



Vacaville High football team's defense key in win over Vanden

By Matt Sieger | Vacaville Reporter | April 2, 2021

VACAVILLE - The most exciting play of the game epitomized not only the outstanding defensive play all night by Vacaville High but also the frustration of the Vanden Vikings in their 35-13 loss at home to the Bulldogs.

Vacaville led 14-7 but Vanden advanced the ball to the Bulldog one-yard line with 35 seconds left in the half. The Bulldogs stopped the Vikings on first down, then committed pass interference in the end zone, putting the ball on their own half-yard line with a new set of downs.

Vacaville turned away two pass attempts in the end zone. On third down Viking quarterback Tre Dimes rolled right looking for a receiver. But Logan Cunningham hit him before he could get a pass away and Dimes fumbled.

Kyler Abramowicz alertly picked up the ball and ran 92 yards for a touchdown as time expired for a 21-7 lead after the extra point by Ariel Till.

"We were on the half-yard line for three plays in a row, and they were running out to the side," Abramowicz said. "And then Logan tackled him and the ball came out and I scooped it up and ran for like 90 yards. No one was in front of me."

Abramowicz, a senior, said it was his first-ever fumble recovery for a touchdown.

Turnovers plagued the Vikings throughout the tightly fought first half. They lost a fumble on their opening drive. After Till missed a 40-yard field goal attempt for Vacaville, the Vikings drove down to the Bulldog 15-yard-line, only to cough up another fumble, this one recovered by linebacker Brandon Holmes.

Vanden forced Vacaville into a three-and-out and started a solid drive that took them to the Bulldog 15-yard-line. But Cunningham picked off a Dimes pass on a third and short to squelch the effort.

In the second quarter, history repeated itself, unfortunately, for the Vikings. After allowing a 41-yard pass play from Ryan Vaughan to Michael Otterstedt, Vanden forced the Bulldogs to punt and got the ball back, only to have a pass intercepted by Geremiah Brown.

Vacaville was finally able to sustain a drive. On fourth and inches on the Vanden 18-yard-line, they used a wildcat formation. The ball was hiked directly to Lucca Sartorio, who gained four yards for the first down. Four plays later, Darian Leon-Guerrero ran it in from six yards out for the first points of the game with 4:24 remaining in the half.

On the ensuing kickoff, Sean Davis took the ball on his own 11-yard line, found an opening on the right side and took it all the way down the sideline for an 89-yard touchdown to tie the game at 7-all after the extra point by Diego Nuñez-Smith.

But Vacaville struck right back, driving down to the Vanden 12-yard line, then being forced back to the 20 after a sack. On third and 17, Hughes found Cunningham in the end zone for a touchdown and a 14-7 Bulldog lead.

“A few plays before we had run the same play,” Cunningham said. “I was open in the middle but Ryan wasn’t able to see me. I told him if he has time in the pocket I’m open. And then he saw me and he got it to me and I scored.”

Then Vanden put together a long drive down to the half-yard line, one that ended in heartbreak for the Vikings and their fans as the half ended.

Vacaville, which had not had much success running the ball in the first half, made some adjustments that benefited their running backs, in particular Leon-Guerrero.

“The line made an adjustment and I started being more patient in the backfield and played my game,” said the Bulldogs’ primary running back.

With 8:19 left in the third quarter, Leon-Guerrero burst through a hole and ran 16 yards into the end zone to increase Vacaville’s lead to 28-7 after the PAT.

Vanden put together another good drive but again the bubble burst, this time on a third down and four from the 25-yard line when Brown picked off his second pass of the game.

The teams went back and forth until Vanden finally got on the board again with eight minutes left in the game on a nice pass from Dimes from the Bulldog 18-yard line to Daniel Hughes in the right corner of the end zone. A two-point conversion attempt failed, leaving the score 28-13 Bulldogs.

On Vacaville's ensuing possession, Leon-Guerrero put the game away when he broke off a 60-yard touchdown run.

"We just stayed disciplined," he said. "We had a good run and the blockers set it up perfectly. I just made that cut back on the read and hit the hole and took it down the field."

That TD and the PAT put the game on ice with 7:01 left.

"It's one of the best defensive performances that we've ever had since I've been here," said Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopolous, "I put in the top five for sure. The kids did an amazing job and forced a lot of turnovers and kept us in it for a very long time until we could get something going on offense. And the same thing on special teams, it was very much a team effort all the way around."

Vanden has some highly skilled offensive players who really challenged the Bulldogs.

"They were tested on the run, they were tested on the pass," said Papadopolous of his defense. "One-on-ones with some tremendous athletes that they have. You could go through any of those facets and they were tested on every single one of them. A great high school football game tonight."

For the Bulldogs, Leon-Guerrero ran for 137 yards on 20 carries and had three touchdowns. Vaughn was 7-for-20 for 121 yards and one TD.

Vanden took to the air a lot, Dimes going 27-for-50 for 246 yards and one touchdown. Hughes had nine catches for 118 yards and the TD, while Johnte McDowell had five catches for 57 yards and Jamai East had five catches for 35 yards.

Vacaville is now 2-0 in Monticello Empire League play, while Vanden stands at 1-1 in MEL.