"ONE MORE PLAN THAN THEY DID" KEEPS CROCKETT MOVING ON IN TSSAA PLAYOFFS



Above: Titus Luten -- seen here peering through fourth-quarter fog on the field at Kirby High in Memphis -- had a major influence on Crockett's playoff victory with his scout team simulations in practice and an interception and fumble recovery in the game itself. (Photo by Beth Williams)

Crockett County's playoff football hopes almost went up in smoke Friday night.

Or – more accurately – a misty fog that enveloped the entire field during the fourth quarter at Kirby High School in Memphis.

The Cavaliers were clinging to a 28-26 lead with 24 seconds left in the game when the Kirby offense came to the line for a second-down play at the Crockett 14. By then the fog was so thick it was difficult to see the field of play even from the sidelines.

Quarterback Malcolm Jack – who had already torched the Cav defense for 256 yards through the air – was in the shotgun formation, ready to take the snap and search for any one from his bevy of talented receivers. Six different Cougars had already caught at least one of his passes, and each already had double-digit yardage to their credit.

To make matters even more interesting, Jack had also run for 106 yards on 20 carries, and Crockett had actually received a break on his most recent scamper, when he slid to a stop after making a first down – not realizing his path was reasonably clear into the end zone had he not been so intent on stopping the clock.

Jack received the snap, set up in the pocket, was flushed to his left by a couple of Crockett pass rushers, and then let the ball fly toward the left corner of the fog-infested end zone. Who knew if he could honestly see one of his receivers through the ground-level cloud?

But the same question could be asked of Crockett's pass defenders: Could any of them see when Jack released the ball, since they also had to be conscious of his potential target?

At any rate, Jack's pass appeared to be headed toward his intended Cougar teammate, but the Cavs' Amarion Hobson somehow got a hand in the receiver's way and deflected the ball up into the air toward the end zone's back line. Waiting for it there was Crockett's Squirt Pickens, who – until he picked off a Jack pass at the Cav 11 early in the second quarter – hadn't intercepted a throw all season. The football settled into his arms and he gently backpedaled out of the end zone.

The sighs of relief from the Crockett crowd could have blown the fog off the field. Only six seconds were now showing on the scoreboard clock, and the Cavs would survive and advance to Round #2 of the TSSAA Playoffs.

"Well, it wasn't pretty," admitted Coach Kevin Ward, whose team surrendered 515 yards of total offense to its hosts and committed four offensive turnovers as well, "but when the playoffs start, you just have to win by one point each week. Kirby's quarterback is so talented. He spreads the field out because of his ability to both run and throw, so he creates a lot of defensive situations that are hard to deal with. But I guess we made one more than play than they did, so we're moving on."

That movement will be to Nashville this coming Friday night to face a Pearl-Cohn squad that destroyed Battle Creek 70-7 in its playoff opener. Pearl-Cohn began its season 0-4 by playing teams who now have a combined record of 30-13 and are all still active in the playoff picture, but has won its last seven contests.

Crockett had its hands full dealing with Kirby's Jack, a genuine run-or-throw threat who stretched the Cavalier defense to its absolute limit. And – to listen to Crockett assistant coach Josh Holt tell it – it could have been a worse outcome for the visitors if not for their practice preparation with Cav teammate Titus Luten.

The Cavs needed somebody who could credibly simulate Jack during the previous week's drills. Enter Luten, who in addition to playing wide receiver and cornerback for Crockett is also a high jumper and hurdler on the school's track team.

"Titus ran our scout team offense all week at quarterback," Holt said, "and he deserves all the praise he can get for helping us prepare for this game. It meant he had to limit his own practice at his normal positions, but that was the sacrifice he made for the team. We can't say enough good things about the impact he had for us this week."

Luten's influence on Crockett's victory wasn't limited to his practice simulation. He also recovered a fumble in the end zone to thwart a Kirby touchdown attempt early in the second quarter and intercepted a third-period Jack pass at the Cav 35 to stop another drive. Both the fumble recovery and the interception were his firsts of the year.

Offensively, Crockett relied on a familiar theme – giving the ball to running back DK Woods – and yet another seasonal first, a long pass-and-run play by receiver Karsen Burgess for the key go-ahead touchdown.

Woods broke scoring runs of 61 and 66 yards on his way to a three-touchdown night in which he carried the ball 16 times for 253 yards. The junior back now has 30 tallies and 1,502 yards rushing on the season, averaging a mind-blowing 9.8 yards per try – even though Crockett's opponents know he's likely to get the ball on any given snap.

But Crockett's key offensive play followed an 11-yard touchdown run by Kirby's Tilyon Wilks and ensuing two-point conversion pass from Jack to Tylan Hines, which gave the Cougars a 20-14 lead with 8:19 remaining in the third quarter.

