



Vacaville routs Armijo 57-6 in first MEL duel

Just minutes before Vacaville High School's first Monticello Empire League duel of the season with Armijo, head football coach Mike Papadopoulos gathered his team together on the sideline.

"Don't take your Friday Night's for granted," he told his team.

It would have been all too easy to overlook the Indians (1-5, 0-1 MEL), who have struggled this year and are sitting in the basement of the Monticello Empire League standings halfway through the year.

But the Bulldogs listened to their coach's pre-game message.

Powered by two special teams return scores and two interception return touchdowns, Vacaville (4-2, 1-0 MEL) blasted visiting Armijo 57-6 Friday night at Tom Zunino Stadium in the MEL opener.

The Bulldogs went 3-2 in the five game pre-MEL season with two of their losses coming to top60 ranked teams in California. Armijo --Papadopoulos's alma mater-- hasn't been great this year, but the MEL games are the ones that determine who makes the playoffs and who doesn't.

Vacaville seemed to understand that and came out of the gates with plenty of intensity, starting on the opening kickoff. The Indians won the coin flip and elected to defer to kick off and play defense first. Problem was, their defensive unit never had a chance to hit the field. Cassius Reynolds wiggled his way through tacklers and took the opening kickoff 92-yards to the house to put the Bulldogs up 8-0 after quarterback Cameron Mitchell and Austin Green hooked up for a successful two-point conversion. It was Reynolds's first lifetime kickoff return for a touchdown.

Following back-to-back Indian punts, the Bulldogs put another seven points on the board as Timothy Jackson took an inside run up the middle, broke a few tackles and outraced the Armijo defense up the left side 49-yards to the pylon for a 15-0 lead.

Jacob Abramowicz made it 22-0 after he also muscled an inside run up the middle of Armijo's defense and rumbled home for a 55-yard score on Vacaville's fifth possession of the game. "The kids were pretty efficient tonight," Papadopoulos said post-game. "We were coming off the bye week and this was the first opportunity for us to see how we would respond after a week off. We

didn't know for sure how we would come out from a timing perspective, so I thought we played well in all facets of the game tonight. We really pressed the issue in all areas."

The special teams unit struggled at times in the loss to Pittsburg two weeks ago, but that wasn't the case against Armijo. One minute after the Abramowicz touchdown run, the Indians went three and out and punted for the fifth straight possession. Beau Lopez made them pay with a 50-yard punt return for a touchdown.

Two minutes later, Tyler Cordell capped a 21-0 scoring run over the span of just four gametime minutes by jumping in front of an Armijo receiver, intercepting a pass and returning it for a touchdown. Braydon Altorfer supplied the pressure on a blitz, forcing Armijo's quarterback to make the throw on the run out of the pocket. By that point, it was 36-0 Bulldogs in the second quarter.

To make matters worse, the Indians finished the first half with a poorly executed punt play. Backed up inside their own 15-yard line, the Indians' longsnapper snapped the ball low to the punter. The punter went down to get the ball, but took a knee in the process. He was marked down at the spot, which was on the 6-yard line. Vacaville then pounded it in with two plays. Gunner Bagos scored from 1-yard out with 30 seconds left in the half to send the two teams to the halftime break with the score 43-0. The Indians had just two first downs at the half.

Papadopoulos subbed in many of his second team players in the second half. The Indians rallied a few times in the third and fourth quarters, but were only able to squeeze one touchdown out of it. Armijo took its opening second half drive down inside Vacaville's 15-yard line, but that drive ended abruptly as Jordan Murga made a spectacular diving interception in the endzone. The Bulldogs then got the ball on the 20-yard line and proceeded to march down the field on a well-executed nine play drive that ended with a Tre'Vonne Hunt 5-yard touchdown scamper.

CJ Toler added another score after he stepped in front of an Armijo pass and returned it for a touchdown to make the score 57-6, where it would stand for good.

"It was good to get off to that kind of start in league," Papadopoulos said of his team's first MEL performance. "Our first goal is to win the league, so this win puts us in good position to do that. The kids came out and did a very good job of setting a good pace and tempo early on."

Vacaville is on the road next week in Week 2 of MEL play. They will battle it out with the Vintage Crushers (3-3) in Napa at Memorial Stadium.

