

SURPRISE WILDCAT FORMATION, FUMBLE RECOVERIES AID CROCKETT FOOTBALL COMEBACK



Above: It's that time of year when senior Kylee Garrett is hammering volleyball kills one night and slipping into her cheer team outfit the next. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Garett Rawson -- carrying the Cavalier flag -- leads the team out as it crashes through "The Boys Are Back" sign produced by the cheer team. (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

First, the BEST news: JaQarrius Hurdle, the Ripley receiver who was hurt in the last two minutes of the football game with Crockett County Friday night and was carried off the field on a stretcher, is reportedly "okay" now and dealing with nothing more serious than a sore neck. The Cavalier players and cheerleaders each prayed for Hurdle while he was being stabilized on the field by athletic trainer Carah-Beth Beck and a team of emergency responders, and we are grateful to report the positive outcome.

Now, the GOOD news: Crockett is off to a 2-0 start to the season, despite not having nearly approached its highest level of play.

Finally, the LESS GOOD news: It took a surprise offensive formation and two defensive fumble recoveries by the ever-alert Austin Carroll to make the 2-0 happen.

Coach Kevin Ward's Cavaliers looked a bit lackluster for much of Friday's contest, but after falling behind 14-3 with 8:38 remaining in the third quarter, scored the game's last 20 points and escaped with a 23-14 triumph over the visiting Tigers at Cavalier Stadium.

"We didn't play our best the first week against North Side, and we didn't play very well tonight either," Ward said after the game, "but I'm proud that these guys found a way to win. We didn't really have a good week of practice. The players didn't seem entirely focused, and we have to do a better job as coaches to keep that from happening. But wins are hard to come by, and we have two of them now."

Crockett fumbled away a pair of scoring chances in the first half -- one near the Ripley goal line -- and had another touchdown by Demo Pickens called back because of a holding penalty well behind the play. It was the first of two tallies by the snake-bit Pickens negated by holding infractions in the game.

So when Ripley scored with 1:15 left before intermission to take a 7-3 lead, and then scored again on its opening drive of the third quarter, the Cavaliers looked to be solidly seat-belted on the trouble bus.

But that's when Ward and his staff pulled out the "back pocket" portion of their offensive scheme.

Senior speedster Deuce Greenhill -- playing a wide receiver role this season after establishing himself as one of West Tennessee's top running backs in his first three years -- took an end-around handoff from quarterback Ben Burgess, somehow escaped a gaggle of Tiger tacklers just past the line of scrimmage, and galloped 70 yards for a touchdown to put the hosts right back in the battle just 22 seconds after Ripley thought it was pulling away. Avery Hurst's extra point -- he had scored Crockett's only points on the game's first possession with a 30-yard field goal -- cut the Tiger margin to 14-10.

Then, just seven plays later, Cavalier defenders Carroll and Willie (Dre) Walker combined for a hit on Ripley quarterback Sammie Smith, knocking the ball loose near midfield. Carroll pounced on it to give Crockett possession at the Cavalier 48.

This time -- showing the Tigers yet another new wrinkle -- Greenhill lined up in the "Wildcat" formation, a three-man horizontal backfield that offers a variety of options. He took a direct snap from Carroll (the Cav center) and immediately dashed 37 yards to the Ripley 15. After another three-yard "Wildcat" gain by Greenhill, Crockett shifted back to its power lineup for four straight linebacks by DK Woods, who totaled 87 yards on 20 carries during the contest.

Eventually, the Cavs couldn't score on a fourth-and-goal from the two, with the Tiger defense stiffening to pull down Gabe Dupree for no gain, and Ripley regained the ball.

But on the very next play – in the midst of a 14-yard gain by Ripley's Vernon Thompson – Crockett's Amarion Hobson rattled his cage with a jarring tackle, sending the ball onto the ground again. And – again – Carroll was there to cover it up and give the Cavs possession at the 17.

Pickens swept left for 11 yards on first down, and then Crockett went back into the Wildcat. A bobbled snap cost the Cavs a yard on the next play, but then Greenhill took the next one cleanly, faked a handoff to Woods going right, and then swept left end himself, where Willie (Dre) Walker and Karsen Burgess had sealed the only remaining defenders off with screen blocks. Greenhill waltzed into the end zone with 15 seconds left in the third period, and Hurst's extra made it 17-14, Crockett.

