



## Vacaville opens playoff campaign

What's the difference between seven and 10? The Vacaville Bulldogs found a way to make it two scores in their home matchup against Atwater in the first round of the CIF San Joaquin Section Championships on Friday Night.

Despite facing one of the more talented teams they have faced all season in a chilly November playoff atmosphere, the No. 7 Bulldogs found a way to put together a strong showing throughout in a 35-21 victory over the 10th-seeded Falcons.

The final scoreline may appear slightly charitable to the Falcons, who never really mounted a serious challenge from the end of the third quarter onward, but Atwater did enough to keep the Bulldogs honest through all four quarters until Noah Wilcox put the game away with a spectacular diving interception of a tipped ball.

The Bulldogs got off to a slightly shaky start, trading punts with the visitors throughout the first quarter before handing the Falcons the first points of the game on a touchdown drive that saw four offsides calls on the home side. Running back Tanner Boyd leveled the score midway through the second quarter with a spectacular 41-yard sweep right that saw him charging into the end zone with blockers to spare.

Vacaville's Noah Wilcox makes a diving interception off a tipped ball to put and end to Atwater's season during the Bulldog's 35-21 win in the 2024 CIF Sac-Joaquin Section

Boyd scored his second rushing touchdown on the next Vacaville drive to pull his team ahead 14-7 to finish the half. He was set up by a 70-yard pass caught by Devin Bishop, who reeled in 146 receiving yards on the night.

The Bulldogs' air attack shined early in the second half as well, with Jovias Reinaldo finding space just steps clear from the end zone to stroll in a 38-yard touchdown

catch, his only reception on the night. The touchdown saw the Bulldogs open a two-score lead on only the fourth play of the half.

Atwater answered with a touchdown on the following drive, but Jayden Beamon Santos kept the Vacaville offense rolling with a phenomenal catch, using his facemask to catch a pass over the middle while falling after tripping over an Atwater player. Boyd punched in a 7-yard run up the middle for his third touchdown on the night to make the score 28-14.

Vacaville then came up with an onside kick to re-establish possession with just two minutes left in the third quarter, and Bulldog Jaden Beamon-Santos caught a 38-yard touchdown pass to pull the home team ahead 35-14.

Atwater showed a flicker of hope, however, finding a receiver wide open in the end zone and recovering an onside kick of its own to get the ball back in a two-possession game at the top of the fourth quarter.

The Atwater offense sputtered out, however, and a long drive with several Boyd carries helped the Bulldogs drain time off the clock, despite not scoring.

Head Coach Mike Papadopoulos is no stranger to November football, with five playoff trips in his last five playoff-eligible seasons (No playoffs were held in the 2020-2021 season). Still, the veteran coach came away pleased with his team for a complete performance against difficult opposition.

“Just really proud of the way the kids managed the game all the way through,” he said. “Get to the playoffs and they’re just good, hard-playing teams all the way through.”

The coach said aggression on defense and better ball control on offense were keys to the game for the Bulldogs. He said he was proud to see both sides of the ball look resilient as Atwater started to mount a second-half comeback charge.

“Our kids just confined to play the way we hoped they would and kept some momentum,” he said.

The passing game was a highlight for the Bulldogs all night long, and while that couldn't have happened without 263 yards worth of passing on 11-16 passing from QB Brendan Jackson, the coach was quick to compliment his offensive line for showing up well and giving their passer time.

Staring down a two-seeded powerhouse in St Mary's next week, the coach struck a positive tone and expressed faith in his players.

"They're one of the best teams annually in the section as well," he said, "So we'll just continue to go find out what little things we can continue to try to get better at and see what we can put together."