



Rio Linda outpaces Vacaville in playoff battle

By Nick DeCicco | Daily Republic | November 22, 2013

RIO LINDA - Vacaville High watched Marcel Brown and host Rio Linda outrun them in a 31-21 loss in a Sac-Joaquin Section Division II playoff quarterfinals matchup, Friday.

The seventh-seeded Bulldogs (8-4) had few answers for Brown, who amassed rushing 224 and three touchdowns, including his last when he took a pitch from quarterback Stephen Andrews and blasted 24 yards to give the No. 2 Knights (11-1) a 24-21 lead.

In a game with violent momentum shifts, it was a wounding glance to Vacaville's playoff hopes.

The dagger came on the first play of the ensuing drive when Danny Perez gobbled a Vacaville fumble in the backfield with just more than 2 minutes to play. The turnover yielded a 35-yard touchdown run for Leonard Skattebo and a fatal, final blow in the Knights' win.

"We had a chance with a couple of minutes left and we couldn't close the door on it," said Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos. "(Rio Linda) did a wonderful job, too."

The Rio Linda defense was efficient in halting the Bulldogs' rushing game, holding them to 135 yards before a series of final-drive sacks cost them 37 yards.

Entering the game, the Knights had not surrendered more than 151 yards on the ground in a single game this year.

The Knights defense struggled during the third quarter, however, when the momentum swung in the Bulldogs' favor.

Trailing 17-7 after a second quarter marred by turnovers and stalled drives, Vacaville's Reid Ramirez picked off an Andrews pass near midfield to give the 'Dogs possession.

Four plays later, Demetrius Nunez pushed through the line for a 9-yard TD scamper to cut Rio Linda's lead to 17-14

.The Bulldogs took the lead with 10:56 to go in the fourth when Vacaville quarterback Chad Hekking rolled to his left and spotted Tanner Donaldson tucked behind the Rio Linda secondary. Hekking bombed a deep ball to an open Donaldson for a 54-yard touchdown pass and a 21-17 Bulldogs' lead.

After trading possessions, Brown turned on the afterburners, single-handedly moving the ball 74 yards on five plays, including the go-ahead, 24-yard score.

That reflected the second quarter, in which Brown had 100 yards and two touchdowns.

The first came when Brown bullied his way down his own sideline for a 19-yard score to tie the game at 7.

After a Hekking fumble deep in Vacaville territory, Brown snapped off an 8-yard touchdown run, bursting up the middle and making a spin move at the goal line to reach the end zone and put the Knights ahead 17-7.

Rio Linda's Jonathan Tafoya booted a 30-yard field goal in the second quarter. He also missed two field goals on the night, a 25-yarder on the Knights' opening drive and a 33-yard attempt in the third quarter.

Vacaville got its seven first-half points on an 80-yard drive in the final minutes of the first quarter.

Hekking hit Donaldson for a 53-yard pass to bring the Bulldogs to the Rio Linda 1-yard line before Damonte Moore moved the ball the rest of the way, giving Vacaville a 7-0 edge.

"I'm really proud of them," Papadopoulos said of his team and its 2013 season. "They tried as hard as they possibly could right down to the end."

It was a rematch of a first-round playoff game from last year, when Vacaville defeated Rio Linda.