

TWO-POINT CONVERSION INTERCEPTION FINALLY ENDS A SEAT-NUMBING FOOTBALL OPENER



Above: Senior cheerleader Maddie Moore is tickled by the antics of her friends along the fence row prior to the start of Friday's senior opener. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Garet Rawson, pirating up for the evening's "Surf" theme, prepares to lead the Cavaliers through the cheer squad's first banner of the 2024 season. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

The Crockett County community owes Amaron Hobson an immense debt of gratitude.

If the Cavalier junior defensive back hadn't foiled the potential game-tying two-point conversion pass at Jackson North Side Friday night to avoid overtime, we might all still be sitting in that stadium while the guy keeping the "official time" continues to try to figure out how to use whatever device he was employing.

From the lack of efficiency everyone observed, it might have been a sundial. And once the sun set shortly after kickoff, he lost all hope of ever mastering it. Or it might have been an abacus, or an hourglass – perhaps even a barometer for all we know. How else to explain how a 48-minute high school football game took a full three hours to play?

Allow me to set the scene: When fans walked into "The Reservation" – North Side's outdated name for its "Indian"-themed stadium – they found the scoreboard was not functioning at all. Nothing worked – not a single light bulb. The public address announcer said it was the victim of a "recent weather event."

Being a Jackson-Madison County School System facility, that means it should be repaired sometime around the year 2047.

Anyway, it meant that the season-opening football game would be played with the official time being kept on the field, by one of the game officials. That the first quarter alone took longer than a Billy Graham Crusade in which 329 verses of "Just As I Am" are sung during an altar call indicated we were all in for a long night – and only one guy seemed to know exactly how long, because the crew wasn't the most communicative bunch in conveying it to everyone else.

Long story short – except for the actual time it took – Crockett edged North Side 36-34 when Hobson stepped in front of a two-point conversion pass in the North Side end zone for a ginormous interception that all but sealed the deal for the Cavaliers.

"I was expecting them to run the ball, because that's what they'd been doing on their other ones," Hobson said, "so I started creeping up toward the line. But when the ball was snapped, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that the tight end had not blocked anybody and was sliding out into the end zone. So I followed my instincts and dropped back with him, and got in front of the ball.

Hobson's play came with just "1:20" remaining, according to an official. Of course, that could have meant an hour and 20 minutes, the way things had gone beforehand.

As it was, North Side – now out of timeouts – tried an onside kick, but booted it almost directly out of bounds on a horizontal line, coming nowhere close to going the required 10 yards. After that, Crockett was able to run out the remaining shadow on the sundial (or whatever was being used).

"Any win is a good win," Coach Kevin Ward said. "I'm proud of the way our guys hung in there, with all the back-and-forths, the cramping, the confusion with the time – all of that stuff. We've got some things to iron out, especially on pass defense, but we'll work on it and get it done."

The game was wild from the beginning. Crockett's sophomore running back DK Woods zipped 55 yards on the first play from scrimmage (following the season-opening requisite illegal motion penalty on the first snap). After a sack on the next play, sophomore quarterback Ben Burgess found junior receiver Demo Pickens in the right flat, and he scampered 24 yards for the season's first touchdown, and signaled a big night to come. Avery Hurst drilled the extra point, and the Cavs led 7-0.

North Side's ultra-talented Javonte Smith – a junior who's already received collegiate offers from Tennessee and Vanderbilt – fumbled the ball away on a quick pass reception to Crockett's Zerafin Guardian, and Crockett was back in business. A 20-yard pass to Deuce Greenhill, and an ensuing personal foul on North Side, moved the ball all the way to the 20, and a Pickens end-around took it to the 10. Another Indian infraction gave the Cavs a first down at the five, but then North Side's Smith picked off a pass three yards deep in the end zone and galloped all the way to the opposite end zone to turn a potential 14-0 Crockett edge into a 7-6 contest. When Henry Schiebout hooked the extra point to the left, it gave the visitors a conversion edge they would exploit as the game progressed.

It looked like the momentum had shifted, however, when North Side forced a Hurst punt on Crockett's next possession. The hosts drove the ball to the Cav 18, but on the first play of the second quarter, Pickens stepped in front of a Schiebout pass at the Crockett four and zoomed 49 yards with the interception, shifting the impetus again. Crockett used a mix of runs by Woods and Gabe Dupree to pound the ball the remainder of the 47 yards, with Woods barreling in from the eight behind an unyielding block by Willie Walker to get the touchdown. Hurst boomed the extra for a 14-6 Cav advantage.

But big-gain passes from Schiebout to Miles Howard for 36 and 19 yards got North Side back in the end zone, and Howard ran in a two-point conversion to tie things up at 14-14.

