



## **Pittsburg runs away from Vacaville in second half for 35-13 win; Bulldogs ready for MEL slate**

To say Vacaville High School's football team is prepared for the Monticello Empire League season is an understatement.

On the surface, it may not look that way. The Bulldogs dropped to 2-3 overall after losing Friday night's road game against Pittsburg by a score of 35-13 in the final contest of the nonleague schedule.

But Vacaville heads into next week's bye with more confidence than any of its MEL rivals. Over the course of the season's first five games, the Bulldogs proved to everybody, including themselves, they can hang with the top teams in Northern California.

Looking back at the nonleague schedule Vacaville just played, its five opponents are currently a combined 19-4 this season. Pittsburg is ranked No.21 in California by maxpreps.com, and Granite Bay and Oak Ridge are two of the top-5 teams in the Sac-Joaquin Section.

So forgive Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos for not being a "Debbie Downer" following the team's loss to Pittsburg. If you ask him, growing as a team by facing adversity head on, no matter the final outcome, is what the out-of-conference schedule is all about.

"I really like where we're at, I really do," 'Pop' said postgame. "We found a number of kids throughout this journey in the preseason that are going to be able to help us as we continue into the league season. A couple of kids stepped up in really pivotal situations. That's the goal for us. We'd much rather come out and here and play a team like that (Pittsburg) than anything else. Our kids are going to keep the right perspective and take a lot of pride in what they accomplished this preseason."

Coming in, the Bulldogs had lost both of their games by a combined two points — both being one point defeats to Oak Ridge and Granite Bay. But Pittsburg, a powerhouse out of the North Coast Section's Bay Valley League, provided an even bigger test, and Vacaville again held its own before the wheels came off after halftime.

Two Brandon Talton field goals — one a long range rocket from 47 yards and the other a chip shot from 22 — were the only points Vacaville could muster against Pittsburg's athletic defense.

On the other side, the Pirates came out stale on offense and managed to score just one touchdown in the first half. Pittsburg's points came on a 30 yard hookup between the Boyd cousins — Justin Boyd throwing over the top to his relative A'jae Boyd near the front right pylon — after penalties had backed the Pirates up. That connection capped what was a seven play, 80 yard drive midway through the first quarter.

But that was it for the first half. The Bulldogs went into the break feeling good only down 7-6.

"We knew it was going to be a possession game for us," 'Pop' said. "We knew we had to hit things exactly right, and I thought we hung in well in the first half. They made some nice adjustments against us in the second half."

Whatever Pittsburg head coach Victor Galli said to his team at intermission, it worked.

The Pirate offense looked like a well-oiled machine, scoring touchdowns on four of their five possessions in the second half and may have made it 5-for-5 if the fourth quarter clock hadn't expired when they had the ball on Vacaville's 1-yard line.

Justin Boyd was the first to celebrate in the end zone after scoring on a 7-yard quarterback-designed run around the right side of his offensive line. The touchdown finished off a 12-play, 51 yard drive and pushed the Pittsburg lead to 14-6.

A 29 yard touchdown run from running back Anthony Robinson and a 1-yard scoring run from backfield-mate Darrion Bartley quickly put the game out of hand at 28-6 early in the fourth quarter.

For good measure, Pittsburg's Premier Murphy got in on the action with a 29 yard touchdown run of his own to extend the lead to 35-6. That score came after a Duvall Jackson fumble inside the Pirates' 10 yard line put an end to a promising Vacaville drive. Pittsburg capitalized by going 94 yards the other way in just four plays, capped by Murphy's long run.

"They made good adjustments and were able to take advantage of their speed." 'Pop' said of the second half. "They had their quarterback (Justin Boyd) run a little bit more and that opened us up a little bit. They were able to adjust to some of the things we were giving them fits with in the first half."

The Bulldogs were able to put an end to the Pittsburg scoring parade late in the fourth quarter with a long touchdown drive. Jordan Murga made a diving catch in the back right corner of the end zone on a 4th-and-goal pass from Cam Mitchell, but it was too little, too late for Vacaville.

Mitchell ended his day 10-of-18 for 89 yards and a touchdown. Ethan Houdyshell led the running game with 90 yards on 13 carries. Jackson had 63 yards on 17 carries. Murga led the receiving effort with three grabs for 34 yards and a score.

For Pittsburg, Justin Boyd was 8-of-13 for 101 yards and a touchdown pass. He also carried the ball eight times for 91 yards. Murphy led all ball carriers with 94 yards on 11 carries. A'jae Boyd caught three passes for 49 yards and a touchdown.

Vacaville is off next week before the games really begin to count, starting with a road game at Armijo to commence the MEL schedule.