On a third-and-10 snap from his own 44, Cav quarterback Ben Burgess looked over the middle to find older brother Karsen, who had run a straight slant pattern from the right. Karsen Burgess reached high above his shoulder pads to make a difficult catch, somehow retained his balance, and never broke stride as he sped 56 yards untouched to the end zone. Noah Mayfield – whose dependable extra points were the literal difference in the victory – booted the conversion to put Crockett ahead 21-20 at the 6:38 mark of the period.

The Cavs had gained an edge in the game when Pickens blocked Kirby's first extra point attempt and Dre Walker threw Jack for a loss on a two-point conversion try after the Cougars' second score. In the fourth quarter – with just 8:28 left in the game – Crockett linebacker Jake Knox picked off a Jack pass on another two-point conversion throw to maintain the Cavs' 28-26 margin. And Ian Greenberg had earlier recovered another Kirby fumble to stop a march.

So the Cavaliers, now 9-2, are in the state's Top 16 remaining clubs in the 4-A division as they prepare to journey to Nashville. Amazingly, Crockett's three Region 7 colleagues – South Gibson, Dyer County, and Lexington – also advanced Friday. The Hornets crushed Millington 49-7; Dyer County pounded Lakeland Prep 52-14; and Lexington surprised Haywood 25-22.

Game Statistics: Crockett 28, Kirby 26
Total Offense (Plays-Yards): CC 38-406; **K** 68-515.
First Downs: CC 8**; K** 19.
Penalties-Yards: CC 6-45; **K** 12-106.
Punts-Yards-Avg: CC 1-46-46.0; **K** 1-32-32.0.
Fumbles-Lost: CC 3-2; **K** 2-2.
CC Rushing (Carries-Yards): DK Woods 16-253, Dre Walker 3-56, Squirt Pickens 1-13, Ben Burgess 8-1, Team 28-323. **K Rushing:** Malcolm Jack 20-106, Tilyon Wilks 13-83, Christian Jefferson 11-63, Team 44-259.
CC Passing (Completions-Attempts-Yards-Interceptions): Ben Burgess 5-10-83-2. **K Passing:** Jack 15-24-256-3.
CC Receiving (Catches-Yards): Karsen Burgess 2-61 (1 TD), DK Woods 2-14, Kris Phillips 1-8. **K Receiving:** Jefferson 6-89, Wilks 3-74, Nasir Hammond 2-35, Tecoryion Whitley 2-26, Cordaro Lackland 1-16 (1 TD), Decaden Harris 1-16.
CC Pass Interceptions (Int-Yards): Squirt Pickens 2-2, Titus Luten 1-0. **K Pass Interceptions:** Zavion Douglas 1-19, J'Veon Barber 1-0.
CC Fumble Recoveries: Titus Luten, Ian Greenberg. **K Fumble Recoveries:** 2.
CC Kickoff Returns (Returns-Yards): Squirt Pickens 4-75, Titus Luten 1-10, Team 5-85. **K Kickoff Returns:** Jefferson 1-19, Jordan Bradley 1-(-2), Team 2-17.
CC Punt Returns: None. **K Punt Returns:** None.
CC Scoring (TD-2PC-FG-XP-Points): DK Woods 3-0-0-0-18, Karsen Burgess 1-0-0-0-6, Noah Mayfield 0-0-0-4-4, Team 4-0-0-4-28. **K Scoring:** 4-1-0-0-26.

The Linescore:
Crockett Co- 14 0 14 0 - 28
Kirby- 6 6 8 6 - 26
Crockett – DK Woods 61 run (Noah Mayfield kick)
Kirby – Malcolm Jack 6 run (kick blocked)
Crockett – Woods 5 run (Mayfield kick)
Kirby – Tilyon Wilks 1 run (run failed)
Kirby – Wilks 11 run (Tylan Hines pass from Jack)
Crockett – Karsen Burgess 56 pass from Ben Burgess (Mayfield kick)
Crockett – Woods 66 run (Mayfield kick)
Kirby – Cordaro Lackland 16 pass from Jack (pass failed)



