



## **Vacaville High School football team suffers gutting defeat in classic “Rivalry” game**

A classic performance turned into a gutting defeat in a matter of seconds for Vacaville High School’s football team on Friday night.

The Bulldogs played their best game of the season, and had unbeaten Napa on the ropes ... until the unthinkable happened.

The visiting Indians scored 15 points in the final 2:02, and edged the Bulldogs 28-21 at Tom Zunino Stadium.

The game, tabbed as one of the best 100 in the nation as part of “The Great American Rivalry Series,” was all that and more.

Unfortunately for Vacaville, the more involved their first Monticello Empire League loss of the season.

“That’s what a championship game is all about right there,” Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos said. “That was everything a championship game should be.”

There are still two weeks left of the MEL season, but Napa (8-0 overall) improved to 3-0 in MEL games, and already holds wins over Will C. Wood (2-1) and now Vacaville (2-1).

The Bulldogs fell to 4-4 overall.

The hosts appeared to have the game in hand when Gabe Caravantes hit Beau Lopez with a 10-yard touchdown pass and Sam Patel added the extra-point for a 21-13 Bulldog lead with 4:58 left.

Vacaville drove the ball 89 yards in 14 plays after a Nate Villalobos interception.

But the Indians came right back behind quarterback Cal Bard, who eventually won the game’s most valuable player award.

Bard drove Napa 53 yards in eight plays, with Nathan Toma rambling the final nine yards for the score. Bard added a 2-point conversion pass to Sherman Forbes to tie the game 21-21 with 2:02 left.

Vacaville got a big run from Daniel Wright on its next play from scrimmage, but Wright’s run was wiped out by a penalty that immediately put the Bulldogs in a hole. Two more runs and an incomplete pass forced Vacaville to punt, and Napa got the ball back at their own 47-yard line with 1:23 left.

Bard completed three straight passes for all 53 yards, including the final lob pass to Alex Perez de Leon from 18 yards out for the win with 57 seconds remaining.

Vacaville managed just 15 yards on its final series, and Caravantes was sacked by a pair of Napa players to end the game.

"That's tough," Papadopoulos admitted. "The defense played great, and everybody played hard, but we just couldn't convert a couple of plays at the end when we needed to."

The bitter ending offset career-best performances by several Bulldogs.

Caravantes threw for 122 yards, including two TDs to Lopez, the first a 52-yard scoring play after Napa had built a 13-0 lead early in the second quarter.

Wright added 153 yards rushing on 19 carries, including a 23-yard run straight up the middle on a trap play to give Vacaville a 14-13 lead midway through the third period.

"I thought we really came together as a team," Wright said. "It hurts, but we played our hearts out. We played our hearts out."

On defense, Jacob Abramowicz, Marquis Pratcher and Jake Levengood led a host of standout players who held Napa in check for 43 of the 48 minutes.

Napa finished with 318 total yards, but 106 of those came on the final two drives.

Bard rushed for 69 yards on 18 carries, including first-half touchdowns of one and four yards.

Toma added 92 yards on 18 attempts.

Vacaville hosts Vintage next week.