



Crushers suffer first MEL loss at Vacaville

By Andy Wilcox | Napa Valley Register | October 28, 2011

VACAVILLE — A first-place showdown against the Vintage football team was a showcase of Vacaville's superior speed from the get-go Friday night.

The Bulldogs' well-executed wing-T offense took no more than five plays to score on each of its eight offensive series, and also recovered two Crusher fumbles and returned an interception for another score in a 63-26 Monticello Empire League rout at Tom Zunino Stadium.

"We got overmatched tonight. Speed kills. That's been our problem all year," Vintage head coach Dave Shipp said. "Vacaville executes and makes it a hard offense to defense against. It's hard to duplicate in practice."

Vacaville (8-1 overall, 4-0 MEL) received the opening kickoff and took only four plays to get on the board, on Melvin Mason's 64-yard run up the middle.

Vintage (3-6 overall, 3-1 MEL) managed a first down on its third play, a five-yard gain on the first carry of another big rushing night by A.J. Claudio (22 carries, 144 yards). But the Bulldogs recovered a fumble on the next play, and three plays later, Terrance Trueblood broke off a 44-yard TD run.

The Crushers went three-and-out, but their defense returned the favor. However, Reed White's fine punt was downed at the Vintage 2. Another three-and-out resulted in a 54-yard punt return for a score by Curtis Goins, and the Bulldogs led 21-0 after one quarter.

Vintage then put together a solid 14-play drive, but it ended at the Vacaville 24 with an incomplete pass on fourth down. On the next play, David Mewborn took a handoff on a reverse and raced 76 yards for a 28-0 lead.

Another Vintage three-and-out was costly, as starting safety and long snapper Kane Elliott was carried off the field with ligament damage in his knee, according to Shipp.

“That hurt us,” Shipp said. “That’s why we kept going for it on fourth down and going for two (on conversions) after that.”

Before the Crushers could go for two, they would give up three more touchdowns — a 70-yard run by Trueblood, a 1-yard keeper by Nic Ardave set up by Johnny Schupp’s fumble recovery at the Vintage 10-yard line, and an 18-yard interception return by Mason.

Trailing 49-0 with 4:12 left in the half, the Crushers finally got on the board with a 10-play, 80-yard drive keyed by Claudio’s 60-yard run and finished off by Dylan Duprez’s 3-yard TD pass to Zack Talbot with 15 seconds left. A conversion pass to Talbot was incomplete, leaving it 49-6 at the break.

With a running clock in the second half, Vintage fullback John Gratton enjoyed his best night with scoring runs of 45, 7 and 65 yards. Despite being held to six yards in the first half, he finished with nine carries for 141 yards and three TDs.

“Johnny’s a great, great kid so I’m glad to see him have a game like this,” Shipp said. “It’s so nice to get the fullback involved in the option. That makes a big difference. He’s a kid who’s worked so hard and bided his time and never said a word.”

With the Big Game against Napa’s high-scoring offense coming up next week, Shipp said he wasn’t concerned about his team’s defense after Vacaville’s offensive display.

“They’re going to be ready to go. It’s not a problem,” he said. “These kids are very resilient and they work hard. I give them a lot of credit. They’re just really tough kids and I’ve got a lot of pride in them. We’ve just got to make sure we’re healthy and can execute next week.”