



## **Fumbles doom Vacaville in season-ending 28-21 loss to Elk Grove**

*Losing the turnover battle is usually not conducive to winning football games. Vacaville High School will have an entire offseason to wonder what could have been.*

*Vacaville turned the ball over seven times Friday night at Tom Zunino Stadium, and, yet, the Bulldogs still had chances to win the game late in the fourth quarter in Friday night's 28-21 loss to Elk Grove in the first round of the Sac-Joaquin Section Division II playoffs.*

*Four fumbles — two of them inside the Elk Grove 15 yard line — and three interceptions ultimately spelled doom for the seventh-seeded Bulldogs, who had their season come to an end with the loss. Adding to the misery, Vacaville was also stuffed twice on fourth-and-one conversion attempts.*

*Elk Grove, which wasn't all that impressive offensively, played a cleaner game with just one turnover. The 10th-seeded Thundering Herd advanced to play at No. 2 Central Catholic next week.*

*"The turnovers are just the kids playing hard, but you can't do that in any game and especially not against a team like Elk Grove in the playoffs," Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos said. "For us to still have an opportunity to tie the football game late with how many turnovers we had, it says a lot about our kids and how they were able to hang in there and keep fighting."*

*The interceptions can be forgiven with two of them coming on deep, desperation heaves from quarterback Jeremy Villalobos as the Bulldogs tried to tie the game with very little time left.*

*The fumbles are a different story. All four were costly and uncharacteristic.*

*After Villalobos connected with Dylan Warfield for a 58-yard touchdown pass on Vacaville's opening drive, the Bulldogs were on the doorstep of going up 14-0 when Elk Grove's Nick Woolstencroft ripped the ball out of Talon Abramowicz's hands at the Elk Grove 12 yard line and returned it close to midfield.*

*Nothing came of that fumble as Vacaville's defense forced back-to-back Elk Grove punts before the Herd scored their first touchdown on the first play of the second quarter with 5-foot-6 quarterback Carter Harris slithering his way through the Bulldog defense for a 22-yard touchdown run to even the scoring at 7-7.*

*Vacaville fumbled the ball away again at midfield on its ensuing possession, and this turnover resulted in points. Elk Grove capitalized on the gift four plays later as Harris shuffled the ball to Hunter Hall on an option play off right tackle and Hall took it to the house untouched for a 47-yard touchdown as the Herd went up 14-7.*

*Vacaville quickly responded, evening the score at 14-14 with a Villalobos 55-yard touchdown pass to Warfield. The big play was set up by a play-action fake from Villalobos, who turned and found Warfield streaking wide open deep down field along the left hash. Warfield caught the ball in stride, broke a tackle and scooted up the left sideline for the score.*

*An Elk Grove punt immediately gave Vacaville decent field position and a chance to grab the lead, but this time Warfield put the ball on the ground and the Herd recovered their third fumble of the first half. Starting at the Bulldog 32 yard line, the Herd again made it hurt as Harris quickly connected with Tre'von Frazier for 31 yards down to the 1-yard line. Harris jammed it in from there for a 21-14 lead.*

*Vacaville was forced to punt on its next possession, and Elk Grove appeared to be content with a seven point halftime lead. The Herd ran the ball on their first two plays of the drive with just over two minutes remaining in the half and faced a third-and-five when Vacaville burned a timeout.*

*Elk Grove appeared to change its mind after that stoppage. The Herd picked up the first down with a running play before Hall ripped off a 20-yard run. Harris then faked a handoff and hit Andrew Marlan over the top for a 39-yard touchdown pass with just five seconds left in the half.*

*Elk Grove led 28-14 at the break.*

*"We took a chance of getting a stop there and they burned us," Papadopoulos said of the final moments before halftime.*

*The Vacaville defense stepped up big following intermission, forcing Elk Grove into four straight three-and-out drives to open the second half. After the first punt, the Bulldogs used 13 plays to get inside the Elk Grove 10-yard line only to fumble the ball away for the fourth time.*

*Vacaville later drained even more clock on a nine play scoring drive with Clayton Watterson plowing through the Herd for a 12-yard touchdown scamper to cut the lead to 28-21.*

*Elk Grove continued to struggle on offense, but Vacaville punted and turned the ball over on downs on back-to-back drives as the clock continued to burn in the fourth quarter.*

*The Herd chewed enough clock and played the field position game well enough to force the Bulldogs into desperation mode late in the fourth quarter. Vacaville had an opportunity starting at its own 20-yard line with 2:10 left in the game, but a failed trick play set the Bulldogs into a third-and-18 situation and Villalobos was intercepted deep down the field attempting to move the chains.*

*Elk Grove couldn't pick up one more first down to ice the game away, leaving Vacaville with one last breath — although the Bulldogs needed to go 94 yards in 11 seconds. The Bulldogs picked up 20 yards on a hook and ladder play to Warfield before Villalobos was intercepted near midfield on the last play of the game.*

*Vacaville finished with 356 yards of total offense, led by Warfield's 176 all-purpose yards — 124 yards receiving on five catches and 52 yards rushing on 11 carries. He had two receiving scores.*

*Nick Smith added 48 yards rushing on 10 carries, while Abramowicz tossed in 38 yards on four touches.*

*Trevor Marshall had a fumble recovery on defense for Vacaville.*

*Despite starting the year 1-4 in non-conference play, Vacaville won its second straight Monticello Empire League title and its sixth league banner this decade.*

*"It's been quite a ride for our guys," Papadopoulos said. "It was a tough start to our season, but putting a (league) banner in our gym was important to us and the kids showed a lot of hard work and resiliency to get that done. For them to accomplish that, we'll definitely celebrate that."*

