



Vacaville outlasts El Cerrito 28-13

By **NICK MCCONNELL** – Vacaville Reporter

Despite an 0-2 start, the Vacaville High football team have now battled back to .500 ahead of Monticello Empire League play this season.

The Bulldogs defeated El Cerrito with a convincing 28-13 home victory Friday night in front of a packed house at Tom Zunino Stadium.

Despite allowing 33 average points per game this season, the Bulldogs' defense did well to hold El Cerrito's high-flying passing attack to just two touchdowns.

Vacaville's head coach Mike Papadopoulos praised his opponents after the game, calling it a "playoff quality atmosphere."

"Very much a team win all the way through," he said.

Papadopoulos praised his offense's ball control and "methodical" approach, and said his players held up well throughout long drives on defense as well.

"We're just trending in the right direction. That's the biggest thing heading into league, and that's what we were hoping for."

The Gauchos completed just 15 of 29 passing attempts and converted five of 14 third downs, as well as only two of five fourth downs.

Even with standout senior receiver Rome Griego out with an injury, the Bulldogs displayed plenty of offensive firepower. Vacaville's senior running back Roman Conner-Owens rushed for 82 yards and two touchdowns on 14 touches, and senior receiver Bradyn Wight caught for 32 yards and two touchdown passes across three

targets by senior quarterback Brendan Jackson. Jackson completed 12 of 18 passing attempts and rushed for 14 yards on 11 carries.

Griego, who averaged 77 receiving yards and 79.5 receiving yards in the first two games of the season, was dressed in street clothes on the sideline. Head Coach Mike Papadopoulos said he is out with an injury, and the team hopes to have him back later this season.

Conner-Owens also stepped up defensively as a middle linebacker with four tackles and one sack, tying senior free safety Jake Williams for the most tackles on the team. Williams led the Bulldogs in receiving yards with 58 on three catches.

The Bulldog defense set up the team's first touchdown, pouncing on a bad long snap on an El Cerrito punt to gain 30 yards and put their offense on the Gauchos' 12-yard line to start the drive. Three plays later, Conner-Owens scored a rushing touchdown from the three-yard line.

Conner-Owens praised his teammates after his standout performance.

"I have one of the best O-lines, I think in the league," he said. "They push me forward, they give me holes, I just love having the boys supporting me."

The Gauchos moved the ball smoothly on the next drive, capped off with a 32-yard Dejuan Compton touchdown pass to Michael Boyer, tying the game at 7-7 on the first play of the second quarter.

Vacaville's next touchdown finished a grueling drive that felt longer than its 60 yards, as the Bulldogs escaped multiple third-and-long situations over 5:06 of game time. Jackson ultimately found Wight in the end zone with a 26-yard touchdown pass to bring Vacaville ahead 13-7 at halftime.

However, the Gauchos fought back and scored with ease on their first drive of the second half, as Compton chalked up a 23-yard touchdown pass to Gary Youngblood. Vacaville's Carter Edmonds blocked the kick to tie the game 13-13.

Later in the third quarter, however, Jackson found Williams along the left sideline with a 43-yard pass, pinning the Gauchos at their own three-yard line. Wight caught his second touchdown of the evening two plays later.

Following a fumble recovery by senior Dylan Borjesson at the 32-yard line, the Bulldogs then capitalized on another short field situation, as Conner-Owens scored with a 16-yard run to put the Bulldogs ahead 28-13, the eventual final.

Wight said even with Griego on the sideline, the team continues to improve week after week.

“We’re just starting to trust each other,” he said. “We’re only in the middle of what we are capable of, I believe that truly. Just got to keep it rolling now.”

Conner-Owens said he loves the team and was excited to head into league play after putting Vacaville’s early losses in the rear view.

“We started a little rough,” he said, “we started 0-2, but we know what we need to do now to step forward, and we’ve clearly done that.”