



Vacaville High football team falls to defending state champs in season opener

Vacaville High found out in their season opener at home Friday night that Liberty High of Brentwood's quarterback Jay Butterfield is the real deal.

The 6-foot, 6-inch senior, who has committed to play for the Oregon Ducks next season, torched the Bulldogs for 310 yards on 14 of 25 passing and two touchdowns as the Lions beat the Bulldogs 49-24 in front of a packed house at Tom Zunino Stadium.

Butterfield is not Liberty's only weapon. The defending Division I-A state champs also feature powerful senior running back Brenden Bell. He ran for two TDs and banged out 121 yards on 22 carries and also returned a kickoff 98 yards for a touchdown, the final score of the game.

Vacaville coach Mike Papadopolous knew exactly what his team would be up against when he scheduled this game.

"I'm really excited. The kids played with a lot of heart," he said. "They played a great football team tonight. The quarterback is a really, really special guy. He may be playing on Sundays in about five years. We play games like this to figure out who we are and the things we can fix right away. So I'm really excited about where we're headed."

Trailing 35-7 at the half, the Bulldogs played the Lions almost evenly (17-14) in the second half. And Vacaville's Myron Amey and Kadin "Bo" Hernandez gave the home crowd some big-time excitement.

Amey bobbled a Liberty kickoff but scooped it up and made a spectacular 85-yard return for a touchdown with 2:45 left in the third quarter, cutting the Liberty lead to 42-17.

"I knew we were having trouble as a kickoff return team setting up blocks," said the speedy senior. "So I tried to switch it up differently to go a different way and unfortunately it didn't work that way. So I tried to cut it back and I was lucky to find a little hole and that's all I needed."

In the fourth quarter, junior fullback Hernandez, who hadn't been used all night, got the call. On his very first play, he broke one 55 yards for a touchdown.

“I was going to the left side and got the ball,” he said. “And I found a little hole up the right side and got off a couple of tackles and there was a bunch of green grass from there.”

That made it 42-24, but it was too little too late against a very skilled Liberty team.

The Lions wasted no time after receiving the opening kickoff. They moved the ball 85 yards in a little over two minutes. Butterfield connected with Cody Muth on a 41-yard pass play to move the ball past midfield. Bell reeled off a long run to the Vacaville 8-yard line, then punched it into the end zone a couple plays later from three yards out.

But the Bulldogs immediately bit back. After receiving the kickoff, on second down senior quarterback Jeremy Villalobos launched a beautiful pass down the left sideline to senior wide receiver Michael Briscoe for a 71-yard touchdown strike with 9:05 left in the quarter to knot the score at 7-all.

But after holding the Lions without a score on their next drive, the Bulldogs gave the ball right back on a fumble which Liberty recovered on the Vacaville 31-yard line. A few plays later, Darrion Bartley made a nice 18-yard run up the middle to put the Lions back up 14-7 with 5:33 left in the quarter.

The Lions struck again early in the second quarter on a 65-yard touchdown pass from Butterfield to Muth to make it 21-7. After the ‘Dogs went three and out on the next series, the Lions made them pay. They drove the ball 45 yards, capping it with a one-yard run by Bell for a 28-7 lead.

Bartley put the nail in the coffin with a 29-yard run for his second touchdown and a 35-7 Liberty lead with just 31 seconds left in the half.

Chris Sacca kicked a 26-yard field goal for Vacaville with 6:04 left in the third quarter to make it 35-10. But Butterfield connected with Bartley for the senior running back’s third touchdown of the night on a 24-yard pass play with 6:04 left in the quarter to push the Liberty lead to 42-10.

Villalobos had a good night throwing the football, connecting on 14 of his 21 attempts for 228 yards, an average of over 16 yards per pass.

Vacaville’s stats were respectable compared with Liberty’s. The Lions had 485 yards of total offense to Vacaville’s 378. And Liberty had 175 yards on the ground compared to 150 for the Bulldogs.

But the Lions, who are ranked 11th in the state and 40th in the nation, controlled the game after taking back the lead in the first quarter.

Nevertheless, Papadopolous was pleased with Vacaville’s showing.

“This game made us a lot better,” he told the team after the game. “We’ve got to go through this tough part, taking it on the chin a little bit. But we’re going to give some on the chin too... We’re going to be just fine.”