

CAVALIER GRIDDER SLOG THROUGH SOUTH SIDE QUAGMIRE 19-13



Above: Joshua Simmons (78), during a timeout in the never-ending rain, absorbs the instruction provided by assistant coach Jack Burgess (background). (Photo by Ron Barry)

By Ron Barry

The only thing tougher than handling the football at Jackson South Side Friday night – playing amidst the remnant of Hurricane Francine – may have been laundering the uniforms after the game.

But Coach Kevin Ward's Crockett County Cavaliers survived the challenge, scoring the go-ahead touchdown in a pouring rain with just 4:37 left in the game to post a 19-13 triumph, its fourth straight win in as many starts in the 2024 season.

In a contest that featured 12 fumbles, two pass interceptions, botched extra points, 14 penalties, and a bad snap over a punter's head – which helped Crockett tie the game early in the final period – there wasn't much to hope for, other than to say your team came out on top at the end.

"It certainly wasn't pretty," Ward knowingly understated after the game, "but we knew it wasn't going to be. We knew there'd be turnovers, we knew players would slip, we knew it was just going to be a horrible situation trying to deal with the conditions. But overall, we handled it a little bit better than they did, and I'm proud of the players for fighting their way through it all."

But with a road game at Huntingdon as the next obstacle on the schedule, Ward knows that his club "has to prepare better than ever before."

Huntingdon lost its season opener 38-35 to still-unbeaten McKenzie, and since then has steamrolled Adamsville 43-12 and Columbia Academy 42-20. The Mustangs made it all the way to the state quarterfinals in Class 2-A a year ago before falling to eventual champion Riverside 24-7, and it was Huntingdon that "was the only team that embarrassed us last year."

Ward told his players, "We have a chance to beat a really good football team this coming week. But if we don't prepare properly – and that means much more than mentally – they'll embarrass us again. I want to find out where we are as a team. We must prepare better this week than we have shown thus far. If we do, it could be a really interesting game. If we show any weakness or lack of confidence, they'll attack it over and over – so we need to go in there expecting to perform well. Hopefully the weather won't be like it was tonight."

What it "was" at South Side was a non-stop rain, just enough to be annoying at times, but much more likely to be directly impacting play. The field, which already had sideline puddles pre-game, was an absolute mud bath by the fourth quarter – but that was when Crockett turned a 13-6 deficit into its 19-13 win.

South Side – which had scored a first-period touchdown on a short pass that broke loose for a 72-yard play, but then missed the extra point kick – was trailing the Cavaliers 7-6 when forced to punt on its first possession of the second half. From the Crockett 26, Cav running back DK Woods took a handoff up the middle.

As is so often the case with Woods, it took a myriad of Hawk tacklers to bring him down, and on this occasion, Woods was still on his feet and trying to churn for extra yardage even though his forward progress had been stopped. With the officials' whistle still not having ended the run, the Hawks' Keylon Gardner took the opportunity to wrench the slick ball from Woods' arms and run it back into the end zone. The extra point kick put the hosts ahead 13-6 not yet two minutes into the third quarter.

Crockett followed by marching to the South Side 16, but another jumbled handoff in the rain – the Cavs' sixth fumble of the night – lost six yards, and when compounded by a motion penalty on the next play, effectively killed the drive.

But it was then when the Cavs received their biggest break of the contest when Hawk punter Kaleb Nettles could only simply fall on a snap that had sailed over his head, yielding possession to Crockett at the South Side seven-yard line.

Yet even with a pair of half-the-distance penalties going against the Hawk defense, the Cavs couldn't punch it in. The hosts regained the ball on downs – and then promptly turned it right back over when Demo Pickens recovered a Hawk fumble at the seven.

This time Woods – who finished with 117 well-earned yards on 21 sashes through the mud – crashed in from the four on the second play with 10:05 remaining in the game. But the contest stayed tied because the wet ball eluded the holder's hands on the extra point, and Kris Phillips' attempt to run with it was quickly squelched.

Following Avery Hurst's kickoff and a return to their own 31, the Hawks had a second-and-four from the 37 when quarterback Jamarion Grimes dropped back and tried to throw a fairly deep pass. Instead, the ball slipped completely out of the right side of his hand and floated into the waiting arms of Crockett's Randle Perry, who returned it eight yards to the Hawk 40.

