



Jackson's huge night helps lift Vacaville over Will C. Wood in Black and Blue Bowl

It wouldn't be a classic, early November Black and Blue Bowl without a little mud at Tom Zunino Stadium.

The Vacaville Bulldogs were just glad Timothy Jackson was able to keep his feet for most of the night.

Nearly a year after Will C. Wood's football team snapped an 18-year bowl losing streak to Vacaville, Jackson gashed the Wildcats for 285 yards and two touchdowns on a recovering, mud-drenched field to lift the Bulldogs to a 38-15 win in 2016's edition of the annual meeting between the cross-town rivals.

With the victory, Vacaville (7-3, 4-1 Monticello Empire League) secured second place alone in the MEL as first place Napa beat Vintage Friday Night. The Bulldogs and Crushers were tied for second coming into the night. Vintage took third and Wood (5-5, 2-3 MEL) settled for fourth with the loss. Napa and Vacaville are guaranteed a playoff spot. CIF Sac-Joaquin Section pairings will be revealed Saturday afternoon.

"It was a great win for us," said Vacaville safety Cassius Reynolds. "We love playing Wood, it's something we look forward to every year. With everyone in town here, the atmosphere is really energetic. It was good to win this one after we lost last year. They lost a few key guys from last season, but they're still a strong team."

The Bulldogs seemed to feed off of the sell out crowd in Vacaville, especially in the early going.

Vacaville needed just two plays to get on the board and steal the momentum right away. The Bulldogs received the opening kickoff and scored less than a minute into the game as Jackson took a handoff to the left side and followed a few good blocks from Jake Levengood and Vincent Pace all the way to the house for a 68 yard score and an immediate 6-0 lead.

Following a tremendous punt from Wood quarterback Carson Strong, Vacaville found itself backed up on its own two yard line. The Bulldogs calmly drove down the field 98 yards in seven plays, capping the drive with a 68 yard play action touchdown pass from quarterback Troy Claunch to a wide open Jon Donaldson, who coasted into the end zone untouched to make it 12-0, just like that.

"Those first two scores were big," Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos said. "I thought those two quick scores kind of settled the nerves a little bit and allowed us to play our brand of football."

The Wildcats came into the game with perhaps the most explosive offense in the league. Strong entered the bowl with over 2,500 yards passing. Running back Daniel McFadden finished the regular season leading the league in rushing. Asa Wondeh and Zack Marsh-Wojan are the top two in the league in receiving. The Bulldogs, however, seemed to have the kryptonite. Vacaville's defense held Wood to zero points in the first half, forcing four punts, a turnover on downs and a missed field goal. Levengood, Kyle Mills and Zach Myers, among others, brought the heat all night on Strong, who finished with 188 yards passing. McFadden and fellow running back Christian Catlin combined for just 52 yards rushing.

"Our front four were the difference for us defensively," Papadopoulos said. "We were able to get good pressure on Strong with the front four and that allowed us to play coverage on the back end. With how much they like to throw it, that was important. Our defensive backs did a nice job on their receivers."

"We were able to hold their running game in check," Reynolds added. "We made them one-dimensional for the most part and that allowed us to key on the pass. The guys up front did a good job of pressuring Strong which made our job in the secondary easier."

The Wildcats had their chances.

The Bulldogs fumbled the ball away three times in the first half. Gunner Bagos fumbled the first ball early in the second quarter when Vacaville was two yards away from adding a third touchdown. Wood's Myles Riggins recovered in the end zone for a touchback. Pace fumbled it away on the next Vacaville drive near midfield. The most dangerous fumble came when Reynolds couldn't handle a pitch to the right on the following possession and fumbled it away. Wood's Matthew Gonzalez scooped it up and ran it back the other way 25 yards before being tackled by Claunch. The Wildcats weren't able to capitalize on any of the turnovers and settled for a 12-0 deficit at the half.

The Wildcats got the ball first in the second half, but punted again when faced with a 4th-and-5. The Bulldogs pounced on the opportunity by going nine plays to add to their lead. Jackson gashed Wood for good gains on six of the nine carries on the drive, ending it with a 14-yard touchdown scamper to make 18-0.

"He (Jackson) runs hard," Papadopoulos said of his running back. "He was able to get some space and really run downhill tonight. He did a great job of getting running north and south tonight."

McFadden gave Wood good field position on the ensuing kickoff, returning the ball near midfield. Strong and the offense executed a smooth four play drive to get the Wildcats on the board. Strong hit Vince Phan with a beautiful 35 yard touchdown throw to close it to 18-7.

But Vacaville scored on its next three drives to put the game out of reach.

Jacob Abramowicz made it 26-7 on the next Vacaville drive as he went up and over the goaline for a one yard score. Good runs from Jackson and a fourth down conversion, Claunch to tight end Zach Myers helped set the table for that touchdown.

The Bulldogs stretched it to 32-7 on the next drive as Austin Green found pay mud from eight yards out. A key 3rd-and-14 pickup on a trick play helped make that score. Claunch pitched it back to Donaldson, a receiver, and ran a little wheel route along the sideline. Donaldson heaved it high into the air and Claunch came down with it for a 25 yard completion.

Desmond Braxton added to the lead with a three yard touchdown run. That came after Strong hit Asa Wondeh for a 63 yard touchdown over the top of Vacaville's secondary. The Wildcats went for two and made it, making the score 38-15 after Braxton's score.

For Wood, the story of the game was a lack of offensive production. The Bulldogs jumped out to a quick lead and the Wildcats couldn't keep up. Failing to score any points off of three Vacaville turnovers in the first half was a killer.

"We didn't execute the way I would have liked, especially offensively," said Wood head coach Carlos Meraz. "Our defense held its own for a little while, but you can only hold Vacaville down for so long. We needed to put some points on the board to stay with them. When you don't, that offense can get rolling and it's tough to stop.

"That's a good football team. They're a playoff football team for a reason. They just did a good job on us tonight."