CAVS "SEE WHAT WE CAN BE WHEN WE EXECUTE"- CRUISE IN GRIDIRON OPENER 56-0

By Ron Barry

Crockett County's football team did a lot of things right in its season opener Friday night. But Coach Kevin Ward was just as much impressed by what his players didn't do.

"For the past three weeks, we haven't been performing very well," Ward said after his Cavaliers demolished Middle College of Memphis 56-0. "We were making a lot of mistakes. But we didn't make those mistakes tonight. I hope the players washed the bad taste of those mistakes out of their mouths, because I think they saw tonight what we can be when we execute our responsibilities."

While the Bulldogs from Memphis admittedly didn't put up much of a fight after Crockett had scored its first touchdown – a 65-yard gallop by thundering junior running back DK Woods – Ward was pleased with the way his players responded to the excitement of opening night.

"Did we play perfect football? No, and there's still room for improvement," he said. "But based on how we were looking coming into this game, I'm proud of the way we played. We practice with a specific game plan, and the players executed that game plan well. It's why we practice these things, and when the players buy in, this is what can happen."

Except for one over-the-head center snap on a third-down play that lost 18 yards on the opening possession, there weren't any glaring mistakes to draw complaints from the coaching staff. Despite a running clock that quickly gobbled up the time in the second half – after the Cavs had built an insurmountable 49-0 advantage at the intermission – Crockett rushed for more than 300 yards and unveiled a more confident approach by quarterback Ben Burgess.

Burgess started throughout his sophomore season a year ago, but was definitely more of a passing threat than a runner.



Left: Junior running back DK Woods (32) was at his demolition derby best Friday night, running roughshod over and through the Middle School defenders. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Friday night, the junior signal-caller didn't hesitate to take advantage of the attention Woods drew from the Middle College defense, scoring touchdowns on two of his three carries.

"Ben packed on some muscle over the off-season and is much stronger than he was a year ago," Ward said. "He's always been a threat with his arm, but now he's big enough to know he can take a hit and he's more confident when he sees room to run. And he'll get those chances with teams keying on DK most of the time."

Woods was dynamic in the opener, carrying 12 times for 144 yards and four touchdowns, all in the first half. He posted scoring runs of 65, 6, 1, and 20 yards in the contest, dragging tacklers repeatedly as he amassed his gains. Burgess tallied on runs of 12 and 5 yards, and set up Woods' second touchdown with an 11-yard keeper.

But that backfield duo was far from the only impressive takeaway against the outmanned Bulldogs. What else gave Crockett coaches optimism as the season progresses?

1. A defense that allowed just 41 total yards in 37 offensive snaps, along with a fumble recovery by Squirt Pickens, pass interceptions by Demo Pickens and Gabe Dupree, a blocked punt by Kris Phillips, and quarterback sacks by Dupree (twice), Randle Perry, and Ittai Fry.

2. Junior kicker Noah Mayfield – following in the pressure-packed position of replacing the always-reliable Avery Hurst – drilled all eight of his extra point attempts and performed his kickoff duties well.

3. The starting unit didn't allow a single pass completion while on the field, with Ian Greenberg making key breakups in addition to the interceptions by Demo Pickens and Dupree. And when Dupree made his interception on a short pass out in the right flat, he was joined on his return by a swarm of Cav teammates who literally pushed him toward the Crockett goal line for 13 yards.

4. Dre Walker – at school's end to be headed to the University of Delaware in its move to Division I – took a pass reception 43 yards, ran for a six-yard touchdown on his only rushing attempt, and made numerous tackles defensively in demonstrating exactly why the Blue Hens are coveting his arrival.

5. Solid containment and numerous hits described the consistently strong play of linebackers Jake Knox and Austin Carroll, whose occasional appearances as blocking backs often paved the way for successful Crockett runners.

6. There were several nice plays by reserve players. Sophomore running back Khalan Thomas accumulated 75 yards in just five carries, including a 10-yard touchdown for the Cavs' final score. Backup quarterback Kris Phillips – in addition to deftly handling the snaps and placements for kicker Mayfield – raced for an 18-yard gain on his only rush from scrimmage.

7. The line play was much improved from recent scrimmages, with Grant Smallwood, Joshua Simmons, Carson Bridger, Zerafin Guardian, Nolen Turner, Perry, Garner Brown, and Brooks Harris among those who manned the various positions throughout the night.
Crockett will go on the road for its next contest, visiting Ripley this coming Friday night. Ripley was blanked 42-0 by a strong Trenton Peabody team on the opening weekend.

