



Cal commit Carter Jackson helps Granite Bay wreck Vacaville's homecoming

Nick Pecoraro | Sacramento Bee | September 16, 2023

Granite Bay High School junior Carter Jackson was widely considered one of the top running backs in the Sac-Joaquin Section heading into 2023.

Over his last two games, he has proven his believers right.

Jackson scored three touchdowns in the first quarter Friday to set the tone for the Grizzlies, who spoiled Vacaville's homecoming with a 34-13 win.

"The biggest thing that motivates me is what can I do more? How do I get better?" Jackson said after the game. "I don't really look at the past and what I've achieved. I'm always looking at what I can do more."

Jackson did plenty Friday against the Bulldogs, early and often. He raced down the sideline for a 60-yard score within the game's opening minute and had no intention of slowing down. The Cal commit then showed off some power running, taking on Vacaville defenders for a 7-yard TD on the following Granite Bay drive.

After another Grizzlies touchdown, Jackson went back to his lightning quickness for a 38-yard burst to give Granite Bay a 27-0 lead with only half a quarter gone.

In total, Jackson ran 17 times for 151 yards, carrying momentum from a 19-carry, 130-yard, three-TD performance in last week's 51-14 win against Antelope.

But it was also the complementary pieces in the Granite Bay backfield that eased Jackson's workload. Junior Jack Marek had 68 rushing yards on six carries while sophomore Isaiah Ene ran 13 times for 43 yards and a score.

“You don’t really know who’s getting the ball,” Jackson said. “They definitely helped me make big plays and we all kind of feed off each other and work off each other, so it’s a really good chemistry.”

Granite Bay (3-2) forced four turnovers defensively, highlighted by an interception from sophomore Jason Hill Jr.

“We’ve got a lot of young guys who have played against pretty good competition to start the year,”

Granite Bay coach Joe Cattolico said. “Hopefully there are some things to build on there.” Granite Bay’s roster is chock full of Cattolicos. Joe Cattolico, a longtime area coaching whiz now in his third season with the Grizzlies, is flanked by his father, Butch, an iconic figure from his days on the sideline at Los Gatos High School, where he guided 13 Central Coast Section title teams over 264 career wins. Joe Cattolico is approaching the 200-win mark as well with 188.

“He runs a very similar offense to what we ran at Los Gatos for years,” Butch Cattolico said of his son, Joe. “He does a really good job with his own twists. Having played quarterback, he knows what he likes and doesn’t like. But defensively, he’s in a class all by himself.”

On the field are Joe Cattolico’s two sons, Joseph Jr., a junior wide receiver, and Dominic, a freshman quarterback brought up recently to help Granite Bay deal with the injury bug.

“The whole grandson thing makes it even more special,” Butch Cattolico said. “It’s tough on them being sons of the coach. There’s a little more pressure, but Joe handles it really well. ... I just enjoy watching them play.”

Make no mistake, there is no favoritism having sons on the team. Joe Cattolico Sr. is positive when he needs to be but will also get on his boys’ case.

“From a parenting standpoint, it’s tricky,” Joe Cattolico Sr. said. “You get mixed emotions about how you manage that father-son relationship relative to the player-coach relationship. I try to let other guys coach them and let their mom parent them at home. That way I don’t screw it up either way.”

On Friday, Joseph Jr. caught a 42-yard touchdown pass from Lucas Gruia in the first quarter. And in QB relief, Dominic Cattolico took a knee in the victory formation for the Grizzlies.

“You do this for a long time coaching other people’s kids, but it is cool to get to be out there with my own boys,” Joe Cattolico Sr. said. “It’s got it’s challenges, too, obviously — like everything in life — but I think, hopefully, in the long run, you get good memories.”

Football is a family affair at Vacaville as well. Head coach Mike Papadopolous is the son-in-law of former Bulldog coaching icon Tom Zunino, whom the Vacaville football stadium is named after.

“It’s a constant reminder daily when I walk in and see his name on our stadium,” Papadopolous said. “I can hear his voice in the back of my head and the impact he had on the community. Hopefully he’s happy with what we’re trying to do.”

Friday night was an anniversary of sorts for Vacaville quarterback Brody Fortunati. It was this week a year ago against the very same Granite Bay team when Fortunati tried making up for a mistake. After throwing an interception early in the game, the junior QB tried helping out on the tackle and dislocated his hip, ending his season.

Papadopolous said although the injury was tough on Fortunati, his young quarterback was able to step back and see the bigger picture.

“He’s invested the best he can to learn what we’re asking of him,” Papadopolous said. “It’s tough when you’re hurt. How do you manage it? But he’s a driven kid with laser-like future goals.”

Fortunati, who committed to play football at the Air Force Academy in June, completed 7 of 14 passes for 25 yards on Friday as Vacaville (2-2) relied heavily on its run game. The backfield tandem of Cristian Diosdado, who had 16 carries for 68 yards, and Morgan Delago, who had 85 yards on 16 carries, accounted for Vacaville’s two touchdowns.

Vacaville will travel to El Cerrito next week before entering Monticello Empire League play at Rodriguez on Sept. 29.

Granite Bay has a bye next week before kicking off Sierra Foothill League play at home against longtime rival Del Oro.