.



Above: Gabe Dupree (29) and Deuce Greenhill (0) combined for 251 yards rushing and five touchdowns.



Left: The final scoreboard tells it all.