

By JOHN HENSON

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Knox Central coach Scott Russell had seen the story unfolding before him Friday many times before, first as a star running back at Evarts High School and then later as an assistant at Bell County and Knox Central.

Russell knew coming into Friday's game at the James A. Cawood field that the Harlan County Black Bears were going to run the football early and often, just like so many of his teams before, but it soon became apparent that neither he nor his Panthers could do anything to stop them.

Harlan County rolled up 380 yards on the ground, led by 215 on 20 carries from senior tailback Marcus McMillian, on the way to a 34-14 win.

"I thought we did good early, but they kept bringing it at us and found some weaknesses," Russell said. "McMillian does a heck of a job. He's one of the best running backs we've seen. Once you hit him on the first lick, he keeps fighting for yardage. He's a special kid."

After expressing concerns about his offensive line during the week due to injuries, Harlan County coach Tom Larkey had nothing but praise for the unit after the game. The offensive front, led by senior center Chase Calton, sophomore guards J.W. Cooper and Carson Whitehead, senior tackles Michael Smith and D.J. Brock and junior tight end Josh Caldwell, dominated the line of scrimmage.

"They had (senior running back/receiver) Jeffrey Canady, but we had Marcus McMillian, and he had over 200 yards rushing, and I lost track of the touchdowns," Larkey said. "He's a great player, but we had great players in front of him, too. I thought Jake (Middleton) ran the ball well, and Cory Chorak did a good job at fullback. (Zach) Chitwood showed he could run the ball hard, and, of course, Jordy (Brewer) had another good game.

"I thought our line was the hero of the this football game. We hit the weight room two or three times a week, which a lot of teams don't do during the season, and I think that pays off."

Knox Central (4-2) was limited to two big plays on offense in the second half after HCHS built a 21-0 lead. Senior quarterback Jon Barger connected for two touchdowns to his brother, freshman Matt Barger. The younger Barger made a great catch on fourth down for a 29-yard touchdown pass in the third quarter despite being blanketed by Chitwood. Jon Barger broke away from the Harlan County pass rush to find his brother for a 65-yard scoring strike later in the period. Knox Central was limited to 83 yards on the ground, led by Canady with 77. Barger completed only one pass in the first half before finding his rhythm in the second half and helping the Panthers avoid a shutout.

After both teams were forced into three-and-outs on their first possession, the Bears struck quickly on their second with a four-play, 59-yard drive. McMillian broke free around the left side, then dodged Canady and Jason Mitchell in the open field on the way to a 42-yard touchdown run. Josh Jenkins' extra point gave the Bears a 7-0 lead with 5:56 left.

An interception by sophomore cornerback Treyvon Long on a pass intended for Mitchell set up the second Harlan County score. Long picked off the pass at the 10 and took it back to the HC 38. The Bears scored seven plays later on a 14-yard run

by Jordy Brewer on a fourth-and-two play. Jake Middleton had the big play in the drive with a 27-yard run.

Jenkins missed the extra point but Harlan County led 13-0 with 2:33 left in the first quarter.

Harlan County marched into Knox Central territory in the third quarter as McMillian picked up two first downs and Cory Chorak and Brewer added on each. The drive stalled and Mitchell knocked down a Brewer pass on fourth down intended for Austin Maggard.

Josh Jenkins and the Harlan County kickoff coverage quickly deflated the Panthers' remaining hopes in the third quarter. Jenkins' kick bounced its way past several Panthers before Harlan County sophomore Derek Akal hustled his way down field to knock the ball free. Justin Napier recovered on the Knox Central. McMillian scored three plays later on a 3-yard, then added the two-point conversion for a 21-0 lead with 10:34 left in the third quarter.

"That was a back breaker. It gave them all the momentum," Russell said. "We were fighting an uphill battle after that."

"The one we recovered, those things happen. We didn't plan that," Larkey said. "If you have 11 men running down the field things like that can happen. I think our kick coverage was good. Footballs bounce crazy, and I think our new style of kicking will help us a little bit."

The Barger-to-Barger connection put the Panthers on the board with 7:02 to play in the third quarter. Justin Napier hit the first of two extra points.

McMillian went 16 yards to cap a six-play 66-yard drive as the Bears wasted little time answering. Harlan County led 27-7 with 3:48 remaining in the third quarter.

The Bargers teamed up again for a touchdown with 1:02 left in the third quarter.

Harlan County again answered after Hunter Lewis took the kickoff to the 35.

Chorak and McMillian took turns ripping off good gains before Middleton went the final 15 yards over the left side for a touchdown with 8:33 to play. Jenkins hit the extra point.

Brewer and Chitwood each picked up first downs as Harlan County ran most of the remaining time off the clock after stopping the Panthers on fourth down at the Bears' 27. Chitwood had eight straight carries in the 11-play drive that ended on the Knox Central 34 with less than two minutes to play.

Harlan County travels to George Rogers Clark on Friday. Knox Central plays host to Clay County.

Knox Central 0 14 0 0 — 14

Harlan County 13 0 14 7 — 34

HC — McMillian 42 run (Jenkins kick)

HC — Brewer 14 run (kick failed)

HC — McMillian 3 run (McMillian run)

KC — M. Barger 29 pass from J. Barger (Napier kick)

HC — McMillian 16 run (kick failed)
KC — M. Barger 65 pass from J. Barer (Napier kick)
HC — Middleton 15 run (Jenkins kick)

KCHS HCHS
First downs 14 16

Rushes-yards 54-380 24-83

Passing 174 1

Comp-Att-Int 9-18-1 1-3-0

Punts-Avg 2-46 1-44

Fumbles-Lost 1-1 0-0

Penalties-Yards 3-30 10-71

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—Knox Central, J. Canady 13-77, Gist 5-17, Hammons 2-6, H. Canady 1-2, J. Barger 3-(-19). Harlan County, McMillian 20-215, Middleton 9-59, Brewer 9-50, Chitwood 8-29, Chorak 7-27.

PASSING—Knox Central, J. Barger 9-18-1-174, J. Canady 0-1-0-0. Harlan County, Brewer 1-3-0-1.

RECEIVING—Knox Central, J. Canady 4-52, M. Barger 3-104, Mitchell 1-31, Broughton 1-7. Harlan County, McMillian 1-1.