With the momentum now completely swinging back in favor of the hosts, Crockett's defense forced a Tiger punt on the next series. A 10-yard return by Pickens put the ball at the Cav 31. Two runs by Woods and a Ripley penalty advanced the ball to midfield, but after suffering a nine-yard sack, Ben Burgess rolled to his right to buy some time and then uncorked a 38-yard bomb to Walker down to the Tiger 21.

Following a three-yard loss on the ensuing play, the Cavs went back to a misdirection play out of the backfield, and Woods rambled 24 yards for what would be the game's final score with 7:16 remaining. The margin was sustained when both Walker and Greenhill picked off Smith pass attempts in the final 3:30.

Of the move to the Wildcat formation, Ward said, "We needed to do something to shake things up a little bit. It's something we practice off and on, and it's a good thing to have in your back pocket when you need it. With the backs we have, we certainly have the personnel to make it work. It was good to see it make a difference tonight."

Greenhill, who only touched the ball offensively twice in the 36-34 opening win over North Side, rushed nine times for 153 yards and two touchdowns, and caught three passes for 17 more yards in this one. Walker caught five passes for 90 yards in one of his best offensive showings.

Ripley's Smith ran for 84 yards on 19 keepers and scored both Tiger touchdowns, ironically on identical 19-yard bursts through the middle. Crockett outgained the visitors in total yardage 358 to 228.

Crockett will now go back on the road to face perhaps West Tennessee's most Jekyll-and-Hyde team of the first two weeks in Lexington Friday night. The Big Red steamrolled Scotts Hill 48-0 in their season opener, and then were held without a single first down in Week 2 when powerful Riverside pummeled them 35-0.

Final Statistics

Rushes-Yards: CC – Deuce Greenhill 9-153, DK Woods 20-87, Demo Pickens 3-20, Gabe Dupree 3-(-1), Ben Burgess 9-(-16), **Team 44-243. RIP** – Sammie Smith 19-84, Vernon Thompson 11-61, Demarcus Barnes 4-14, Austin Thompson 2-2, **Team 36-161.**

Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC – Burgess 9-14-115-1. **RIP** – Smith 5-12-67-2.

Receptions-Yards: CC – Willie (Dre) Walker 5-90, Greenhill 3-17, Karsen Burgess 1-8. **RIP** – Mason Deloach 1-29, JaQarrius Hurdle 2-23, Makhi Maben 2-15.

Interceptions: CC – Walker 1-10, Greenhill 1-0, **Team 2-10. RIP** – Smith 1-0.

Kickoff Returns-Yards: CC – Demo Pickens 1-29, Luke Beaird 1-8, **Team 2-37.**

RIP – None.

Punt Returns-Yards: CC – Demo Pickens 2-18. **RIP** – Hurdle 1-7.

Total Scrimmage Plays-Yards: CC 56-358, **RIP** 48-228.

First Downs: CC 12, **RIP** 10.

Fumbles-Lost: CC 2-2, **RIP** 4-2.

Penalties-Yards: CC 6-45, **RIP** 6-50.

Punts-Yards: CC – Avery Hurst 1-42-42.0. **RIP** – Will Maynard 4-132-33.0.

Points (TD-2PC-XP-FG-P): Greenhill 2-0-0-0-12, Woods 1-0-0-0-6, Hurst 0-0-2-1-5, **Team 3-0-2-1-23. Opponents 2-0-2-**

Season Statistics (Record: 2-0)

Rushes-Yards: CC – DK Woods 38-239, Deuce Greenhill 10-198, Demo Pickens 5-39, Gabe Dupree 12-34, Amarion Hobson 2-9, Ben Burgess 18-(-6), **Team 85-513. Opponents 67-351.**

Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC – Burgess 12-20-203-2. **Opponents 23-39-296-4.**

Receptions-Yards: CC – Willie (Dre) Walker 6-134, Greenhill 4-37, Demo Pickens 1-24-1 TD, Karsen Burgess 1-8, **Team 12-203. Opponents 23-296.**

Interceptions: CC – Demo Pickens 1-49, Woods 1-12, Walker 1-10, Greenhill 1-0, **Team 4-71. Opponents 2-103-1 TD.**

Kickoff Returns-Yards: CC – Demo Pickens 3-114, Squirt Pickens 2-37, Luke Beaird 1-8, **Team 6-159. Opponents 4-78.**

Punt Returns-Yards: CC – Demo Pickens 2-18, **Team 2-18. Opponents 2-21.**

Total Scrimmage Plays-Yards: CC 103-716. Opponents 106-647.

