



## **Fired up: No. 5 Vacaville defense dominates No. 4 Oak Ridge offense in a prep classic**

**By James Patrick | Sacramento Bee | August 28, 2021**

Fire up the flamethrowers: The Vacaville football team has plenty to celebrate this fall.

The fifth-ranked Bulldogs knocked off No. 4 Oak Ridge 17-10 on Friday, announcing Vacaville is very much for real.

The Trojans' last-ditch drive ended at the Vacaville 17-yard line with four straight incomplete passes. Oak Ridge receiver Aden Clark hauled in the fourth-down throw a step or two out of bounds in the end zone, setting off a raucous Vacaville celebration.

A series of flamethrowers in front of the Bulldogs' fans erupted as Vacaville defender Tim Plowman high-fived everybody in sight in the end zone.

Everybody deserved a high-five. The Bulldogs smothered Oak Ridge's high-powered offense all night. The Trojans had just 131 yards of total offense before taking the ball at their own 21-yard line with no timeouts and 1:49 left to play. Oak Ridge quarterback Maddox Varella needed just five plays to move the Trojans down to the Vacaville 17-yard line, but then the Bulldogs tightened up, with four straight incompletions essentially ending the game with a turnover on downs with 15 seconds left.

"Could our defense have bailed us out any more times than they just did? Oh my gosh," Vacaville coach Mike Papadopoulos said.

Everybody on the defense deserved a shout-out. Jacob Edmonds gummed up the middle as Vacaville allowed 56 rushing yards. Defensive backs Roman Price and Tim

Plowman were impressive, batting down passes all night. Linebacker Lucca Sartorio stuffed runs and played smart pass defense.

It helps when you know what plays are coming, Plowman said.

“It all started in practice. We put in whatever formation they were running and we knew the answer. We just executed it,” he said.

The work really started after halftime, when the score was tied 7-7. After Oak Ridge went three-and out on its first possession, Vacaville running back Darian Leon-Guerrero burst through a hole in the middle and sprinted untouched 67 yards for a touchdown. Cue the flamethrowers, with 9:27 left in the third quarter and a 14-7 Vacaville lead.

“We made some corrections at halftime. I knew the gaps were starting to hit in the middle, so I knew once I committed to that hole, I had to stick with it,” Leon-Guerrero said.

Leon-Guerrero had a busy night, helping out on defense in addition to running for 178 yards and two touchdowns. When asked to single out some defenders who had a big night, Leon-Guerrero cited most of the starting lineup.

“We dominated. We dominated. Our defense, we really gave it to them tonight. I’m really proud of ’em,” he said.

Plowman played a big role in that. The senior cornerback caught four passes but played stellar defense. Oak Ridge’s vaunted passing attack completed 16 of 35 throws from three different tossers.

Beating a quality program like Oak Ridge means a little bit more in Vacaville. Entering the game, the Trojans had won eight straight contests over the Bulldogs, a fact the PA announcer did not forget to mention after the game.

“That’s why we sign these guys up,” Papadopoulos said. “We have such a high respect for these guys and that’s why we sign guys up. This is a stepping stone for us but it also helps us fix things immediately.”

After doing a video interview for a high school sports show, Plowman turned around to talk to yet another reporter. Football has always been a big deal in Vacaville; people are just starting to notice.

“Surreal, man,” he said. “This city, man. Vacaville football is so special. We don’t get a lot of recognition, since we’re not really in the Bay Area or Sac, so getting that recognition is something special. We don’t take that for granted.”