



Penalties kill otherwise solid performance by Vanden in loss to Vacaville

Because Vacaville's home game Friday against Vanden was played at Will C. Wood's Wildcats Stadium while renovations are underway at their own Zunino Stadium, there was perhaps a bit more blue on the field representative of the Wood Wildcats than the Bulldogs would have liked.

For visiting Vanden, certainly they felt like there was too much yellow – not the trim color for Will C. Wood, the color from penalty flags. The Vikings had an otherwise solid effort against the Bulldogs go to waste in the face of 18 penalties that hampered Vanden (2-5, 1-1) all night in a 30-14 loss to Vacaville (5-2, 2-0).

Vacaville got on the board first with Jeremy Villalobos hitting Brandon Holmes for a 41-yard touchdown pass with 7:46 left in the first quarter. They added to their lead less than a minute later when a botched pitch play cost the Vikings 17 yards of field position. The Bulldogs picked up a safety on the very next play, but then fumbled the snap on the first play following the free kick.

Vanden was forced to punt on their following possession and Vacaville added to its lead following a scramble by Villalobos that resulted in a 60-yard run just shy of the goal line. The Bulldogs punched it in from there and built the lead to 16-0.

Vanden could not get on track offensively in the first half, in part due to penalties and in part do to Vacaville's solid defense. The Bulldogs held the Vikings to just 46 rushing yards and kept them to under 100 yards of total offense in the first half.

Jordan Woolard helped get the Vikings on the board early in the second quarter with a 5-yard touchdown pass to Johnte McDowell, but Vacaville stretch the lead to 23-6 on their ensuing drive, a methodical, grinding trip down the field that burned nearly six full minutes off the clock.

Vanden's defense looked to be rising to the challenge late in the first half following a sack by Thomas Basye and a Villalobos interception two plays later. However, the interception was wiped out on a roughing the passer penalty. Vacaville kept the ball and a 14-yard touchdown run by Chris Island expanded the lead to 30-6 by halftime.

The Bulldogs piled up 153 yards rushing in the first half but managed nearly nothing in the second half, which was owed partly to better play from Vanden's defense and the fact that most of Vacaville's yardage was a result of Vanden penalties.

Lincoln Holland helped give the Vanden defense a bit of an early spark in the second half and that momentum helped the Vikings hold Vacaville scoreless in the second half.

The rushing attack continued to sputter in the second half but the passing game showed improved signs of life, with Woolard hitting Kurt Gandy with a 22-yard touchdown pass on the first play of the fourth quarter to cut the lead to 30-14.

Woolard completed 18 of 29 passes for 232 yards and two touchdowns but he also had two interceptions in the latter half of the fourth quarter that ended Vanden drives.

Of the plague of penalties, Vanden head coach Sean Murphy said, "No offense is designed to operate from behind the sticks that often . . . you just can't play that way against really quality teams."

Murphy said his staff coaches the players to play aggressively and noted that many of the penalties were a result of that aggressive play and that the coaches would look at ways of curtailing the penalties without dampening the team's aggression.

"I think we played with a lot more spirit in the second half . . . it's a real testament to our kids. They're going to continue to fight until the very end," Murphy said of the second half defensive effort.

The Vikings are still well-positioned to earn a playoff berth and will travel to play at Fairfield next week. Vacaville will be on the road right behind them with a trip slated next week to Armijo to play the as-yet-mascotless team in purple and gold.