

Tech in good hands with Crabtree

Former Carter standout explodes for 244 yards receiving, three TDS

HOUSTON – Rice's Jarett Dillard had just made the sort of catch expected from a returning All-American receiver.

Texas Tech's Michael Crabtree responded with the sort of play no one expects from a freshman, redshirt or otherwise.

Another immensely productive game by Crabtree and quarterback Graham Harrell helped Tech (3-0) turn a potentially competitive road game Saturday into a 59-24 rout.

Crabtree, who departed two plays into the fourth quarter, finished with 11 catches for 244 yards and three touchdowns.

"Whenever you call my number, I'm going to do my job out there," Crabtree said. "I expect great, so I work for great."

The timing was as important as the productivity.

Dillard's acrobatic 47-yard touchdown catch had drawn Rice within 21-17 midway through the second quarter.

On the third play of Tech's next series, Harrell saw an impending blitz, changed the play and found Crabtree 10 yards behind the nearest Rice defender for a 74-yard touchdown.

It was the first of five unanswered Tech touchdowns. Three of the five came via the Harrell-to-Crabtree connection.

"It was big," said Harrell, well aware that game situation was fluid at that moment. "That's when we really needed to score. It swung the momentum."

Harrell and Crabtree say they bonded almost from the moment Crabtree, a redshirt freshman, arrived in Lubbock from Carter High School.

Harrell showed Crabtree a few quarterback-to-receiver signals that first day.

"I was thinking, 'Man, we can probably do some big things. It was clicking from there,'" Crabtree said.

Things have only gotten better.

Harrell has thrown for more than 400 yards in each of Tech's three victories. His six touchdown passes Saturday tied the Rice Stadium record held by Texas A&M's Gary Kubiak, now head coach of the Houston Texans.

Already, Crabtree has made each of his three games an event. He entered Saturday second nationally in receiving.

In his first college game, he torched SMU's secondary for three touchdowns. In his second, he tied the Tech school record with 15 receptions against UTEP.

His performance Saturday was the fourth-most receiving yards in Tech history, just 11 yards short of the school record.

"If I knew it, I would have thrown him a curl," Tech coach Mike Leach said.

Crabtree's touchdowns covered 74, 9 and 25 yards.

Rice defensive back Ja'Corey Shepherd remained perplexed afterward.

He felt that he was in good position to make plays, and somehow Crabtree came away with the ball.

At times, it seemed like he and Harrell were playing catch, making it look easy.

"When you have players like him," Harrell said, "it is."

Crabtree's performance proved contagious, to the defense as well as the offense.

Tech's defense forced three turnovers, recorded six sacks and allowed only seven points in the second half.

"He [Crabtree] gets better as the game goes along," Tech linebacker Paul Williams said after finishing with 10 tackles and a sack. "He comes off the field, and he's fired up. He gets us fired up to make a play to get him and the rest of the offense back on the field."

**Dallas Morning News, Chuck Carlton
September 16, 2007**