Game Statistics: Crockett 56, Middle College 0
Total Offense (Plays-Yards): CC 34-301; **MC** 37-41.
First Downs: CC 12; **MC** 3.
Penalties-Yards: CC 6-35; **MC** 9-70 (one player ejection).
Punts-Yards-Avg: CC 1-27-27.0; **MC** 7-148-21.1 (1 blocked).
Fumbles-Lost: CC 2-2; **MC** 1-1.
CC Rushing (Carries-Yards): DK Woods 12-144, Khalan Thomas 5-75, Ben Burgess 3-28, Demo Pickens 5-24, Kris Phillips 1-18, Davis Porter 2-18, Dre Walker 1-6, Squirt Pickens 2-5, Chris Vance 2-1, bad snap 1-(-18), Team 34-301. **MC Rushing:** Rashun Buluu 4-16, Alex Bennett 12-13, Ryan Robinson 4-7, Jordan Stevens 10-(-11), Team 30-25.
CC Passing (Completions-Attempts-Yards-Interceptions): Ben Burgess 1-4-43-0. **MC Passing:** Alex Bennett 2-7-16-2.
CC Receiving (Catches-Yards): Dre Walker 1-43. **MC Receiving:** Ryan Robinson 1-9, Andra Crawley 1-7.
CC Pass Interceptions (Int-Yards): Demo Pickens 1-36, Gabe Dupree 1-13. **MC Pass Interceptions:** None.
CC Fumble Recoveries: Demo Pickens 1. **MC Fumble Recoveries:** 2.
CC Kickoff Returns (Returns-Yards): None. **MC Kickoff Returns:** 6-110.
CC Punt Returns: Squirt Pickens 1-4, Demo Pickens 1-2, Team 2-6. **MC Punt Returns**: None.
CC Punt Blocks: Kris Phillips 1.
CC Scoring (TD-2PC-FG-XP-Points): DK Woods 4-0-0-0-24, Ben Burgess 2-0-0-0-12, Noah Mayfield 0-0-0-8-8, Dre Walker 1-0-0-0-6, Khalan Thomas 1-0-0-0-6, Team 8-0-0-8-56. **MC Scoring**: None.
The Linescore:
MC 0 0 0 0 - 0
CC 14 35 0 7 - 56
Crockett – Woods 65 run (Mayfield kick)
Crockett – Ben Burgess 12 run (Mayfield kick)
Crockett – Woods 6 run (Mayfield kick)
Crockett – Woods 1 run (Mayfield kickj)
Crockett – Burgess 5 run (Mayfield kick)
Crockett – Woods 20 run (Mayfield kick)
Crockett –Walker 6 run (Mayfield kick)
Crockett – Thomas 10 run (Mayfield kick)



Above: Senior linebacker Austin Carroll contributed his usual solid performance against Middle College, helping the Cavaliers limit the visitors to just 41 total offensive yards. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Right: Dre Walker (6) hurls Middle College running back Alex Bennett out of bounds with a one-handed yank of his jersey as Ian Greenberg arrives to help if needed. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Ian Greenberg (19) leaps high to break up this Bulldog pass attempt while Squirt Pickens (23) prepares to hit the receiver from below if he catches it. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: A steady breeze was about the only thing providing resistance to Crockett's efforts Friday night, but even that couldn't dampen Kinzey Hutchison's enthusiasm on opening night. (Photo by Ron Barry)









Left: Carson Bridger (79) and Zerafin Guardian (76) catch up with DK Woods in the end zone for the ceremonial lift to the sky. Woods was on his way to a 144-yard evening -- all in the first half. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Three pillars of the Cavalier defense -- Zerafin Guardian (76), Jake Knox (35), and Dre Walker (6) -- barely yielded any yardage during the lopsided rout of Middle College. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Above: DK Woods cuts outside of blocks by Carson Bridger (79) and Zerafin Guardian (76) and finds a wide-open sideline to begin his 65-yard jaunt to the end zone in the first quarter. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Senior cheerleader Gracie Gaines had her squad ready for an enthusiastic night as the Cavaliers surprised nearly everyone with their 56-point outburst. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Crockett quarterback Ben Burgess (10) takes advantage of the Bulldog defense keying on DK Woods (back left) and takes off on a keeper, following blocks by Zerafin Guardian (76), Carson Bridger (79), and Randle Perry (50) for an 11-yard gain. (Photo by Ron Barry)







Above: Junior Noah Mayfield (25) -- out of the hold of Kris Phillips (16) -- drilled all eight of his extra points successfully Friday night in his first game as Crockett's primary kicker. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: The "Cavalier Crazies" student section was out in force for "Beach Night." (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Dre Walker took a short pass and broke a 43-yard gain down the left sideline to set up a touchdown run by Ben Burgess, giving the Cavs a 14-0 lead with 1:22 to play in the first quarter. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Nolen Turner (54) and DK Woods (32) put a sandwich hit on Bulldog runner Alex Bennett on this play. Crockett held Middle College to 25 yards rushing. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Randle Perry (50) sacks Middle College quarterback Jordan Stevens (11) just before Grant Smallwood (77) can arrive to apply more force. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Crockett lineman Grant Smallwood gets a quick pick-me-up during an injury timeout in Friday night's big win. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Blocks by Brooks Harris (73), Zerafin Guardian (76), Randle Perry (50), and Nolen Turner (54) opened up this hole for Demo Pickens (3), who got down to the one-yard line to set up the Cavs' fourth score. (Photo by Ron Barry)







Above: Linebacker Jake Knox (35) was in some Bulldog's kitchen on just about every play, as he often is against any Crockett opponent. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: When it was all over, whose smiles are better to sum up the feeling of a 56-0 start to the season than cheerleading buddies Mia Grace Simmons (left) and Lexie Beaird? (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: When Gabe Dupree (29) picked off this Bulldog pass at the visitors' 26-yard line, he was immediately surrounded by a swarm of teammates that included Garner Brown (67), Grant Smallwood (77), Austin Carroll (7), and Demo Pickens (3), ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: ... who proceeded to push Dupree collectively for a 13-yard return, setting up a Dre Walker touchdown run. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Once some of the reserves started to see action, sophomore Khalan Thomas was a standout, rushing for 75 yards and scoring this 10-yard touchdown behind a big block from Blake Johnson (64). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Backup quarterback Kris Phillips (16) broke off this 18-yard scamper, racing toward Mason Dennis (12), who's looking for a target to block downfield. (Photo by Ron Barry)







Above: In addition to his interception, Gabe Dupree had two sacks in the game, wrapping up Bulldog quarterback Jordan Stevens just before Brody Parlow (5) and Jake Knox (35) arrive to apply additional booms. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Backup lineman Ittai Fry (57) also recorded a sack on Jordan Stevens, who was fortunate to still be in one piece by the end of the contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)