



Vacaville High football team lights up Armijo in home opener

By Matt Sieger | Vacaville Reporter | March 27, 2021

VACAVILLE - There were fireworks at halftime on homecoming night Friday at Tom Zunino Stadium. But the Vacaville High football team created fireworks of its own with some offensive displays that left the visiting Armijo Royals breathless in a 63-12 Bulldog victory in Monticello Empire League action.

The refurbished Tom Zunino Stadium was completed last May, but the football team patiently waited through COVID to get a chance to christen the new field

The first football stadium at Vacaville High opened in 1952. It was dubbed Harold Youngblood Stadium in honor of the former superintendent of schools. Zunino became head coach of the football team in 1962. He decided to make it a project in his lifetime to recreate the football field for future generations of Vacaville High students.

The school district approached the Youngblood family in 2004 to see if they were okay with changing the name. The family was fine with it, for they recognized how much Zunino had contributed to the upgraded stadium.

This latest \$6.7 million upgrade, funded through Measure A, provides AstroTurf for the gridiron and track, a brand new scoreboard and flagpole, relocation of some of the venues for track and field, and a host of other improvements.

Head coach Mike Papadopolous is proud to carry on the tradition of great Bulldog football for his father-in-law, Zunino, who served as coach and athletic director for 38 years before he passed away in 2008.

"I'm just fortunate to have such a great family to be part of. It's just a privilege for me to do this," Papadopolous said. "I'm really excited that we were able to get some people here today just to be part of the whole thing. I'm very appreciative of our student council

and our classes that took the opportunity and found ways to still have fireworks and engage the community. I'm very, very proud of everybody."

He also had praise for his team that kept in condition during COVID until they finally had a chance to play.

"As I'll remind the kids, it's just a privilege to have this season," he said, "They've endured so much. Very resilient group of kids."

On a pleasant evening under a full moon, with two family members per athlete, cheerleader and drumline member allowed in the stands due to COVID, the home team wasted no time in showing its firepower.

After forcing the visiting Royals into a three-and-out after the kickoff, the Bulldogs scored on their very first play from scrimmage.

"It was a little screen, a little dump pass," said Darian Leon-Guerrero, who caught the pass on the right flat from quarterback Ryan Vaughan and took it 42 yards into the end zone, breaking at least two tackles on the way. "It was awesome."

After another three-and-out by Armijo, Leon-Guerrero found another way to score, running the ball in from 13 yards out to make it 14-0 with 5:37 left in the first quarter after the first of nine extra points by kicker Ariel Till.

Vaughan was an equal opportunity quarterback, finding four different receivers for touchdowns in the first half. The junior field general gave way to Mayson Olney after the half, by which time Vaughan had completed 11 of 16 passes for 214 yards without an interception in a skillful showing.

He had an electric connection with Tony Wiley with a little under two minutes left in the opening quarter.

"That was just one of our pop slant passes," Vaughan said. "We've been working on it all week and we were excited to run it against these guys. We got a good look and it worked out and Tony made a good play."

Good play is an understatement. The diminutive running back caught the pass in full stride, broke a tackle and made several Royals miss on his way to a 69-yard score.

"The safety came over, so I had to break the tackle," said Wiley, "But my guy Logan (Cunningham) blocked for me."

That made it 21-0 Bulldogs. Early in the second quarter they added another score on a two-yard run by Blake Espino.

With 9:15 left in the half, Vaughan found Timothy Plowman for a 15-yard TD to boost the margin to 35-0. Four minutes later, the quarterback connected with Antonio Whittaker for a 14-yard score and a 42-0 lead.

“My guys are the best,” said Vaughan of his receiving corps. “I love working with them every day at practice and coach Tanner (Donaldson, receivers coach) has done a great job of getting us ready to go and I think it showed today. We were able to get the ball to different guys. So I’m really excited about the feeling we’ve got going into next week (game at Vanden).”

Armijo finally got on the board with 1:10 left in the half on a 13-yard pass from Justin Duff to Kaiba Washinton. The two-point conversion attempt failed, making it 42-6 at halftime.

After the halftime fireworks display, Wiley put on an explosive show for the fans. He took the kickoff on the nine-yard line, wove a path through the defense and sprinted all the way into the end zone.

A 91-yard kickoff return for a TD may not be a high school record. But it could be a record for an athlete who did it with one shoe.

“It (his left shoe) came off as soon as I caught it. My foot was really cold,” said Wiley with a laugh. “I saw green grass so I had to take it.”

That made the score 49-6. Armijo scored with 3:56 left in the third quarter on a 12-yard run by Jayden Matthews. A two-point conversion attempt failed, leaving the count at 49-12.

Vacaville scored twice more in the final quarter, first on a 7-yard run by Bo Hernandez with 5:10 remaining and then on a 38-yard scamper by Kyler Abramowicz with 1:32 left.

The Bulldog defense was stout all night, often in the Armijo backfield for losses. Plowman and Fernando Gonzalez had interceptions to squelch Armijo drives.

“They executed well,” said Papadopolous of the overall team effort. “We were able to work on some things and clean some things up from last week as well. We are just hoping to get a little bit better each week.”

“I think we played as more of a unit,” said Leon-Guerrero.

“We’ve settled in as a team,” added Vaughan.