



## **Vacaville High football team ousted from playoffs by Elk Grove**

**By Matt Seiger | Vacaville Reporter | November 15, 2019**

It is hard to play from behind.

On the opening kickoff Friday night at Will C. Wood's Wildcat Stadium, Elk Grove's Khalani Riddick returned the ball 81 yards for a touchdown against Vacaville High after just 15 ticks of the clock.

"Right out of the gate we put ourselves in a really, really bad position, We were playing catchup the whole time," said Bulldog head coach Mike Papadopoulos. "Then we gave them a short field, then we gave them a second short field."

Vacaville (8-3) trailed 21-6 after the first quarter, never fully recovered and lost 52-29 to the Thundering Herd (8-4) in the second round of the Sac-Joaquin Section Division II playoffs.

No. 3-seed Vacaville had a first-round bye, while No. 6 seed Elk Grove beat No. 11 seed Oakmont 41-22 in round-one play.

Last year, when the Bulldogs lost to Elk Grove 28-21 in the first round, ball control was Vacaville's problem, with multiple lost fumbles. This year the problem was the efficiency of the Herd's triple option.

Elk Grove's 5-foot, 6-inch quarterback, senior Carter Harris, is a master of the sleight-of-hand needed to run the option. It seemed as if the Bulldogs were having difficulty figuring out if Harris was going to keep the ball or give it to junior running back Cruz Baltazar or to either senior running back Hunter Hall or junior wingback Jeremy Crook.

Harris, Baltazar, and Hall ran for 147, 119 and 80 yards, respectively, on the night. Crook scored three touchdowns.

Vacaville bounced back with a nice eight-play drive highlighted by two 16-yard pass plays from Jeremy Villalobos to Myron Amey and Michael Otterstadt and a 32-yard TD run by Darian Leon-Guerrero with 9:04 left in the first quarter. The Bulldogs trailed 7-6 after a missed extra point by Chris Sacca.

But Vacaville kicked off again to Riddick, probably a mistake, as he returned this one all the way to the Vacaville 35. Three plays later, on a pitch from Harris, Crook took it in from 15 yards out for a 14-6 lead after the second of Jasiah Renteria's seven PATs.

On their next possession, the Bulldogs went for it on fourth-and-one from their own 41 but were short by inches. Harris immediately capitalized, running 41 yards on a quarterback keeper on the Herd's first play from scrimmage for a TD and 21-6 lead after the PAT with 5:34 left in the quarter.

"It was just a really, really tough hole that first quarter to get out of," Papadopolous said.

The hole got deeper early in the second quarter when Nick Woolstencroft intercepted a Villalobos pass on the Vacaville 35-yard line and ran it back to the 18. Four plays later Crook ran it in from seven yards out for a 28-6 Herd lead after the extra point.

On Vacaville's next possession, Villalobos found Michael Briscoe with a pass on the left flat which the speedy senior receiver turned into a 62-yard touchdown to bring the 'Dogs within 28-12 with 7:34 left in the half. A two-point conversion attempt failed.

But Elk Grove was relentless with the option and drove 70 yards on six plays on its next possession, Crook scoring on a 16-yard scamper for a 35-12 Herd lead after the PAT with 5:05 left in the half.

After Vacaville was forced to punt, the Bulldogs caused an Elk Grove fumble that Tyler Beelard recovered. Sacca then kicked a 35-yard field goal eight seconds before intermission to make the halftime score 35-15.

The second half began as a defensive battle, but with 5:46 left in the third quarter, Harris again found a seam and ran 77 yards for his second TD and a 42-15 lead after the extra point.

That made a comeback nearly impossible, but the Bulldogs showed some spark of their own.

On second-and-ten from his team's own 49-yard line, Villalobos threw a pass down the middle of the field which was tipped by a defender right into the hands of Amey, who waltzed into the end zone for a 51-yard TD. Vacaville trailed 42-22 after the Sacca PAT with 4:35 left in the quarter.

Then, in a key play, Vacaville tried an onside kick. Sacca recovered it as the Vacaville players and fans celebrated, only to have the referees rule that the ball had not gone the required ten yards before Sacca fell on it.

The Bulldogs made a big fourth-down stop after Elk Grove took over, and Villalobos hit Briscoe with a 62-yard strike down to the Elk Grove 24. but the drive stalled when the Herd sacked Villalobos twice.

Elk Grove was very fast on defense and Herd defenders suffocated Villalobos all night, not giving him much time to pass.

“Very much what we expected it was going to be,” said Papadopoulos of the pass rush, “and he (Villalobos) still threw for a ton of yards (365) tonight, some great catches along the way... We were capable of scoring on a single play... It just put us in a bad spot having to catch up the whole time.”

After a 24-yard field goal by Renteria with 8:45 left in the game, the Bulldogs did strike on a single play, a 65-yard pass play from Villalobos to Briscoe, who made a brilliant catch with a man right on him and broke away down the left sideline for a TD to cut the margin to 45-29 after the Sacca extra point.

But playing catchup led to a couple of interceptions by Elk Grove, one setting up a 14-yard TD run by Hunter Hall with 3:19 left for the 52-29 final score after the extra point.

“The kids fought really hard all the way to the end, just as we asked them,” Papadopoulos said. “I’m really proud of the resiliency of our kids. We had so much growth throughout the year. We had tremendous senior leadership and it was quite a ride all the way through. A really memorable and great group of kids to work with. I’m really proud of them.”

Briscoe compiled 229 receiving yards on six catches. Amey caught five balls for 90 yards.

Elk Grove will now face No. 2 seed Consumes Oaks, which defeated No. 7 Granite Bay, 31-20.