At that point, the rain began to fall as hard as it had at any point in the game, forcing the Cavs to keep things relatively simple – and after Woods had smashed his way to a first down on a fourth-down power blast, Deuce Greenhill took it the final 19 yards through a cloudburst that almost obscured the end zone from his vision. The impossible conditions foiled the extra point again, but the Cavs had their 19-13 margin at the 4:37 mark.

Still, it remained to stop the Hawks one more time, and on a key fourth-down play from the South Side 45, Woods knifed through the Hawk offensive line to drop Rodrick Ross for a two-yard loss and seal the victory. Woods had given the Cavs their initial score in the game by rambling 68 yards for a score in the first quarter almost immediately after South Side's opening touchdown, and Hurst's successful extra made it 7-6 in Crockett's favor, a score that held until halftime.

In addition to Woods' 117 yards, Greenhill added 91 on 15 carries. Crockett's defense - and the weather - limited South Side to just 22 yards on the ground during the game.



Above: Receiver Brody Parlow -- who caught his first pass of the season earlier in the game -- tries to deal with the dripping rain off his helmet. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Crockett kickoff returner Squirt Pickens (23) gets submarined (no pun intended) and is sent flying through the rain-drenched air as John Christopher provides an escort on this first-quarter play Friday night. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Final Statistics

Rushes-Yards: CC - DK Woods 21-117, Deuce Greenhill 15-91, Demo Pickens 2-6, Amarion Hobson 1-(-1), Ben Burgess 11-(-42), **Team 50-171. JSS** - Rodrick Ross 9-34, Aiden Collins 2-14, Brayden Weldon 5-1, Khamyrah Caldwell 2-(-1), Jamarion Grimes 8-(-9), Kaleb Nettles 1-(-17), **Team 27-22.**

Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC - Burgess 2-4-21-1. **JSS** - Grimes 4-5-87-1.

Receptions-Yards: CC - Woods 1-14, Brody Parlow 1-7. **JSS** - David Hardin 3-84, Kaden Currie 1-3.

Interceptions: CC - Randle Perry 1-8. **JSS** - Von Hill 1-0.

Kickoff Returns-Yards: CC - Squirt Pickens 3-60, Team 3-60. **JSS** - Terrion Reeves 2-43, Weldon 1-21, **Team 3-64.**

Punt Returns-Yards: CC - Demo Pickens 1-0. **JSS** - None.

Total Scrimmage Plays-Yards: CC 54-192, JSS 33-109.

First Downs: CC 9, JSS 2.

Fumbles-Lost: CC 6-1, JSS 6-2.

Penalties-Yards: CC 4-40, JSS 10-65.

Punts-Yards: CC - Avery Hurst 2-60-30.0. **JSS** - Kaleb Nettles 3-93-31.0.

Points (TD-2PC-XP-FG-P): Woods 2-0-0-0-12, Greenhill 1-0-0-0-6, Hurst 0-0-1-0-1, Team 3-0-1-0-19. Opponents 2-0-1-

Season Statistics (Record: 4-0)

Rushes-Yards: CC - DK Woods 72-429, Deuce Greenhill 32-353, Demo Pickens 9-50, Gabe Dupree 12-34, Amarion Hobson 7-13, Ben Burgess 34-(-49), **Team 166-830. Opponents 136-551.**

Passing (Comp-Att-Yds-Int): CC - Burgess 21-34-344-3. **Opponents 34-58-438-6.**

Receptions-Yards: CC - Dre Walker 7-159, Greenhill 8-121-1 TD, Demo Pickens 3-35-1 TD, DK Woods 1-14, Karsen Burgess 1-8, Brody Parlow 1-7, **Team 21-344. Opponents 34-438.**

Interceptions: CC - Demo Pickens 2-49, Woods 1-12, Walker 1-10, Randle Perry 1-8, Greenhill 1-0, **Team 6-79. Opponents 3-103-1 TD.**

Kickoff Returns-Yards: CC - Demo Pickens 5-144, Squirt Pickens 5-97, Luke Beaird 1-8, **Team 11-249. Opponents 8-160.**

Punt Returns-Yards: CC - Demo Pickens 5-79, **Team 5-79. Opponents 3-26.**

Total Scrimmage Plays-Yards: CC 198-1,174. Opponents 195-989.

