



Bulldogs unhorse Knights in SJS playoff opener

By Mike Corpus | Fairfield Daily Republic | November 10, 2012

VACAVILLE — Explosive offense and shutdown defense added up to a big victory for the Vacaville High football team Friday night as the Bulldogs knocked off Rio Linda 35-21 in the Sac-Joaquin Section Division II playoff opener at Tom Zunino Stadium.

Seeded ninth in the bracket, Vacaville took the lead on the first play from scrimmage on a 58-yard touchdown run by Curtis Goins, who weaved through the No. 8 Knights' defense virtually untouched and exploded down field for the score and a 7-0 lead after Alberto Escobedo's extra point.

"Fundamentally, the kids did a very nice job," said Vacaville coach Mike Papadopoulos. "A big, physical football team that we faced, a wonderful program. It was an honor for us to play them and it was definitely a big test. It's not what you expect a first-round game to be and every bit as billed."

The early advantage lasted into the second quarter before Rio Linda completed a 65-yard, nine-play drive with a 5-yard TD scamper by Lamar Bible to tie it at 7-7 with 10 minutes, 33 seconds left in the half.

So the see-saw battle went through the first half as the Bulldogs scored and the Knights answered.

Vacaville took a 14-7 lead after Jared Paulin's 5-yard TD run, capping a 70-yard drive that left 7:05 on the clock in the half.

Rio Linda tied it for the last time on a disputed play.

Marcel Brown raced into the end zone from 19 yards out, but the Knights were called for a personal foul.

The game officials said the flag went up after Brown was in the end zone, but Vacaville coaches argued otherwise. That left 3:03 in the half.

It was plenty of time for the Bulldogs to take the lead for good, though, as they ran just four plays and scored on Goins' 46-yard dash on fourth-and-two, taking a 21-14 lead into the break. Quarterback Nic Ardave pulled off a convincing fake handoff to Jaden Grotke, leaving Goins in the clear as he raced up the right side to pay dirt.

Goins led all rushers with 180 yards on 16 carries, pushing him past the 1,000-yard mark. Daniel Mewborn added 105 yards on six carries with two TDs for Vacaville.

Pailin and Grotke ran for 64 and 61 yards, respectively, helping Vacaville to a 405-yard night on offense.

Whatever adjustments Papadopoulos and his staff made at halftime, they worked.

The Bulldogs' defense came out looking like the unit that dominated its way to the Division II SJS championship last year. Vacaville held Rio Linda to just 134 yards (out of 320 total) and one touchdown over the final 24 minutes of play.

"Multiple spots, very physical kids they played against, fast guys that they were playing and they showed a lot of resolve when things were looking a little bit bleak for a minute there and they continued to step up," the coach said.

Four times, the Bulldogs stopped the Knights on fourth down, capitalizing on the first one for what proved the winning score.

After Rio came up empty on the opening drive of the second half, Vacaville took over on its own 47, and eight plays later, it was Mewborn on a 2-yard push for the TD and a 28-14 lead.

The Knights came up empty on another fourth down, but got the ball back when Michael Shane stripped Mewborn at the Bulldogs' 45, setting up a quick six-play drive that ended with Keenan Hunt's 9-yard TD catch from Dustin Rossiter to get within 28-21.

That was it for the Knights, and if to put an exclamation point on the game, Mewborn redeemed himself with a 69-yard scoring run, breaking three tackles as he weaved his way past Rio Linda defenders for the final margin.

A number of turnovers – Mewborn's fumble and interceptions thrown by Goins and Ardave – were the only blemishes on the game for Vacaville, but they will need to be addressed before the Bulldogs take on No. 1 Folsom on the road next week.

"Managing the ball a little better than we did (will be key)," Papadopoulos said. "There were a couple very costly turnovers that we take responsibility for. . . . The management of the game is going to be huge.