



Vacaville football wins wild shootout over Liberty in season opener

If there was one word that accurately sums up Vacaville High School's Week Zero win over Liberty, it would be resiliency.

In what turned out to be a good old-fashioned shootout between a pair of teams that combined for 94 points under the bright lights at Tom Zunino Stadium, it was the Bulldogs who finally pulled out a pair of gutty drives to create separation late in the fourth quarter.

Trailing 41-38 with 11 minutes left in the fourth, Vacaville orchestrated a methodical nine play drive that ate up over five minutes on the clock and concluded with junior running back Ethan Houdyshell scampering into the end zone from 26 yards out to give the Bulldogs a 45-42 lead.

Vacaville's defense struggled at times, but came through when it had to, forcing the Liberty to punt on the ensuing drive. The Bulldogs then put the game away for good with a four minute, 10 play drive in which Houdyshell punched it in for his second touchdown of the game, this one from 12 yards out. That put the score at 52-42, where it would stay for good.

"We showed a lot of resolve tonight," said head coach Mike Papadopoulos, who enters his 13th year leading the Bulldogs. "This is a very close group, but we haven't been in a situation where we've been stressed yet. So to be down in the fourth quarter, and for them to have to play together like that, it was great to see. They didn't panic. They executed like we asked them to and they did a great job."

The lead changed seven times in total as both teams went back and forth like a pair of prize fighters.

Vacaville went into the halftime lockerroom with a 31-28 lead, but allowed a touchdown pass over the top midway through the third quarter as quarterback Jay Butterfield hit wideout Zane Hinojosa for a 30 yard scoring strike to give Liberty a 35-31 advantage.

Hinojosa, who snagged 12 passes for 218 yards and four touchdowns, was a nightmare for Vacaville's secondary all night.

"They got behind us a couple times and that hurt," 'Pop' said. "I thought we tackled well on defense, but we just made a few mistakes that we will learn from. Liberty is a great program with a lot of athletic kids and a huge offensive line. Their quarterback was lights out all night.

In the end, I think this game will make our defense better. We'll look at the film, but I think a lot of it is very correctable."

The Bulldogs responded with a six play scoring drive that started on their own 7-yard line and ended with Duvall Jackson slamming it home from two yards out to make the score 38-35 Vacaville with 2:12 left in the third. That drive was sparked by a 60-yard run from Dylan Warfield.

Liberty punched right back and seized a 42-38 lead after Hinojosa soared high through the air, hauled in a tough catch and stiff armed a defender on his way to the end zone for 50-yard touchdown strike with 11:52 remaining in the game.

But that's when the Bulldogs showed some early season heart that should bode well going forward.

Vacaville's defense found a second wind and held Liberty scoreless the rest of the way. Jake Narayan was a big reason for it. After the Bulldogs answered with a Houdyshell touchdown for a 45-42 lead, Narayan's interception of Butterfield on Liberty's next drive gave Vacaville great field position. The Bulldogs cashed in with Houdyshell sealing a Week Zero win with his second touchdown of the night for a 52-42 lead with less than a minute left.

"It's a great feeling," said quarterback Cam Mitchell, who commanded the offense beautifully and threw for 109 yards and touchdown on the night. "I have to give all the credit to the offensive line and my running backs for doing a great job. The coaches made great play calls. Hitting the tight ends was key for me tonight. Again, great blocking from the o-line, those guys are a really strong component of this team."

The Bulldogs came out hot offensively in the first half, scoring on a 15-yard run from Jackson, a 1-yard run from Warfield, a 5-yard run from Chris Island, a 36-yard field goal from Brandon Talton and a 7-yard touchdown pass from Mitchell to Tre'Vonnie Hunt, who was also a force on special teams with several big kickoff returns.

Defensively, Narayan led the way with five tackles and two interceptions. Jake Levengood made four tackles.

"It's very exciting to be back out here competing again," 'Pop' said. "There was great energy from the crowd too, which is always a lot of fun. Offensively, we did a nice job and broke loose on a few plays. There's some good things going on and we'll certainly take a look at the film and see where we can improve as well."

