

HARDIN

FROM **PAGE B1**

hour and the Knights' seemingly solid lead appeared to teeter in the balance.

With little time remaining, Bulldog receiver Jeremiah Smith was unable to secure an underthrown pass on fourth down from quarterback Adrian Lunsford in the end zone that could have drastically changed the outcome of this game.

"I stay nervous on the sidelines because I know what we're capable of doing," Knight Coach Ross Brown said with a laugh. "I knew what could have happened. But our defense finally had a game where it played well from start to finish. Not allowing them to score a touchdown all night was a big step forward for this team."

Marion County grabbed control of the game with the only touchdowns of the game. Tight end Max Taylor converted a 30-yard completion from Wyatt Thompson into the first score for the Knights.

Dee Thornton then hit paydirt with the second Knights' touchdown on a five-yard burst. Thompson's second successful extra point had Marion County up 14-3 midway through the third quarter.

John Hardin started to generate some offense but a costly penalty and a pair of Knight tackles for loss limited the Bulldogs to a long field goal attempt. Kicker Ashton Russell connected from 42 yards for his second field goal of the night and John Hardin trailed by only one score.

Penalties and costly miscues on offense by the Knights opened the door for John Hardin's last gasp.

After driving deep inside Knight territory, the game came down to that pivotal pass dropped in the end zone.

"They really had established the momentum before the delay. We had some penalties on some big plays that got called back and we basically shot ourselves in the foot. We almost gave it away," Brown added.

The Knight Coach credited some new faces to the team's dramatic improvement on the defensive side of the ball.

"Isaac Leake really stepped up for us. He made more tackles than any other lineman all year. We've moved some players around and Max Taylor has been asked to fill in for different spots and he had a great game," Brown explained.

Offensively, Brown gave notice to halfback Thornton and his quarterback Thompson.

"Dee ran the ball hard all night. What can you say about Wyatt Thompson? He was able to get us some first downs just on sheer will. That was important, because after the delay it never really stopped raining," Brown said.

The Knights improved to 2-3 on the season and now face Thomas Nelson on the road Friday night. The game time for this battle has been moved up to 7:00.

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TOBACCO

FROM **PAGE B4**

estimate.

But agriculture revenue is now up to \$8.3 billion, with livestock — poultry, cattle, horses — making up over 60% of the state's revenue. Cattle farmers in Kentucky have grappled with their own financial challenges while dealing with tariffs, competition from abroad and the loss of farmland.

He said diversification of the agricultural economy in the wake of the tobacco buyout, with help from the state in the form of grants to farmers encouraging diversification, is a large part of the state's success in moving beyond tobacco.

Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell said various boards and efforts, ranging from the Kentucky Agricultural Finance Corporation to the Kentucky Agriculture Development Board, have helped provide farmers more options.

Shell also believes there's still an opportunity to support Kentucky's remaining

tobacco farmers, one way through stronger tariffs against foreign tobacco imports, to bolster the demand for domestic growers. He said even with efforts to tax "out of existence" cigarettes, tobacco farmers still "deserve the same representation as everybody else" in the agriculture community.

"I think that there is potential, maybe not for growth in the industry, but at least for the hemorrhaging to stop, to where the farmers feel like their profitability has increased, or they're able to raise enough to where that they can sustain their operation," Shell said.

But that does not mean every farmer made it through the massive transition. Snell said smaller tobacco farmers in Eastern Kentucky couldn't compete by growing smaller plots of tobacco after the buyout when competing with other farmers who could win larger contracts with tobacco companies to grow more.

Another organization that small tobacco farmers relied on was the Burley

Tobacco Growers Cooperative, founded in Lexington in 1922. That cooperative dissolved in 2020 after struggling to find its footing, including making a failed investment in growing hemp, following the 2004 buyout.

Robert Bach, a 80-year-old farmer from Bath County who helps his son raise beef cattle, was one of those Eastern Kentucky tobacco farmers. He still keeps a few burley tobacco plants growing in his backyard garden, even though his wife says they take up too much room.

"It's just part of Kentucky history. It's just it's hard to give history up for me anyway," Bach said.

Bach grew up in Northern Kentucky and moved to Bath County in the late

1970s after serving in the Vietnam War, helping his wife's family grow tobacco and raise cattle. He said growing burley tobacco was one of the main ways to make a living in Bath County; the tobacco check helped buy Christmas gifts.

He said tobacco companies still are providing contracts to those who can grow larger acreage of tobacco. But for him, he bowed out of the industry a few years after the buyout, keeping the tobacco plants in the garden to remind people of the past.

"We've had a couple people come visit us and wanted to know about what a tobacco plant looked like because they hadn't seen any of it," Bach said. I just take them out to the garden."



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