CROCKETT'S SOLID GRIDIRON PERFORMANCE MEANS LIGHTS OUT FOR RIPLEY

By Ron Barry

When Crockett County speedster Demo Pickens ran the opening kickoff back 74 yards – untouched – for a score, you had the feeling the host Ripley Tigers were in for a dark evening. When, on its first offensive series, Tiger backs were dropped for a five-yard loss by Jake Knox and an eight-yard sack by Brody Parlow, there appeared to be no light at the end of the Ripley tunnel.

When the Cavaliers took over on downs because a high punt snap was bobbled, forcing a too-short pass, and on the very next play Squirt Pickens took a quick throw from Ben Burgess and snaked his way for a 21-yard touchdown – well, you could pretty much say it was lights out for Ripley.

In fact, by the end of the first quarter, you could literally say it was lights out for Ripley.

That's because – with a beautiful sunset descending behind the home team's stands – the Crockett folks on the visiting side of the field could barely see each other, because the light poles on that side were never turned on, reportedly due to the fear of resulting in an electrical box fire just behind the bleachers.

That forced game officials to bring the head coaches to midfield at the end of the first quarter – with Crockett already ahead by leaps and bounds and no reason to believe the Cavaliers couldn't double or triple their total – when all agreed it was best to just call it a night. Final score: Crockett County 30, Ripley 6.

"I've just about seen it all in my career as a coach," said Cav head man Kevin Ward, "but this was a first. I've had to wait out lightning delays, heat delays, and other stuff like that, but I've never had a game cut short because all the lights couldn't be safely turned on."



Above: By the time Demo Pickens (3) cuts back to his left while returning the game's opening kickoff, his teammates have cleared a hole big enough to drive the proverbial truck through. Brody Parlow and Nolen Turner took care of the right side, Karsen Burgess the middle, and Austin Carroll, Ian Greenberg (19), Randle Perry, and Squirt Pickens (23) did most of the damage to the left, as Demo sailed 74 yards untouched. (Photo by Ron Barry)

The main concern for Ward – whose team has now steamrolled its way to two lopsided victories over clearly outmatched foes – is that his starters have barely been on the field, and he's facing a Week #3 Region matchup this coming Friday at powerful Lexington.

"Our starting players only have three quarters of actual game experience now through two games," Ward said, "and we're going to be playing a team that's a whole lot stronger than what we've seen so far. And if we want to contend for a Region championship, we have to realize that these first two wins don't really mean anything. It's great that these guys have been able to see the fruits of what good execution can bring, and I would have liked to let them see some more of it tonight (at Ripley), but we've got to continue to prepare well to keep this momentum going."

Ward's main disappointment came from the fact that his team was playing well in virtually all phases of the game except for its kickoff return defense, which allowed Ripley's Johnathan Currie to ramble 93 yards on one just before the period ended to set up the Tigers' lone tally.

"We were run blocking well; we had scored on a pass play; our defense had made several tackles for negative yardage and sacks; and we'd intercepted a pass," Ward said.

"So there wasn't a lot to dislike. But then came that kickoff return, and it's because we have too many guys that are trying to hit the returner hard and knock his helmet off rather than concentrate on getting him down. When you go for the big hit and don't make it, it creates large gaps. We've got to do a better job in that phase of the game."

Until that long return, there weren't many things the Cavaliers could have done better.

Demo Pickens ran that opening kickoff back all the way (even though a bouncing center snap foiled the extra point attempt); Squirt Pickens caught the TD pass from Burgess (followed by a surprise two-point conversion pass from Kris Phillips to Dre Walker); and then – after two more negative-yardage tackles by Knox and Walker – Ripley's center snapped the ball over his punter's head and all the way out of the end zone for a safety, giving Crockett a 16-0 advantage in less than five minutes of play.

On the next series, running back DK Woods got his first two carries, and he went 16 yards for a first down and then 19 for another touchdown, sprung by a fantastic block from Austin Carroll that wiped out two Tigers at once as if they were dominoes. Noah Mayfield's extra point made it 23-0, and it was still just the 6:30 mark of the opening period.

Ripley finally made a first down on its next possession, but on the very next play Gabe Dupree intercepted a Jazarion Theus pass and returned it seven yards to the Cavalier 49. Burgess found his older brother Karson twice for completions totaling 21 yards before Squirt Pickens – on a reverse play – scooted 30 more for the touchdown. Mayfield's extra pushed the lead to 30-0, and only nine minutes had been played.

