



Vacaville falls to Atwater in instant classic

By Jahson Nahal – Vacaville Reporter

What took place at Tom Zunino Stadium on Friday night can only be described as an instant classic.

The Vacaville and Atwater High School football teams traded blows like a UFC heavyweight fight, combining for 18 touchdowns, 129 points, 61 first downs and 1,278 yards of offense.

In the end, it was the Falcons' star-studded duo of quarterback Ali Banks Jr. and receiver Syllas Austin that propelled Atwater to a 65-64 overtime win.

"We try to find the best teams that we can play early so we can figure things out about ourselves," Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos said. "We found some bright spots in there, and we'll find some parts that we definitely need to get better on."

Banks and Austin put up numbers that most would struggle to replicate in a video game. Banks completed 22-of-33 passes for 437 yards and seven touchdowns while also rushing for 120 yards and another score. Austin was his go-to guy, hauling in 10 receptions for 284 yards and five touchdowns.

"We knew walking in that they had a high-powered offense," Papadopoulos said. "What they're doing is tough to slow down."

Vacaville senior quarterback Brendan Jackson wasn't far behind Banks, completing 18-of-23 passes for 305 yards and four touchdowns. Senior receiver Rome Griego was a man on a mission, rushing for 150 yards and one touchdown while making six grabs for 120 yards and another score.

"If you like offense, you saw a ton tonight," Papadopoulos said.

The Bulldogs' largest lead of the game came after Jackson threw a 19-yard strike to Brody Rogers in the back of the end zone, giving them a 22-0 advantage in the second quarter.

From there on, Austin caught everything thrown into his airspace.

The 6-foot-6 215-pound receiver outmuscled Vacaville defenders to catch each of the next four Atwater touchdowns, the second on a 85-yard catch and run. The third came from 79 yards out.

The threat of Banks' arm opened up lanes for him to scramble and he took full advantage, turning on the jets for a 10-yard touchdown run to give the Falcons their first lead of the game at 43-36 with 2:20 left in the third quarter.

Jackson responded by orchestrating a 6-play, 2-minute drive capped by a 14-yard touchdown pass to tight end Bradyn Wight, who shrugged off three defenders before crossing the plane.

After the lead changed hands twice in the final frame, The Bulldogs relied on their ground game and running back Dylan Borjesson to tie the game at 57-all with just 57 seconds remaining.

Banks used his legs to move the Falcons into field goal range, but Trevor Hill missed the potential game-winning 36-yard field goal as time expired. Hill made his initial attempt, but Vacaville called a timeout seconds before.

Jackson opened overtime with a picture-perfect 21-yard play-action pass to Wight and Roman Conner-Owens followed with his third rushing touchdown of the game to give the Bulldogs the lead.

But as the tale went all night, Vacaville was unable to stop Banks when it mattered.

The dual-threat quarterback threw a 10-yard touchdown pass that was intended for Austin but was deflected into the hands of Vinny Valado. The Falcons opted to go for two and Banks rolled to his right to find Isaiah Navarro wide open in the end zone for the game-winning score.

“It was a playoff kind of atmosphere right out of the gate, and you just never know how they’re gonna play out,” Papadopoulos said. “We’ll get a lot better from this experience tonight.”

Vacaville will look to put this loss behind them when they travel to Roseville to face West Park on Friday, Aug. 29.