



Vacaville defeats Napa 40-10 in final MEL meeting

It may have been Senior Night at Tom Zunino Stadium, but Saturday night's game was an affair that went well beyond football.

With Napa leaving the Monticello Empire League for the North Coast Section next fall, Vacaville hosted their longtime rival one last time and came away with the 40-10 victory. But as the pair of teams lined up midfield for the typical post-game handshake, fans and families followed suit as the two sides bid farewell to a tradition dating back to 1933.

Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos, Vaca High Principal Ed Santopadre, and Napa head coach Jesus Martinez spoke to the teams after the game as they shed light on what this rivalry meant to the two schools and themselves personally.

For coach Pop and Santopadre, it was a time to remind the visiting Indians players that the two teams are much more than rivals.

"Number one, we feel for everything that's been going on in Napa and we just can't imagine how difficult it's been for those guys and their coaching staff," said coach Papadopoulos. "It was an annual reunion for us and getting the opportunity to play was the most important thing for us."

However, there was still a game played Saturday night and the Bulldogs (4-3, 2-0 MEL) were clearly the better team as they took an early lead over the Indians (2-5, 0-2 MEL) and didn't look back.

Thanks to an outstanding performance on the ground by Vacaville senior running back Timothy Jackson, the Bulldogs rolled to a 33-0 advantage before the midway point of the second quarter.

Following an interception by senior linebacker Toven Steele — on a tipped pass during the opening drive — Jackson logged the first of a season-high four touchdowns on a 7 yard run.

Napa struggled to move the ball on the ensuing possession and was forced to punt as the Bulldogs took over near midfield. Vacaville elected to go with the run on the first two plays but were unable to move the chains until senior quarterback Cameron Mitchell aired it out to fellow senior and birthday boy Jordan Murga on a 21 yard pass and catch.

On the very next play, Jackson made a pair of Indians miss as he took the ball to the house from 39 yards out.

But Jackson's impact in the game wasn't only felt on the offensive side. Shortly after Napa garnered their first first down of the game, Jackson manufactured a hit that caused Indians running back Dawson Trent to cough up the ball. The Bulldogs quickly turned that into another Jackson touchdown and the hometown crowd erupted as Vacaville had a 19-0 cushion with 2:57 left in the first quarter.

Jackson's final score of the night came on a 61 yard punt return along the Vacaville sideline as he showcased his speed and crafty moves once again.

"[Timothy Jackson] was tremendous," Papadopoulos said. "He had a big night early and set the tempo for what we were hoping to do. We were able to make some holes for him and then a couple times he just did it on his own."

With the Bulldogs boasting a 27-0 lead following the Jackson punt return, Vacaville sophomore Dylan Warfield added a 65 yard touchdown run of his own for added insurance amid the blowout.

However, Napa managed to put themselves on the scoreboard in the waning moments of the first half with a 19 yard touchdown pass from senior quarterback Caden Cortese to senior Alex Perez de Leon.

The Bulldogs' final touchdown of the night came in the third quarter on a 6 yard run from junior Clayton Watterson. As for the Indians, their final score came on a field goal with 2:41 left on the clock.

"To get a true opportunity for a life lesson like this is huge," Papadopoulos said after the game. "I truly believe our kids get it and are empathetic. And with social media as well, the two towns have become closer. We appreciate everything they do for their kids and I know it's reciprocated as well ... they've made our program better every single year."