First Downs: CC 38, Opponents 41.

Fumbles-Lost: CC 8-3, Opponents 11-5.

Penalties-Yards: CC 24-177, Opponents 34-245.

Punts-Yards: CC - Avery Hurst 8-287-35.9. **Opponents 11-382-34.7.**

Points (TD-2PC-XP-FG-P): Woods 7-0-0-0-42, Greenhill 5-0-0-0-30, Hurst 0-0-11-1-14, Burgess 2-0-0-0-12, Demo Pickens 1-0-0-0-6, Walker 0-1-0-0-2, Team 15-1-11-1-106. Opponents 9-2-3-2-



Above: Austin Carroll (56) drags down South Side's Brayden Weldon (2) by his jersey as Dre Walker (6) helps slow him up. Arriving for support in the background are Jake Knox (35), Zerafin Guardian (76), and Nolen Turner (54). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The intensity of the driving rain can be plainly seen here as Deuce Greenhill (7) -- barely visible through the pelting drops -- begins the 19-yard touchdown run that put Crockett ahead in the fourth quarter. Providing the quality blocking in the muck and mire are Colton Mayo (52), Austin Carroll (56), Dre Walker (6), Randle Perry (50), and Travis Cork (72). (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: It was already pouring in the first period when DK Woods (32) broke this 68-yard scoring gallop that overcame an early 6-0 Hawk advantage. Woods had 117 yards on 21 tries, with two touchdowns. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The players weren't the only ones who had to deal with the adverse conditions. Crockett's cheer squad came equipped to adjust to the surroundings, however uncomfortable they might have been. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Dre Walker was a stalwart for the Cavaliers against South Side, whether checking his blocking assignment (if he could see his sheet) on offense ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... or making a great individual effort defensively as on this play, when Walker single-handedly drags a Hawk runner down by his jersey. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: The fans -- most resigned to the fact that they were going to get pretty wet -- still remained in high spirits, as seen here with students Izzy Yearwood, Ella Cate Haynes, and Hannah Carter. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Out on the field, though, it was a quagmire, but Crockett's defense fought through the elements with teamwork tackling. On this play the gang is composed of DK Woods (32), Nolen Turner (54), Zerafin Guardian (76), Dre Walker (6), Austin Carroll (56), and Jake Knox (35). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Amaron Hobson (4) gets a firm grip on South Side quarterback Jamarion Grimes (12) to drag him down just before DK Woods (32) and Nolen Turner (54) arrive to help lower the boom. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: The conditions created frustrating situations. With passing almost entirely out of the question, even the runners had to deal with occasions like this, when Deuce Greenhill (7) tried to grab this hand-off from Ben Burgess (10), but saw the slippery ball begin to slide from his grasp ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and as Zerafin Guardian (76) and Travis Cork (72) try to apply their blocks, Greenhill begins to realize that this play is not going to go as planned ... (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: ... until finally it becomes a footrace to the ball, and Greenhill has to simply fall on it for a six-yard loss that (at least temporarily) foiled a third-period scoring threat. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Because of the lack of solid footing on the playing field, by the fourth period many of the plays resembled a rugby scrum. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: The mud began to take over, coating the tacklers and flying from the players' feet. Here, Nolen Turner (54) and Dre Walker (6) fight through it to make a stop, as Ian Greenberg (19) provides secondary backup, Austin Carroll (56) deals with his jersey being held, Jake Knox (35) moves in behind Turner to plug the hole, and Carson Bridger (79) deals with a double-team block. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: But when Deuce Greenhill (7) -- who had 91 yards on 15 carries -- broke away from the pack to score the game-winning touchdown ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: ... and was congratulated by Austin Carroll (56) and Carson Bridger (79) on his way back to the sideline under the pelting rain ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: ... it left only this big fourth-down tackle by DK Woods (32) with 1:19 remaining to seal the win that sends Crockett to Huntingdon this coming week with a 4-0 record. (Photo by Ron Barry)

