

HARLAN COUNTY

Bears find success in the air in victory

By John Henson
Sports Writer

From Woody Hayes' three yards and a cloud of dust style in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, football has evolved into a wide open throw the ball around the field game in the 21st century.

But even with three Class 5A regional titles in the first decade of the program, the Harlan County Black Bears stayed true to an old-school style of physical football.

The Black Bears are changing 17 years of tradition in 2025 as sophomore quarterback Brayden Morris found success through the air in three-and four-receiver sets as he completed 13 of 17 passes for 130 yards in the Bears' 36-13 win over McCreary Central on Friday to improve to 4-1 on the season.

Morris also had a big night on the ground with 185 yards on 16 carries.

"That's our offense. That's what we've been working on since the summer. I wanted to hold

off on that until we got to Bell (last week) because we wanted to be physical with our first three opponents, but it was time to do it," Harlan County coach Jacob Saylor said.

"Brayden threw the ball really well, and he's reading that. He did an excellent job, our offensive line gave him time and our receivers caught the football."

Morris needed only two plays to direct the Bears' first scoring drive, teaming with Jonah Sharp for a nine-yard pass before breaking loose against a spread out McCreary defense for a 76-scoring run.

Sharp's two-point conversion run after a McCreary penalty gave the Bears an 8-0 lead.

Aiden Duncan's kickoff return to the HC 36 set up the Raiders for a quick answer as Darius Ridener went in from the 1 with 6:46 left in the opening period. Hunter Napier broke through to drop Ridener on the two-point conversion attempt.

The Bears were driving again when Morris fumbled on the McCreary 15. Senior quarterback Peyton Higginbotham broke free three plays later for a 76-yard TD run on a third-and-one play.

Logan Strunk hit the extra point to put



Harlan County sophomore quarterback Brayden Morris cut back against the McCreary Central defense in Friday's game. Morris ran for 185 yards and passed for 130 in the Bears' 36-13 win.

McCreary up 13-8 with 3:12 left in the first quarter.

Harlan County answered with a nine-play, 65-yard drive highlighted by a 19-yard completion from Morris to Sharp. Jayce Brown went the final 12 yards for the score, picking up a block from Colby Shepherd at the goal line.

Morris went in for the two-point conversion and a 16-13 lead.

McCreary responded with a 14-play drive, but this time the HCHS bent but didn't break defense as Higginbotham's pass on a fake field goal attempt was off the mark at the HC 3.

The Bears took control with a 97-yard march over 13 plays. Napier picked up a first down on a fourth-and-two play.

Morris found Kayden Adams for three passes in the drive, capped by a 5-yard touchdown catch with 3.3 seconds left in the half. Tye's kick gave the Bears a 23-13 lead at the break.

After struggling in the first half, the HCHS defense took over in the second by holding the Raiders scoreless. Napier had the first big play of the half when he forced a fumble on a sack on a fourth-and-eight play.

"We made some adjustments at halftime and that made the difference. Our guys decided at halftime they were going to finish this game, and finish is our motto this year:"

Jacob Salyer
Harlan County coach

Harlan County also came up empty on offense, but the defense responded again as Shepherd made a huge fourth down tackle of Higginbotham late in the third quarter.

The Bears went 38 yards in seven plays for a 1-yard TD run by Napier with

6:42 left. Tye's extra point pushed the lead to 30-13. Morris ran for 11 yards and found Brown for an 11-yard catch to set up the score.

Sharp had two runs for first downs and Morris added one before Morris went the final 15 yards for a touchdown with 1:47

left. Adams was stopped on the two-point conversion attempt.

"We made some adjustments at halftime and that made the difference," Saylor said of the HCHS defense.

"Our guys decided at halftime they were going to finish this game, and finish is our motto this year. We made some stops the second half. I'm happy for our kids. They aren't done. I told them before the game to remember the feeling they had walking off the field at Log Mountain last week. I think they know they can be a good football team. We have a tough one next Friday, and we'll get back

to work Monday."

After depending on the passing game in the first half, the Bears put the game away with 93 yards on the ground in the fourth quarter.

"I was very proud of our offensive line at the end," Saylor said.

"We didn't come off the football as well last week. We played a physical football team this week. I told our linemen this week that the backs and receivers get all the glory but they are the reason they get that glory."

Harlan County (4-1) travels to South Laurel on Friday. McCreary Central (2-2) plays host to Bell County on Friday.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

City of Evarts
USDA-RD Grant
October 3, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.

A public hearing will take place on Friday, October 3rd, 2025 at 11:00am. at Evarts City Hall. The purpose of this meeting is to provide general information to the public regarding the City of Evarts purchasing a police vehicle and materials through USDA Rural Development Grant funding. The public is invited to attend and comment on any issues related to the proposed project.

By: City of Evarts and Cumberland Valley Area Development District

Topic: Evarts-Public Hearing for USDA-RD Funding for Police Vehicle
Time: October 3rd, 2025 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Place: Evarts City Hall

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