

# CROCKETT FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS BEGIN ONE WEEK EARLY



**Above:** As always, Crockett's creative cheerleaders have a sign ready to fire up the boys.



**Above:** The first quarter belonged to Willie Walker, who set up the first touchdown with a 24-yard pass reception and the second with this interception return.

## By Ron Barry

"We've proven we have as good a football team as there is in this region. But we have to win this coming week just to get into the playoffs. So our playoffs begin one week earlier than everyone else's."

With those words, Coach Kevin Ward expressed the balance and the craziness of this 2023 Crockett County football season in Region 7-4A.

Speaking right after a heartbreaking 28-23 loss at Haywood County – in a game the Cavaliers controlled a majority of the time – Ward correctly noted that Crockett must defeat Fayette-Ware this coming Friday night in Somerville just to get into the TSSAA playoffs. But he also stressed that the Cavs have as good a chance to advance as anybody – once they get in.

"We could have been – probably should have been – undefeated in the region right now," he said, "but instead we've got to fight just to make sure we get into the playoffs. And that's okay. I'm not disappointed in the way we played against Haywood. We have two region losses, and each time the other team made one more play than we did. That just means any of us could beat any of the others, or lose to any of the others, once the playoffs start."

Haywood and Dyer County have wrapped up the top two seeds and will host playoff games in the opening round. Both are 3-0 in the region and will play each other Friday night to see who's number one and who's number two. After that, Crockett is 1-2, Obion County is 1-3, and Fayette-Ware is 0-3. If the Cavs beat Fayette-Ware, they'll be the three seed and Obion will be the fourth seed. If Fayette-Ware wins and all three teams are 1-3, the tiebreaker comes down to regular season records and muddies the water somewhat.

This past week, Ward's Cavs completely dominated the host Tomcats in the opening quarter, building a 14-0 lead on a seven-yard sweep by Demo Pickens and a 27-yard run by Deuce Greenhill, which followed a 24-yard pass interception return by Willie Walker.

But the game really turned (somewhat) in the second period, when Crockett ran 27 plays to just seven for Haywood, but scored just three points to the Tomcats' seven. Haywood got on the scoreboard with 8:08 left before intermission when Kemonte Williams tallied from two yards out after a 45-yard scamper by Cam Miller and a 23-yard pass from Miller to Kobe Wilson set it up.

The Cavaliers responded promptly with a 19-yard pass from Grayson Lambert to Greenhill, moving the ball inside the Tomcat 20. But a fumbled snap on a second-down play stalled Crockett's momentum and eventually forced the visitors to settle for a 35-yard field goal by Avery Hurst. His boot hit the right upright and slithered over the crossbar by the width of the football to give Crockett a 17-7 advantage with 3:34 remaining in the second quarter.

Two plays later, Jordan Rainey recovered a Haywood fumble at the Tomcat 24, but Crockett used so much time on its next five running plays – which only moved the ball to the 12 – that it forced a second-down pass play with 16 seconds left, which fell incomplete. When the third down snap was fumbled and recovered again, the Cavs had to try another field goal, but this one missed wide to the right. The lead was still 17-7, but Haywood had to feel as if it had dodged not just a bullet, but a full artillery round.

The third quarter was a reverse of the second. The Tomcats had the ball for all but six plays, even though Crockett scored another touchdown between the Haywood possessions.

Miller broke a 35-yard run to begin the period, and then threw a 20-yard scoring pass to Wilson to make it 17-14. Ward's club immediately answered with a 62-yard toss from Lambert to Greenhill down to the Haywood two. Freshman Dakylan Woods crashed it in on his second try from a yard out, and the lead was 23-14 after the extra point failed.

The hosts responded with an 18-play drive that burned eight minutes off the clock, but resulted in a four-yard score by Miller with 24 seconds remaining in the period. Javet Sanchez kicked the extra, and it was now a 23-21 game entering the final stanza.

Crockett advanced the ball into Tomcat territory on a 13-yard pass from Lambert to Pickens, but eventually punted. Joseph Gould rolled it dead at the Haywood nine, but on the fourth snap after that – on a third-and-four situation – Williams found a huge hole up the middle and roared 71 yards for the go-ahead touchdown with 7:36 left.

The Cavs used several quarterback keepers by Lambert and a 15-yard pass interference penalty to get the ball all the way down to the Tomcat 25, but Lambert then was hit for a three-yard loss, threw an incompleteness on the next play, and was picked off on third down by Haywood's Caden Harris.

Haywood survived 13 penalties for 125 yards, but rolled up 427 yards in total offense against a Crockett defense playing without steady linebacker Carson Pruitt, sidelined with a broken arm from the previous week. The Cavs managed 242 yards offensively, but never forced Haywood to punt.

So it comes down to Friday night's duel in Somerville: beat Fayette-Ware, and Crockett is in the playoffs and guarantees a winning season.

"The only bad news is that we can't play at home in the first week of the playoffs," Ward said. "But if we get in, everybody starts over at 0-0, and we know we can play with anybody. We had a great week of preparation before Haywood, and for the most part, we played well. We've had a few lapses in every game; if we ever put it all together on the same night, we'll be a very hard team to beat."

