

## **Arab Knights Travel to Butler - Part 1**

### **David A. Myers**

The convoy of buses rolled out of the parking lot, straining noisily under their load. Several carloads of students and parents followed. Many more would be close behind, after a quick dinner. For fans who couldn't make the trip, tailgate parties would be forming soon in the shopping center parking lots about town.

From the street and from porches along the route, people waived at the buses as they passed. Because it was the first game of the season, it was accompanied by the inevitable optimism for a good season. Most of the town would be tuning in to the radio broadcast of the game. The buses merged onto the highway for the forty-minute ride that would take them through Morgan City, down Brindle Mountain, through Lacey's Spring, and into Huntsville. Minutes later they were at the stadium.

"All right, guys. Let's go! Linemen first," yelled Coach Steele.

The Knights filed off of the bus as a group of Butler students watched. The huge linemen apparently made the desired impression, for the crowd instinctively took several steps back as the team spread out and filled the unloading zone. The Knights filed into the gate and into their locker room.

"Get a load of these guys. They're huge!" someone said.

"Yeah. This might be a decent game after all."

Sixty minutes later the Knights took the field for their warm-ups. Many fans stopped to watch the teams go through their pre-game drills as they filed in. There were many more Butler fans in the stadium. That was to be expected since the game was being played at their field. A couple of old timers leaned against the fence and watched Jimmy Mason taking snaps and throwing passes.

"That's a big, strong looking quarterback Arab's got there. He's big enough to play line. I don't remember him from last year."

"I don't either. Number twelve. Well, he's written in at the end here. Mason. Hmmp - never heard of him."

"Well, let's go find us a seat."

Just before game time the teams lined up behind their respective goals. The cheerleaders for each team held huge paper banners across their path. The teams crashed through the barriers

and charged onto the field amidst cheers and fight songs. Jimmy fastened his chin strap and took his place at the sideline. He nervously awaited the first offensive series.

The Knights won the toss and elected to receive the kick. Tommy Port and Hank Jordan stood back to receive the kickoff. Jimmy stood on the sideline and waited. The kick came down to the ten-yard line and Tommy took it on a dead run on the far side of the field. He faked into the middle and made a move to the near sideline. He outran the pursuit and was able to turn up field. Just as he accelerated and headed up the sideline, a hand reached out and punched the ball out of his hands. Before anyone realized that it was on the turf, a Butler player jumped on top of it. When the dust cleared, Butler had recovered at the Knight's twenty-five.

Jimmy moaned in disgust. What a tough break this was. Tommy trotted back to the sidelines hanging his head.

"It's okay man. We'll get it back," said Jimmy.

The Butler crowd was loud. Tommy stood with Jimmy and Hoover and watched as Butler tried a run up the middle. The Knight defense stopped them for a short gain. Big Bill Simmons was like a granite wall, despite the fact that two Rebel linemen were trying to push him back. The crowd settled down a little bit. From the press box, the story unfolded for the benefit of the fans back home who were listening to their radios.

"That's a tough way to open a season, folks. The Knights are going to have to dig in here. Second and eight. Here's the snap! Jones is back to pass. He unloads to White in the flat. White slips a tackle and he's down to the fifteen, ten, five, Touchdown!"

Jimmy closed his eyes and swore. Tommy spit and hung his head.

"We'll get 'em back, buddy."

Tommy took the ensuing kickoff once again. This time he found a crease and took it up the middle.

"Port crosses the thirty and is taken down hard at the thirty-three! Nice run."

The Hal and George radio team had made the trip.

"It really was a nice run, George. Port made a quick move up the middle and picked up good yardage. He was cradling the ball

with both hands this time. Now let's see if the Knights can get something going."

Jimmy snapped his helmet as he trotted to the huddle.

"Twenty-three on three. Twenty-three on three. Let's get Tommy going, boys. We can get this right back. One, two three... hey!"

"The Knights are lined up in an I formation. Jimmy Mason is under center. The hand-off is to Port and he rams his way to the thirty-eight for a pickup of five."

"The Knights line opened a nice hole for Port," Hal commented.

"Yes indeed! And Port is an extremely strong runner. Knights' fullback Jimmy Smith ran into the hole first and cleared out the linebacker. Both backs have spent a lot of time in the weight room and are good, strong runners," George added.

"This whole team is in great shape. Simmons looks like a man among boys out there. Coach Joe Steele is a strong believer in hitting the weights. The Knights are always a well-conditioned team. Even Mason looks strong."