Ripley ran a total of 13 offensive plays and gained just seven total yards. Crockett's defense has now yielded just 48 total yards in 50 plays by its opponents through two games.

Lexington figures to be a much tougher test. The Big Red (or Tigers – they go by both monikers) is also 2-0, having disposed of Bolivar Central 24-7 and Decatur Riverside. Senior quarterback Ross McDaniel leads an experienced squad in what will be Crockett's first game in the newly realigned Region 7 setup.

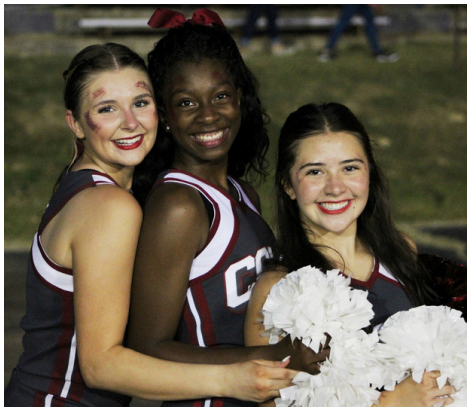
Game Statistics: Crockett 30, Ripley 6
Total Offense (Plays-Yards): CC 8-107; **RIP** 13-7.
First Downs: CC 2; **RIP** 1.
Penalties-Yards: CC 0-0; **RIP** 2-14.
Punts-Yards-Avg: CC none; **RIP** none.
Fumbles-Lost: CC 0-0; **RIP** 2-1.
CC Rushing (Carries-Yards): DK Woods 3-35, Squirt Pickens 1-30, Team 4-65. **RIP Rushing:** Zedric Smith 2-2, Lakenyan Currie 4-(-3), Jazarion Theus 1-(-8), bad center snap 1-(-8), Team 8-(-17).
CC Passing (Completions-Attempts-Yards-Interceptions): Ben Burgess 3-4-42-0. **RIP Passing:** Jazarion Theus 1-3-12-1, Cedric Murrell 1-1-6-0, Johnathan Currie 1-1-6-0, Team 3-5-24-1.
CC Receiving (Catches-Yards): Karson Burgess 2-21, Squirt Pickens 1-21. **RIP Receiving:** Johnathan Currie 2-18, Mekel Frazier 1-7.
CC Pass Interceptions (Int-Yards): Gabe Dupree 1-7. **RIP Pass Interceptions:** None.
CC Fumble Recoveries: team recovery (safety) 1. **RIP Fumble Recoveries:** 0.
CC Kickoff Returns (Returns-Yards): Demo Pickens 3-102 (1 TD). **RIP Kickoff Returns:** Johnathan Currie 4-144.
CC Punt Returns: None. **RIP Punt Returns:** None.
CC Scoring (TD-2PC-FG-XP-Points): Squirt Pickens 2-0-0-0-12, DK Woods 1-0-0-0-6, Demo Pickens 1-0-0-0-6, Noah Mayfield 0-0-0-2-2, Dre Walker 0-1-0-0-2, team safety 2, Team 4-1-0-2-30 (includes 1 safety). **RIP Scoring:** 1-0-0-0-6.
The Linescore:
CC 30 x x x - 30
RIP 6 x x x - 6
Crockett – Demo Pickens 74 kickoff return (kick failed)
Crockett – Squirt Pickens 21 pass from Ben Burgess (Dre Walker pass from Kris Phillips)
Crockett – Safety (Ripley center snap went out of bounds in end zone)
Crockett – DK Woods 19 run (Noah Mayfield kickj)
Crockett – Squirt Pickens 30 run (Mayfield kick)
Ripley – Mekel Frazier 7 pass from Johnathan Currie (kick failed)