Above: DK Woods (32) cuts behind the block of Garner Brown (67) to break out for a long gainer against Kirby. Woods totaled 253 yards on 16 carries, accounting for three touchdowns. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Season Statistics (11 games; 9-2 record; 5-2 region):
Total Offense (Plays-Yards): CC 432-3,851; **OPP** 533-2,595**.**
First Downs: CC 125; **OPP** 121**.**
Penalties-Yards: CC 53-429; **OPP** 70-620.
Punts-Yards-Avg: CC 13-390-30.0; OPP 32-991-31.0 (1 blocked).
Fumbles-Lost: CC 18-12; **OPP** 15-8.
CC Rushing (Carries-Yards): DK Woods 154-1,502, Ben Burgess 71-262, Demo Pickens 28-183, Dre Walker 11-145, Khalan Thomas 12-136, Amarion Hobson 12-122, Squirt Pickens 13-101, Gabe Dupree 3-100, Kris Phillips 6-56, Davis Porter 2-18, Karsen Burgess 2-7, Chris Vance 2-1, Chris Mann 1-(-1), bad snap 2-(-31), Team 323-2,601. **OPP Rushing:** 355-1,447.
CC Passing (Completions-Attempts-Yards-Interceptions): Ben Burgess 71-115-1,293-5. **OPP Passing:** 96-178-1,148-15.
CC Receiving (Catches-Yards): Karsen Burgess 21-373 (1 TD), Kris Phillips 11-251 (1 TD), Squirt Pickens 15-249 (2 TD), Dre Walker 14-224 (2 TD), Titus Luten 3-114 (2 TD), DK Woods 6-75 (1 TD), Demo Pickens 1-7. **OPP Receiving:** 96-1,148 (10 TD).
CC Pass Interceptions (Int-Yards): Gabe Dupree 4-24, Ian Greenberg 2-17, Squirt Pickens 2-2, Demo Pickens 1-36, Dre Walker 1-13, Kris Phillips 1-5, Austin Carroll 1-1, Amarion Hobson 1-0, Jake Knox 1-0, Titus Luten 1-0, Team 15-98**. OPP Pass Interceptions:** 5-19.
CC Fumble Recoveries: Gabe Dupree 1, Demo Pickens 1, Amarion Hobson 1, Garner Brown 1, Titus Luten 1, Ian Greenberg 1, team recovery 2 (1 for safety). **OPP Fumble Recoveries:** 12.
CC Kickoff Returns (Returns-Yards): Demo Pickens 6-130 (1 TD), Squirt Pickens 7-121, Dre Walker 1-25, Amarion Hobson 1-17, Titus Luten 1-10, Mason Dennis 1-9, DK Woods 1-7, Brody Parlow 1-5, Carson Bridger 1-1, Team 20-325 (1 TD). **OPP Kickoff Returns:** 47-969 (1 TD).
CC Punt Returns: Demo Pickens 7-46, Squirt Pickens 2-38, Team 9-84. **OPP Punt Returns:** None.
CC Punt Blocks: Kris Phillips 1.
Extra Point Blocks: Squirt Pickens 1.
CC Scoring (TD-2PC-FG-XP-Points): DK Woods 30-0-0-0-180, Noah Mayfield 0-0-1-45-48, Ben Burgess 7-1-0-0-44, Dre Walker 3-2-0-0-22, Squirt Pickens 3-0-0-0-18, Demo Pickens 2-0-0-0-12, Gabe Dupree 2-0-0-0-12, Titus Luten 2-0-0-0-12, Khalan Thomas 2-0-0-0-12, Kris Phillips 1-0-0-0-6, Amarion Hobson 1-0-0-0-6, Karsen Burgess 1-0-0-0-6, team safety 2, Team 54-3-1-45-380 (includes 1 safety). **OPP Scoring:** 25-1-1-17-172.



Above: Karsen Burgess zooms for the go-ahead score in the third quarter on a 56-yard pass play, combining with his quarterback brother Ben Burgess. (Photo by Beth Williams)

Below: Austin Carroll (7) and Grant Smallwood (77) corral Kirby's multi-talented quarterback Malcolm Jack on this play. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Squirt Pickens -- who hadn't intercepted a pass all season for Crockett -- picked off two in this playoff game, including the game-clincher in the end zone with only six seconds to play. (Photo by Beth Williams)



Above: Crockett's Jake Knox (35) takes down Cougar runner Christian Jefferson (4) as DK Woods (32) is being held by the Kirby lineman. Gabe Dupree (29), Nolen Turner (54), and Garner Brown (67) arrive to help out if needed. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: Center Carson Bridger (79) congratulates DK Woods (32) after his 61-yard touchdown run gave Crockett the initial lead in the game. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Right: Dre Walker (6) cuts behind blocks by Brooks Harris (73), Sebastian Garduno (63), and Zerafin Guardian (76) ... (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: ... and eventually turns the play into a 41-yard gainer. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Below: Garner Brown (67) tries to track down Kirby star Malcolm Jack on this scramble. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Titus Luten (38) secures a fourth-quarter pooch kickoff from the Cougars as teammates Brody Parlow (5), Khalan Thomas (20), and DK Woods (32) offer blocking help. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Titus Luten makes a big tackle on Kirby's Malcolm Jack. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: As the fog rolled in, Crockett prepares for the last defensive stand. They would bend, but not break. From left: Austin Carroll (7), Jake Knox (35), Zerafin Guardian (76), Dre Walker (6), and Grant Smallwood (77). (Photo by Beth Williams)



Below: Dre Walker (6) leaps over Kirby's Zavion Douglas (11) on this fourth-quarter run. (Photo by Beth Williams)





Above: At the end of the day, it's good to have DK Woods on your team. (Photo by Ron Barry)