"Here comes Arab to the line. The snap, it's a hand-off to the fullback, Smith who gets a couple up the middle. That'll bring up third down."

Jimmy got the play from Joseph King, who was alternating plays at wide receiver with speedy Hank Jordan. It was to be his first pass as a Knight.

"Third and three. Mason back to throw for the first time as a Knight. He's got Fuller! Ohhh..., in and out of Fuller's hands. Tough break for the Knights. Mason was on the money with that throw and Fuller doesn't miss very often."

"You're right about that, George. The players call him 'Hoover' for that very reason. He usually gets anything that's close. Mason showed a lot of poise on that play. He faded back and looked at a couple of receivers before coming back to Fuller. Good protection by the line, too. This may be a case of first game jitters for the Knights, but they have to be careful they don't dig themselves into a hole they can't get out of."

"Here's the punt. White receives the ball at the Rebel thirty-eight and finds a crease up the middle! He's to the forty..., fifty...,

he's in the open! He'll go all the way! Nobody laid a hand on him. Butler will go up by two touchdowns."

"Good heavens! That boy is fast! He was through the crease and into open field before anyone knew it. This puts the Knights in a tough spot. We're halfway through the first quarter. Butler thirteen. Arab nothing. The Knights are stunned!"

On the sidelines, Coach Steele was talking to his quarterback.

"Jimmy, we've got to settle these guys down. I know we can drive on this team. They'll be coming after you now. Let's try some short passes with an occasional draw to keep things honest."

"Gotcha, coach."

"The extra point is good and we're halfway through the first quarter. Butler fourteen. Arab zip"

This time the kick went out of bounds and the Knights took over on their thirty-five yard line. Jimmy jogged to the huddle. The Butler defensive unit was laughing and joking amongst themselves. The Knights waited for play to resume.

"Hey you, number twelve," taunted number ninety-seven on the defense, "I'm coming after you!"

Jimmy ignored the taunts. He was experienced enough to know that he had to stay focused.

"Okay guys, let's show these ladies what we've been doing all summer. Blue route three! Blue route three! Boys, gimme just a little time and we can do some business. One, two, three..."

"The Knights look confident at the line," commented George.

Before getting into his crouch Bill Simmons looked over the defense, pointed out a couple of defenders, and called out signals to the offensive line. Jimmy looked over the defense. He knew he had to try and get a drive going. He needed to keep the offense on the field for a while so that he could get a feel as to how to attack this Butler defense. He also needed to keep the Butler offense on the sidelines. He felt that his team was just as strong as the Rebels. If Butler had an edge, it was in speed. They also held the momentum. That was about to change.

"Hike, hike, HIKE!"

Jimmy took the snap and dropped back a few steps. The Butler defensive line tried to rush but before they could get a push Jimmy

had unloaded a short pass to Jay about ten yards up the field across the middle. This time the Hoover sucked it in.

"Complete to Fuller at the forty-five! He's got some room to run! Fuller's across the 50 and dragged down at the Rebel 45-yard line. First down Knights!"

"What a nice play. Mason dropped three yards and hit Hoover on a crossing pattern right up the middle. The line did a good job of pass blocking," added Hal.

Jimmy took his signal from the sideline.

"Okay guys, the boss has spoken. Here it is. Green route three. Green route three..." Jimmy's voice was calm and assuring.

"Once again Jimmy Mason is back to throw. He's looking right, pumps once, throws left. Complete! That's the wide-out Jordan at the thirty. Another first down and once again Mason is on the money."

"Not only that but he had time to set up and look down field. The rush didn't get close."

Hal could hear the concern in the voices of the Butler coaches in the press box.

"Geez! Another perfect pass. Where did this kid come from? Mike, we've got to get some pressure on this kid!"

Hal smiled.

*Only moments before they had been talking about a rout. This could get interesting. If only our boys can hang in there.*

The boys had more in mind than just hanging in there.

"Mason back to pass and, he's under pressure! He's going back, he unloads to Port in the flat! Screen pass! Port is to the twenty, ten, five, touchdown! Wow, what a run! What a play! The Knights are on the board."

"And the Knights linemen just cleaned out the left side of the field for Tommy Port," said Hal. "The Rebels were blitzing and the Knights ran a perfectly executed screen. The perfect play to negate the blitz! The kick is good and Arab has cut the Rebels' lead in half! Butler fourteen, Arab seven. Whoa, baby!"

