



## **Vacaville, Will C. Wood take field for first football practice of 2017 season**

The sun hats were out, the helmets were strapped on tight and the piercing sound of a whistle being blown could be heard in even the most isolated pockets of the empty campuses.

It's official: Football is finally back in Vacaville.

Area high school football teams convened for their first official practice of the 2017 season Monday afternoon in brutally hot temperatures that exceeded 100 degrees in and around Vacaville.

According to the Sac-Joaquin Section's acclimatization chart, padded practices won't be allowed until Wednesday. T-shirts, shorts and helmets were the combination of choice for most players Monday as teams ran through various pre-season drills and conditioning.

Regardless of the permitted attire, football has returned and so too has the excitement for another season on the gridiron.

"There's always a lot of excitement and energy for the first practice of the season," said Vacaville High School head coach Mike Papadopoulos, who said 67 varsity players were counted at Monday's practice. "We're really looking forward to another exciting year for us."

Another good year could indeed be on the horizon for Vacaville, a team that returns many of its core starters after taking second place in the Monticello Empire League standings last year.

Jake Levengood is back for his senior season and will anchor an offensive line that is always stout as the foundation of Vacaville's Wing-T offense. Timothy Jackson returns to the Bulldogs' backfield after he ran for 1,045 yards and 11 touchdowns, averaging nearly nine yards per attempt.

The Bulldogs did lose key pieces to graduation in quarterback Troy Claunch, wide receiver Jon Donaldson, wide receiver-defensive back Cassius Reynolds and linebacker Jacob Abramowicz, but Papadopoulos is confident he has a young group capable of competing for an MEL title this year.

"There's a lot of great chemistry with this group," Papadopoulos said. "We had a tremendous summer. We have a lot of good leadership this year and the kids have been working very hard."

Papadopoulos said this week will feature plenty of conditioning and basic drills as his players get back into a football groove.

"We're still kind of getting the kids into football shape," he said. "There's going to be a lot of strength training and kind of getting the kids acclimated to their equipment and everything as well."

Not far away, Will C. Wood also made a return to the gridiron Monday and welcomed 62 varsity players to the team's first practice.

Wood is looking to return to the section playoffs following a 5-5 overall campaign a year ago. The Wildcats, a high-scoring team in 2016, will have many premier playmakers back on offense, although they will sorely miss quarterback Carson Strong, a University of Nevada, Reno commit who has been ruled out for season with an injury.

"We've had a pretty good summer," said Wood head coach Carlos Meraz. "We're making some adjustments with Carson out, but we've looked pretty good. We have a lot of guys returning from last year's team, so we have a lot of experience coming back."

Meraz said the quarterback competition to replace Strong is between Andrew Jones and Jhalen Grayer. Jones was described by Meraz as more of a "thrower" with pinpoint accuracy and good zip on his throws, while Grayer was characterized as an "athlete" who can make a lot of plays with his arm and his legs.

Whoever wins the job will have no shortage of weapons at his disposal. Shifty running backs Chris Catlin and Daniel McFadden are back for their senior seasons, as is explosive wideout Asa Wondeh, who was one of Strong's favorite targets last season. Reliable tight end Zach Marsh-Wojan also returns to the mix after snagging 59 passes for 805 yards and eight touchdowns, a team-high last year