The swift Pickens regained Crockett's edge by returning the ensuing kickoff 40 yards to midfield. After Hobson gained six on an end-around, Burgess dropped back and found a wide-open Walker straight down the middle for 44 yards to the one. The Cavs hurried to the line of scrimmage and – as soon as the ball was set – ran their variation of the Philadelphia Eagles' "tush-push" sneak, on which Burgess takes the snap and plows straight ahead while the backs behind him shove him over the goal line. The touchdown made it 20-14 Cavs, and Hurst came on for the extra point. This time, though, holder Kris Phillips took the snap, momentarily pretended to place it for the kick, and then jumped up and tossed to strike to a wide-open Walker in the end zone for a two-point conversion that made it 22-14.

North Side again bounced right back, with Schiebout completing a series of quick passes that picked up first downs and then scrambling 23 yards himself on another play. Demingo Maupins eventually carried it in from seven yards out, followed by a two-point conversion run by Korliss Hudson. The 22-22 deadlock took us to halftime.

North Side had its best chance to gain the upper hand when it received the third-period kickoff and drove from their own 17 to the Cav 23, overcoming four penalties on the march. But Crockett's Austin Carroll made a huge third-down tackle of Schiebout on another scramble, forcing a fourth-down pass play that fell harmlessly incomplete.

Ward's club then marched 77 yards, with first-down gains by Burgess and Dupree setting up an end-around by Greenhill – his only rushing play of the night – and he sped 45 yards for a touchdown after Woods singlehandedly wiped out three Indian tacklers with a crushing block on the play. Hurst's dependable extra made it 29-22 just before the end of the quarter – allegedly, because it still took forever to complete. At times it seemed the crew was adding minutes as bonus points for scoring plays.

Early in the fourth quarter – and remember, all references to time in this story are relative – the teams exchanged punts for the first time before North Side struck again, going 63 yards in six plays, the final one a four-yard dash by running quarterback Quinn Jenkins. But this time Cav linebacker Jake Knox knifed through to tackle Maupins quickly on the two-point conversion try that would have given the hosts their first lead, upholding Crockett's 29-28 edge.

Pickens again delivered on the next kickoff, racing 45 yards to the North Side 39. From there, four straight handoffs to Woods – who rarely is brought down by less than three defenders – produced another score, this time from five yards out when he literally dragged two tacklers the last few yards into the end zone. When Hurst again boomed his extra point through the uprights, Crockett was back to an eight-point lead at 36-28.

At that point, North Side took a tactical risk that backfired. Hurst hooked his kickoff slightly out of bounds, an infraction that gave the hosts an option of taking the ball at their 35. But North Side – hoping that Smith could spring a possible touchdown return – elected to have Hurst re-kick after a five-yard penalty.

But this time Hurst still blasted the ball all the way to the three, keeping it away from Smith at the same time. Davien Caruthers was forced to return it, and when Crockett's Luke Beaird, Squirt Pickens, and Laithon Bonds dragged him down at the 10, North Side had a long way to go and not much time – possibly, who knew for sure? – to get there.

Two plays later, Woods intercepted a Schiebout pass and brought it back 12 yards to the 17. Crockett kept it simple on the next series, content to set up a field goal attempt by Hurst that would put the game out of reach. But first the Cavs tried to draw North Side offside with a fake play call, only to have one of their own players commit an illegal procedure penalty that moved the ensuing kick back five yards, and it just missed to the right upright.

So the hosts had one more chance, and a 34-yard scramble by Schiebout set up an improbable 41-yard "Hail Mary" touchdown pass to the talented Smith, who caught it between two defenders in the right corner of the end zone. The game would now come down to the two-point conversion again for the reeling Cavaliers.

Fortunately, Hobson kept his wits – and his instincts – about him, and he picked off the Jenkins pass attempt. His timing on the play was perfect – and an ironic way to conclude the derriere-numbing clash.

Crockett will host Ripley this coming Friday night in the Cavalier home opener.



Above: A familiar sight this season should be the follow-through of kicker Avery Hurst (85), watching another successful extra point try sail well through the uprights. Holder Kris Phillips (16) even threw a two-point conversion pass Friday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Final Statistics

Rushes-Yards: CC - DK Woods 18-152, Deuce Greenhill 1-45, Gabe Dupree 9-35, Demo Pickens 2-19, Ben Burgess 9-10, Amaron Hobson 2-9, **Team 41-270.**

NS - Henry Schiebout 9-93, Demingo Maupins 3-40, Javonte Smith 6-29, Korliss Hudson 8-17, Quinn Jenkins 4-13, Miles Howard 1-(-2), **Team 31-190.**

Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC - Burgess 3-6-88-1.

NS - Schiebout 17-25-211-2, Jenkins 1-2-18-0, Team 18-27-229-2.