"Hal, that was a very impressive drive. The rebels vaunted pass rush was completely neutralized."

The Knights were jubilant on the sidelines. The opening game jitters were over and the team was feeling confident. If they could hold Butler and get the ball back, they would be in business.

Jimmy and Tommy Port stood next to Coach Steele and watched from the sidelines. White had run twice for twenty yards.

"That guy is fast! He looks skinny though. If we can get some good licks on him, he'll slow down," said Tommy.

"We'll have to catch him first," replied Jimmy. He was interrupted by a sudden scramble for the ball at mid-field followed by the sight of a jubilant Bill Simmons coming out of the pile holding the football above his head.

"Fumble!" George shouted into the microphone. "The Knights have the ball at the Butler forty-nine!"

"Oh, what a break for the Knights. Simmons is just dominating the middle of the line. And it looks like it was Simmons who recovered."

"That's also the end of the quarter. Well, George, the Knights have gotten themselves back into it behind the passing of Jimmy Mason and the running of Tommy Port. And what a game Mason's having. Let's not forget that the Knights are no slouches on the defensive side of the ball either."

"Hal, the last time the Knights had the ball they looked unstoppable. It'll be interesting to see what kind of adjustments the Rebels try defensively."

"Knights now moving right to left. The hand-off is to Port and he's down to the thirty-two. Nice pickup of eight yards through the left side of the line."

"There was some penetration on the right side and fortunately the Knights were running left. Mason was hit hard just after he gave the ball to Port."

From the ground Jimmy could hear the collective moan of the Butler crowd, telling him that the play had been successful. He looked up to see big number ninety-seven walking away. He had hit Jimmy with a pretty good shot.

"You all right, man?" asked Tommy as he came to the huddle.

"Yeah," said Jimmy, "but we're going to have to watch that guy."

"The Knights up to the line, Mason calling the signals. The snap, oh, Mays is all over Mason. There was absolutely nothing he could do but eat the ball. That's a loss of five yards."

"What's the deal, man. Who's got ninety-seven?" asked Hoover.

"He's shootin' the gap on the count. He's reading the cadence," said offensive tackle Tanker Cagle.

"Let's see if we can do something with this. On hike, nobody moves, okay? Take a break. Let's see if we can get an easy five. If he doesn't bite, I'll call time."

Jimmy followed his center to the line.

"Hike, hike, HIKE!"

No one moved except the linebacker who shot into the gap between the guard and Cagle, finding himself conspicuously in the Knight backfield amidst several yellow flags.

"Offside on the defense is the call. Mays, who was in the Knight backfield on the last two plays, jumped the gun that time. And the Knights get back the five they lost on second down. Third and two. The Knights are back to the line. Mason under center. There goes Mays again! Was he drawn off?"

"George, it looks like the ref is calling another offside on the Rebels. Mays shot the gap again. The ball was never snapped. I didn't notice any movement on the offense," said Hal.

"Hal, I think that Jimmy Mason felt that Mays was trying to anticipate the snap by reading the cadence and shooting the gap. He's using the cadence to draw him offside. That's a first down at the twenty-seven."

"That sure is what appears to be happening. Here we go again," chuckled Hal.

For the third time Mays jumped into the backfield on the inflected "HIKE". Though he didn't make contact with an offensive player, Simmons alertly snapped the ball before the bewildered linebacker could get back.

"Another five-yard gain for the Knight's," laughed George, "and the drive continues."

"The Rebel coach is calling time out. They want to stop and regroup here," said Hal.

"That had to happen sooner or later. That's some real 'heady' play by the offense. I think that'll slow down the rush for a little while."

"Mason brings his team to the line on first and five. This time the Knights snap the ball. Port straight up the middle and he crashes down to the fifteen-yard line! Some good hard running by Tommy Port and another first down for the Knights!"

"The Knights can really help themselves by scoring on this drive, George, especially after being down by fourteen early in the game."

"No doubt there, Hal. Mason hands the ball to the fullback, Smith, up the middle for four yards. The Knight line just pushed forward and Smith got in low behind them and picked up some tough yards."

The Knights were gaining confidence with each chunk of positive yardage, and it was becoming obvious that they were able to control the line of scrimmage. Jimmy agreed with the call from the sideline. Butler was becoming concerned with stopping the run and were cheating up toward the line. Jimmy took a short drop and unloaded to his friend Jay, who was cutting across the middle, angling toward the goal line.

"Complete to Fuller and he's down to the one-yard line! First and goal!"

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