**Final Statistics**

**Rushes-Yards: CC** - Deuce Greenhill 13-58, Grayson Lambert 16-33, Demo Pickens 3-18, Dakylan Woods 5-6, **Team 37-115. HAY** - Cam Miller 30-244, Kemonte Williams 14-110, Carlos Hines 1-10, **Team 45-364.**

**Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC** - G. Lambert 6-13-127-1. **HAY** - Hines 4-9-44-1, Miller 2-2-19-0, **Team 6-11-63-1.**

**Receptions-Yards: CC** - Greenhill 2-81, Willie Walker 1-24, Pickens 3-22. **HAY** - Kobe Wilson 4-50, J.T. Byrum 1-7, Zyon Washington 1-7.

**Interceptions: CC** - Walker 1-24. **HAY** - Caden Harris 1-0.

**Total Yards: CC 242, HAY 427.**

**First Downs: CC 11, HAY 14.**

**Fumbles-Lost: CC 3-0, HAY 1-1.**

**Penalties-Yards: CC 3-20, HAY 13-125.**

**Punts-Yards: CC Joseph Gould 2-68, HAY 0-0.**

**Season Statistics (9 Games; Record 5-4; Region 1-2)**

**Rushes-Yards: CC** - Deuce Greenhill 160-1,157, Dakylan Woods 39-254, Grayson Lambert 77-195, Gabe Dupree 28-181, Demo Pickens 19-111, Carson Pruitt 5-31, Ben Burgess 4-(-1), **Team 332-2,051. Opponents 352-2,109.**

**Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC** - G. Lambert 50-101-894-3, Ben Burgess 1-2-0-0, **Team 51-103-894-3. Opponents 67-123-974-10.**

**Receptions-Yards: CC** - Deuce Greenhill 8-215, Antuan Hobson 12-181, Amarion Hobson 5-153, Willie Walker 10-137, Preston Lambert 5-102, Demo Pickens 8-70, Carson Pruitt 3-36, **Team 51-894. Opponents 67-974.**

**Interceptions: CC**-Demo Pickens 4-64, Antuan Hobson 3-64 (1 TD return), Willie Walker 1-24, Gabe Dupree 1-13, Dakylan Woods 1-0, **Team 10-165. Opponents 3-45.**

**Points (TDs-2PC-XP-FG-P):** Greenhill 19-0-0-0-114, Woods 6-1-0-0-38, Avery Hurst 0-0-28-2-34, Antuan Hobson 3-1-0-0-20, Preston Lambert 2-1-0-0-14, Walker 2-0-0-0-12, Dupree 2-0-0-0-12, Pickens 2-0-0-0-12, Grayson Lambert 1-0-0-0-6, Pruitt 1-0-0-0-6, Amarion Hobson 1-0-0-0-6.

**Total Yards: CC 2,792, Opponents 2,967.**

**First Downs: CC 104, Opponents 109.**

**Fumbles-Lost: CC 21-7, Opponents 22-11.**

**Penalties-Yards: CC 32-228,**

**Opponents 61-502.**

**Punts-Yards-Avg: CC** - Joseph Gould

**20-799-40.0, Opponents 20-557-27.9.**

**Points Scored: CC 274, Opponents 203.**



**Above:** Deuce Greenhill (0) scored his 19th touchdown of the season, going all the way up the hill in the left corner of the end zone to celebrate.



**Above:** As Jordan Rainey (70) provides pass protection, quarterback Grayson Lambert (1) has his choice of three different receivers on this play.



**Above:** Jordan Rainey (right, below the three Haywood players) recovered this fumble with 2:56 left in the half, but Crockett couldn't add to its lead.



**Above** Avery Hurst (85) booted this 35-yard field goal out of Landon Wicker's hold to give the Cavs a 17-7 lead.



**Above** Antuan Hobson (2) returns this kickoff in the third quarter, looking for blocks from Willie Walker (6) and Dylan Pigue (21).



**Above** The Cavs missed the defensive presence of senior linebacker Carson Pruitt, who broke his arm in last week's game with PURE Academy.

**Below:** Greenhill tries to outrun the rest of the Tomcat defense, but was eventually dragged down at the Haywood two.



**Right:** Deuce Greenhill (0) hauled in this 62-yard pass from Grayson Lambert to set up Crockett's third touchdown.



**Below:** Freshman Dakylan Woods (32) ducks in behind blocks by Jordan Rainey (70), Zerafin Guardian (76), Kentravion Price (57), and Jacob Knox (42) to score from a yard out in the third quarter.



**Left:** Demo Pickens (3) gets blocks from Dakylan Woods (32), Dylan Pigue (21), and Zerafin Guardian (76) on this kickoff return.



**Right:** Greenhill (0) gets away from Haywood's Zikeyus Hill (4), who's been partially blocked by Crockett's Preston Vernon (50).



**Left:** Luke Carter (19) hammers Haywood receiver Kobe Wilson (18) after a short reception.



**Above:** Gabe Dupree (29) and Jacob Knox (42) try to corral the elusive Cam Miller (3), who ran for 244 yards on 30 carries for Haywood.

**Left:** Center Joseph Gould (71) prepares a snap, alongside fellow linemen Preston Vernon (50), Ethan Allen (55), Kevin Garduno (74), and Preston Lambert (13).