Season Statistics (2 games): Crockett 86, Opponents 6.
Total Offense (Plays-Yards): CC 42-408; OPP 50-48.
First Downs: CC 14; OPP 4.
Penalties-Yards: CC 6-35; OPP 11-84.
Punts-Yards-Avg: CC 1-27-27.0; OPP 7-148-21.1 (1 blocked).
Fumbles-Lost: CC 2-2; OPP 3-2.
CC Rushing (Carries-Yards): DK Woods 15-179, Khalan Thomas 5-75, Squirt Pickens 3-35, Ben Burgess 3-28, Demo Pickens 5-24, Kris Phillips 1-18, Davis Porter 2-18, Dre Walker 1-6, Chris Vance 2-1, bad snap 1-(-18), Team 38-366. OPP Rushing: 38-8.
CC Passing (Completions-Attempts-Yards-Interceptions): Ben Burgess 4-8-85-0. OPP Passing: 5-12-40-3.
CC Receiving (Catches-Yards): Dre Walker 1-43, Karson Burgess 2-21, Squirt Pickens 1-21 (1 TD). OPP Receiving: 5-40 (1 TD).
CC Pass Interceptions (Int-Yards): Gabe Dupree 2-20, Demo Pickens 1-36, Team 3-56. OPP Pass Interceptions: None.
CC Fumble Recoveries: Demo Pickens 1, team recovery 1 (for safety). OPP Fumble Recoveries: 2.
CC Kickoff Returns (Returns-Yards): Demo Pickens 3-102 (1 TD). OPP Kickoff Returns: 10-254.
CC Punt Returns: Squirt Pickens 1-4, Demo Pickens 1-2, Team 2-6. OPP Punt Returns: None.
CC Punt Blocks: Kris Phillips 1.
CC Scoring (TD-2PC-FG-XP-Points): DK Woods 5-0-0-0-30, Ben Burgess 2-0-0-0-12, Squirt Pickens 2-0-0-0-12, Noah Mayfield 0-0-0-10-10, Dre Walker 1-1-0-0-8, Demo Pickens 1-0-0-0-6, Khalan Thomas 1-0-0-0-6, team safety 2, Team 12-1-0-10-86 (includes 1 safety). OPP Scoring: 1-0-0-0-6.



Above: The opening score kept the smile on cheerleader Carrington Smith's face. But, in all honesty, it's usually there anyway. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Cheer team members Marlee Kellough (left), Auriana Taylor, and Gabby Dobbelaire celebrated Crockett's second victory of the young season. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: On the next series, Brody Parlow (5) forced this play to go inside, where Jake Knox (35) proceeded to crush Ripley back Lakenyan Currie (11) for a loss. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Then it was Squirt Pickens (23) who stepped into the spotlight, taking this short toss from Ben Burgess (10) and eluding the Tiger defense for a 21-yard touchdown. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: ... to wide-open tight end Dre Walker, and Crockett led 14-0 with 8:59 left in the first quarter. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: One play later, Brody Parlow managed a sack of his own, nailing his numerical counterpart Jazarion Theus. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: After that touchdown, extra point holder Kris Phillips faked out the Ripley rushers and tossed a two-point conversion pass ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: That play brought smiles to multi-sport Crockett athletes Jersey Wells (left) and Addie Hoover, who were pretending to be cheerleaders throughout the evening. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Dre Walker tossed Ripley's Lakenyan Currie for a three-yard loss on the next possession, and Crockett received a safety (and two more points) went the Tiger center snapped the ball over his punter's head and through the end zone. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: After that, it was time to get DK Woods (32) involved, and he left several tacklers in his wake as he took his second carry toward the goal line, ... (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: ... and finished off his 19-yard touchdown run when Austin Carroll (7) wiped out two Ripley tacklers like dominoes falling with this crushing block. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The next Cavalier to make an impact was Gabe Dupree (29), who made his second interception in as many games, bringing it back to midfield. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: That produced more cheer team smiles, this time from Allyssa Ward (left) and Lillian Ray. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Quarterback Ben Burgess (10) takes the snap from center Carson Bridger (79) and gets ready to complete a 16-yard pass to his brother Karson (2, at left). Additional blocking on the play comes from Randle Perry (50), Zerafin Guardian (76), Nolen Turner (54), and Dre Walker (6). (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Squirt Pickens (23) couldn't get a touchdown when this long pass was underthrown, but he followed it with a 30-yard run on a reverse to produce six more points for the Cavs. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Left: Austin Carroll (7) drags down burly Ripley fullback Zedric Smith (44). (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The final scene was captured beautifully by the phone camera of Jennifer Todd as the sun sets colorfully behind the Ripley grandstand. (Photo by Jennifer Todd)



Above: When the first quarter ended, coaches and officials decided to declare the game over when the lack of lights on the visitors side (due to fear of an electrical fire) caused things to shut down. God decided to paint the sky beautifully as the teams shook hands. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Head Coach Kevin Ward addressed his crew shortly afterward, warning them that the start of Region 7 play this coming week will be an entirely different challenge. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Linebacker Jake Knox -- one of Crockett's defensive standouts thus far -- listens attentively to Coach Kevin Ward's post-game words. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Time to go home! Ready for departure are cheer team members (from left) Lexie Beaird, Mia Grace Simmons, Kinlee Moore, and Leah Beaird. (Photo by Ron Barry)

