



## Oak Ridge rallies in fourth quarter to stun Vacaville, 24-23

It wasn't a perfectly executed game from Oak Ridge High School's football team, but as the age-old saying goes, "It's not over until the fat lady sings."

Unfortunately for Vacaville, there was no fat lady. And there certainly wasn't any singing on this night.

Oak Ridge — the No.3 ranked team in the Sac-Joaquin Section and the 24th best in California by maxpreps.com standards — rallied for 14 points with less than five minutes left in the fourth quarter to shock Vacaville 24-23 at Tom Zunino Stadium Friday night.

"They (Oak Ridge) do such a good job with their balance," Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos said after the game. "You just sort of knew they were going to eventually figure out some of the things we were trying to do to them defensively. They stretch you in so many different ways."

When Vacaville kicker Brandon Talton nailed a 28-yard field goal to put the Bulldogs up 23-10 with 5:13 left in the game, it looked like the mighty Trojans were going to fall.

But maybe the play of the game for Oak Ridge came on the ensuing drive, when quarterback Marco Baldacchino connected with wideout Justin Poerio down the Trojan sideline for a huge 70-yard completion down to Vacaville's 10-yard line. The Trojans quickly cashed in on the big play as Baldacchino found Poerio again on a 5-yard slant after the Bulldogs were called for an offside penalty.

The drive took three plays in total, brought the score to 23-17 and washed just 36 seconds off the clock. It also snapped a string of five straight three-and-out drives out of halftime for the Trojans.

Perhaps feeling a swing in momentum, Oak Ridge head coach Eric Cavaliere, who has roots at Vacaville High, gambled and dialed up an onside kick. The risk worked out as Poerio sent the football end-over-end and the Trojans recovered it near midfield.

The Trojans capitalized, going eight plays in just over two minutes to steal a 24-23 lead. Baldacchino, who had a hand in all three of Oak Ridge's touchdowns, capped the drive with a 5-yard quarterback power up the middle for the score.

After outplaying Oak Ridge for the entire game, Vacaville was suddenly forced to respond with 2:43 left in the fourth quarter.

The Bulldogs started by handing the ball to Duvall Jackson, who picked up two yards on the run play. But six incompletions in the following seven plays essentially brought an end to the game for Vacaville. A defensive pass interference call gave the Bulldogs a fresh set of downs that they couldn't do anything with.

Baldacchino and the Trojan offense came back on the field for a pair of kneel downs and that was it. Oak Ridge, out of thin air, stole a 24-23 road win over Vacaville.

Vacaville's defense was excellent all night. A loaded Oak Ridge offense looked confused, annoyed and frustrated all night until the final five minutes. The Trojans were forced to punt seven times after hanging 49 points on Vista del Lago last week.

"To hold them down like that after what they did to Vista del Lago last week, it was tremendous," Papadopoulos said. "That team is going to win tons of football games this year and they will go deep in the playoffs. So when I look at it comparatively to what we were last week, I know we're going to be just fine. The week of preparation was just really solid. The kids knew the gameplan and executed it really well."

The Bulldogs began the scoring on a hot night of football as quarterback Cam Mitchell found the end zone from a yard out on a sneak for a 7-0 lead. The Trojans countered with 10 unanswered points, Poerio nailing a 35-yard field goal and later snagging a 13-yard touchdown from Baldacchino just before the halftime whistle. Chris Island gave the Bulldogs a 14-10 lead in the third quarter with a 5-yard touchdown run. Jackson followed it with a 9-yard score early in the fourth quarter. But the Bulldogs botched the extra point after Jackson's touchdown, which didn't seem all that significant at the time. After all, Vacaville held a 20-10 lead and made it 23-10 three minutes later with a Talton field goal.

But that failed extra point attempt came back to hurt. Oak Ridge closed the game with 14 unanswered points, and made its final point after attempt to secure a 24-23 win.

The Trojans have now won the last six meetings between the two teams. Although it wasn't the result Vacaville wanted, Papadopoulos knows what kind of an impact a close loss to Oak Ridge can mean for his team going forward.

"We try to play the best teams we can find for our preseason schedule exactly for this," Papadopoulos explained. "A loss like this is absolutely difficult for the kids, but you have to look at the bigger picture. The outcome on the scoreboard is obviously disappointing, but the

personal growth we've shown as a team in the last seven days is tremendous. That's one of the best teams in Northern California over there and we proved we can play with them. That's big."