



Bulldogs outlasts Vikings in 55-35 shootout

There's a new rivalry in the Monticello Empire League.

With a potential league title hanging in the balance for both Vacaville and Vanden high schools before a standing room only crowd, Vacaville pulled ahead in the fourth quarter en route to the 55-35 road win.

However, while the Bulldogs (3-4, 2-0 MEL) managed to score 27 fourth-quarter points in the thrilling display, the Vikings (4-3 1-1 MEL) refused to let up after facing a 28-7 deficit at the halftime break. Vanden racked up 21 unanswered points in the third and fourth quarters to dissolve the deficit, but the Bulldogs' defense stifled the Vikings rally to garner the critical league win following a 38-year hiatus between the two programs.

"We have a lot of respect for their program and have maintained a good relationship with them over the years," said Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos. "These kids grew up together and we've all been around here for quite a long time and it was a pleasure working with them today."

The Vikings took an early lead after forcing a Bulldogs three-and-out on the opening drive. On Vanden's third play of the ensuing possession, Vanden junior Jonathan Brenes took the snap 36 yards for the early advantage. But after another three-and-out for the Vacaville offense, the defense fueled a rally by hauling in three of a season-high six interceptions in the game.

After failing to cash in on the first of two opening quarter interceptions by Vaca High junior free safety Myron Amey, the reigning league champs scored through the air on a 34-yard touchdown pass from junior quarterback Jeremy Villalobos to senior receiver Trevor Marshall.

With both teams sharing a 7-7 tie to open the second quarter, junior cornerback Michael Briscoe corralled a jump ball for the first of his two interceptions on the night. A 38-yard pass from Villalobos to junior tight end Michael Brown set up the 1-yard touchdown run. After a 20-minute delay caused by a scuffle between the two teams, resulting in the ejection of four players, Vacaville continued to roll and scored 14 points on runs by Villalobos and senior running back Nick Smith.

Smith, whose first touchdown came from 42 yards out, finished the night with a team-high three touchdowns and added an interception in the outset of a third quarter in which Vacaville was on offense for just seven plays.

"I try to do anything I can for my team," Smith said. "That's my mindset I have every day and I just wanted to go crazy for them. That's all it is. Our defense showed that it is one of the best in the league and we're not a team to mess with."

Despite the early second-half interception by Smith, the Vikings forced a fumble and made it a 28-14 game thanks to a 34-yard touchdown run by senior quarterback Corey Abrams. Vacaville was unable to pick up a first down on the ensuing drive and elected to punt.

Vanden shrunk the gap to a touchdown by patiently working their way down the field and scored on the ninth play of the drive. Senior running back Jordyn Bartley powered through the Vacaville defense from one yard out as the hometown crowd erupted in elation. Facing a third and five situation after a short-lived possession by the black and orange, Abrams fired off a pass to senior wide out Taylor Williams that hit his hands and fell to the turf.

Moments later, Abrams went right back to Williams on the fourth down and found him on an out route in the front-left corner of the end zone to make it a 28-28 game.

However, the Bulldogs took full advantage of their opportunities in the fourth while creating some of their own. After benefiting from a pair of costly Vanden penalties, Smith scored the first of his two fourth-quarter touchdowns on a sweep from eight yards out.

The Vacaville defense held its ground on the ensuing possession and forced Vanden to punt. But the punt was ultimately blocked by senior Talon Abramowicz to put the Bulldogs in total control. Smith score moments later from six yards out for the 42-28 cushion.

With just over five minutes left in the contest, Vanden responded with a touchdown pass from Abrams to Bartley from 25 yards out. But a score by Abramowicz made it 49-35 before Briscoe delivered the final blow on his 44-yard pick six along the Vaca High sideline.

"Tonight showed us that we haven't played this type of game," said Vanden coach Sean Murphy. "They have the Black and Blue Bowl and American Canyon wasn't really a crosstown rival for us. A lot of our first half problems came from mental mistakes. We made a lot that we haven't made all year long. That's our fault as a coaching staff and we'll fix that."

Vacaville will return home next week to take on Armijo (3-4, 0-2 MEL), while Vanden is slated to host Fairfield (1-6, 0-2 MEL).