First Downs: CC 23, Opponents 26.

Fumbles-Lost: CC 2-2, Opponents 5-3.

Penalties-Yards: CC 16-105, Opponents 17-125.

Punts-Yards: CC – Avery Hurst 4-173-43.3. **Opponents 5-165-33.0.**

Points (TD-2PC-XP-FG-P): Woods 3-0-0-0-18, Greenhill 3-0-0-0-18, Hurst 0-0-6-1-9, Demo Pickens 1-0-0-0-6, Burgess 1-0-0-0-6, Walker 0-1-0-0-2, **Team 8-1-6-1-59. Opponents 7-2-2-0-4**



Above: Crockett cheerleader Gracie Gaines was all smiles before the start of the festivities. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Crockett's new halftime show features soloists, dancers -- the band members themselves, in some cases, a large rhythm section, and flag performers. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Two plays keyed Crockett's comeback win over Ripley: The first came on a third-quarter end-around run by Deuce Greenhill (7), who somehow escaped this pack of Tiger tacklers near the line of scrimmage ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... and cut back to his right, outrunning the remainder of the Ripley pursuers as the scoreboard reflects how dire the situation was for the Cavaliers at the time. Gabe Dupree (29) and Carson Bridger (79) helped clear the initial path. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The second huge play came when Austin Carroll (56) pounced on this fumble that he and Willie (Dre) Walker produced with a big hit on Ripley quarterback Sammie Smith. Carroll's recovery -- the first of two he made within minutes of each other -- led to the Cavaliers' go-ahead touchdown on another run by Deuce Greenhill. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: It was a tough-luck night for Demo Pickens (3), who had two touchdowns called back -- including one on this very play -- for holding calls that were flagged well behind the plays. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Austin Carroll celebrates the first of his two fumble recoveries that helped turn the game around in the third quarter for Crockett over Ripley. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett's Amarion Hobson trips up Ripley runner Austin Thompson with an ankle grab, even after having been blocked to the ground. Hobson later caused the Tiger fumble that sustained the game momentum in the Cavs' favor late in the third quarter. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Avery Hurst (85) put Crockett up 3-0 with this 30-yard field goal out of the hold of Kris Phillips (16) on the initial Cavalier possession of the contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... exemplified by Crockett's tennis doubles partnership of Brennan Morris (left) and Izzy Yearwood. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: The Cavalier Crazies went with a "White-Out" theme for the battle with Ripley ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Representative of almost any DK Woods (32) run is trail of dazed potential tacklers on the ground and a pack of others still trying to bring him down, while Willie Walker (6) continues to block. Woods ran for 87 yards on 20 carries and a touchdown Friday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: But DK Woods (32) can also deliver a hit, as he does here with Austin Carroll (56) on Ripley's Sammie Smith as Cav defenders Jake Knox (35) and Zerafin Guardian (76) arrive to lend support. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Nolen Turner (54) and Demo Pickens (3) try to cool off during a timeout. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: One of the busiest people at Friday's game was Crockett athletic trainer Carah-Beth Beck (left), here helping Cav lineman Zerafin Guardian (76) off the field after a third-quarter leg injury. It was Beck's careful approach that stabilized Ripley's JaQarrius Hurdle, injured seriously with just under two minutes to go, significantly contributing to his ability to recover after the game. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: At halftime, Crockett County Director of Schools P. A. Pratt (left) and current chair of the Board of Education Jasper Taylor (center) honored retiring Board member Dr. Tony Emison (right), who has served 20 years in that role. (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: Crockett linebacker Jake Knox (35) is about to lower the boom on this Ripley runner, with Zerafin Guardian (76) and Nolen Turner (54) arriving soon to help out. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The Crockett Marching Cavaliers gave a rousing halftime performance at the first home game of the season. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The Cavs' Gabe Dupree (29) -- playing on his birthday -- just missed blocking this punt in the end zone from Ripley's Will Maynard. The ball can actually be seen flying just over Dupree's right shoulder. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: In the end, it took two late touchdowns to put the game away. This is the go-ahead score by Deuce Greenhill (7), who rushed for 153 yards on just nine carries ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: ... and this is the final tally by DK Woods, which provided the final margin of 23-14 ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and earned the celebratory airlift from lineman Carson Bridger (79) as Willie Walker (6) approves in the end zone. (Photo by Ron Barry)