Receptions-Yards: CC - Willie Walker 1-44, Demo Pickens 1-24-1 TD, Greenhill 1-20.

NS - Davien Caruthers 4-64, Smith 5-63-1 TD, Howard 4-57-1 TD, Zaterrious Coman 2-29, Hudson 3-16.

Interceptions: CC - Demo Pickens 1-49, Woods 1-12, **Team 2-61.**

NS - Smith 1-103-1 TD.

Kickoff Returns-Yards: CC - Demo Pickens 2-85, Squirt Pickens 2-37, **Team 4-122.**

NS - Smith 1-45, Howard 1-15, Kymani White 1-11, Caruthers 1-7, **Team 4-78.**

Punt Returns-Yards: CC - none.

NS - Smith 1-14.

Total Scrimmage Plays-Yards: CC 47-358. **NS** 58-419.

First Downs: CC 11, **NS** 16.

Fumbles-Lost: CC 0-0, **NS** 1-1.

Penalties-Yards: CC 10-60, **NS** 11-75.

Punts-Yards: CC - Avery Hurst 3-131-43.7. **NS** - Schiebout 1-33-33.0.

Points (TD-2PC-XP-FG-P): Woods 2-0-0-0-12, Greenhill 1-0-0-0-6, Demo Pickens 1-0-0-0-6, Burgess 1-0-0-0-6, Hurst 0-0-4-0-4, Walker 0-1-0-0-2, **Team 5-1-4-0-36.**

Opponents 5-2-0-0-3

Below: Deuce Greenhill (7), playing as a wideout this season, only ran the ball once Friday on an end-around, but took it all the way 45 yards for a score when DK Woods (32) took out three potential North Side tacklers with this lead block. Carson Bridger (79) cleared a path for Greenhill's cutback. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Sophomore running back DK Woods had an absolute monster star for the Cavaliers, here speeding 55 yards on his very first carry of the contest. He scored twice, ran 18 times for 152 yards, and also intercepted a pass. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Amaron Hobson (4) celebrates after he picks off North Side's final two-point conversion pass to seal Crockett's 36-34 victory in the season opener. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The return game of Demo Pickens (3) accounted for 134 yards on kickoffs of 40 and 45 yards and an interception for 49 more. And he turned a flare pass into a 24-yard touchdown as a receiver. Here he benefits from the blocking of Gunner Williams (49) and Carson Bridger (79). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Linebacker Jake Knox was one of several Cav battling cramps from the heat, but were kept in the game due to tremendous sideline work by athletic trainer Carah-Beth Beck. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Cavalier cheerleader (and golf team member) Rachel Crossnoe surveys the crowd prior to the beginning of the game ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The Crockett County Marching Cavaliers gave a spirited halftime show in front of the North Side crowd, unveiling their new 2024 show for the first time under new band director Trevor Mayhall. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: When on the field, Jake Knox (35) led this crew of gang-tacklers to take down North Side quarterback Henry Schiebout (12). Assisting Knox on the takedown are Colton Mayo (52), Joshua Simmons (78), Austin Carroll (56), and Willie Walker (6). (Photo by Ron Barry)



above: Members of Crockett's cheer squad watch the Crockett Marching Cavaliers perform across the field during the halftime show. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: One of the most telling pictures of the entire game: Demo Pickens (3), here scoring his pass reception touchdown, WAS working hard; the North Side scoreboard was NOT, keeping spectators in the dark all night. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett's third touchdown of the night came after quarterback Ben Burgess (10) hit Willie Walker (6) for a 44-yard pass down the middle to the Indian one, and then Burgess quickly scored on this "tush-push" play where he is shoved over the goal line with help from teammates Karsen Burgess (2), Amarion Hobson (4), Deuce Greenhill (7), Austin Carroll (56), and Colton Mayo (52). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Randle Perry (50) and Zerafin Guardian (76) -- who made a key fumble recovery early in the game for the Cavs -- combine to tackle scrambling North Side quarterback Henry Schiebout near the sideline. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Cav Coach Kevin Ward gives timeout encouragement to Austin Carroll (56), Karen Burgess (2, left), Travis Cork (72), and Nolen Turner (54). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: DK Woods (32) scored one of his touchdowns thanks to an over-and-above blocking effort by Willie Walker (6), who cast off two would-be North Side tacklers as Woods neared the end zone. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Crockett sophomore Mason Dennis (12) wraps his arms around the legs of a North Side kick returner as Cav teammates Gabe Dupree (29), Brody Parlow (5), and Karsen Burgess arrive to lend support. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: This group of rowdy "Surfburns" was vocal in its full support of the Cavalier effort Friday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)



above: ... But at the end of a very long evening, it was the interception heroics of Amarion Hobson that preserved the triumph to launch Crockett's grid season. (Photo by Ron Barry)