

DYERSBURG — Lemeco Miller rushed for 111 yards and two touchdowns and 22nd-ranked Cumberland's defense limited Kansas Wesleyan to just 45 yards in the second half in a 31-10 season-opening victory Saturday in the Big River Bowl at J.C. Sawyers Stadium.

Miller carried 19 times and led a rushing attack that churned out 317 yards on the ground on 51 carries, including 222 yards on 31 rushes in the second half. The Bulldogs led 14-10 at the half, scored on a 52-yard touchdown pass to Marquis Hagewood a little over a minute into the third quarter and then added two more touchdowns in the final period.

Reed Gurchiek finished 11-of-21 for 134 yards passing with one touchdown and one interception, while Thomas Goodloe added 55 yards on eight carries and nine total CU players carried the ball in the victory.

Cumberland's defense played bend-but-don't-break in the first offense, with the Coyotes missing two field goals and scoring on a busted play from 52 yards by Brett Giesen. But the unit played much better from the start of the second quarter on, holding KWU to just 63 yards after the TD run.

Giesen rushed 19 times for 118 yards and one score, while KWU quarterback Trey Dallas was 13-of-29 for 99 yards and one interception. He was also sacked three times and harassed on several other occasions.

Cumberland took its opening possession of the game 41 yards after a short punt and a seven-yard return by Daniel Dayton. Gurchiek hit Courtland Styles, Jr., for a 15-yard gain during the drive before the quarterback faked a handoff and rushed nine yards for the score and a 7-0 edge just six minutes into the game.

The Bulldogs went 3-and-out on their next two drives and Giesen broke a 52-yard run on the

first play of KWU's third drive, tying the game at seven.

KWU's Terry Stecker missed a 43-yard field goal at the start of the second period and CU put together its best drive of the opening half, marching 74 yards on 11 plays. Gurchiek was 3-for-3 on the drive for 29 yards and rushed once for 12 yards. Styles caught and 11-yard pass on third down, getting to the KWU five-yard line, and Miller carried a couple of defenders into the end zone for a 14-7 Bulldog lead.

Stecker missed a 45-yard field goal on the ensuing possession but Gurchiek threw an interception on the next drive for CU, setting up the Coyotes before the break. Despite a pair of holding calls backing up KWU, they moved the ball 15 yards before Stecker finally found the range, this one from 49 yards with 29 seconds left before the half.

On the third play of the second half Gurchiek found Hagewood on a post corner and the freshman turned it into a 52-yard score.

The Bulldogs drove 80 yards on 13 plays covering nearly six minutes at the end of the third quarter and beginning of the fourth, just what the doctor ordered for both sides of the ball. Jared White converted a 24-yard field goal to end the drive for a 24-10 Bulldog lead.

Miller finished off the final scoring drive of the game, going 19 yards on fourth down for his second TD.

Cumberland opens the home schedule next Saturday at 1:30 p.m. against the University of the Cumberlands at Nokes-Lasater Field.