



Vanden football finally earns the long-awaited victory over Vacaville

By Matt Miller | Daily Republic | October 7, 2023

VACAVILLE — Where were you 1967?

That was the last time a Vanden High School varsity football team had beaten Vacaville. The Bulldogs came into Friday night's game at Tom Zunino Stadium with a 9-1 edge in the series. But that all changed as the Vikings used their vaunted passing attack and made some key defensive stops when necessary to beat Vacaville 24-9.

Vacaville has won six straight Monticello Empire League titles and hasn't lost a league game since 2016 when the Bulldogs lost to Napa. Friday night's game was very much still in the balance until Vanden quarterback Kalani Mcleod hit receiver Marcellus Chandler in the middle of the field for an 83-yard touchdown pass on third down with 3:38 to play in the game.

"It feels great," Chandler said. "I've never had this feeling before. We made history tonight. Coach told us not to give up and run the ball down the field. I ran the route, got open and turned it into an 83-yard touchdown."

Vanden improved its record to 5-2 overall and 2-0 in the Monticello Empire League and at the moment are alone at the top of league.

Micah Navarro had just kicked his third field goal of the night with 4:55 remaining in the game. Vacaville got the ball back down 17-9 before Chandler got the score and turned the tide. The Bulldogs had one final drive with 1:49 left in the game but ran out of time.

"Vacaville is such a monster program," Vanden head coach Sean Murphy said. "It's a great feeling to finally get the win. But I think our league is going to be really strong this year. It's only the second week and we're looking forward to having some more great games."

Mcleod had a monster game himself. He completed 24 of 42 passes for 400 yards and two touchdown passes, though he was intercepted three times. He also rushed for a score.

His first touchdown pass went to Brayden Chavez for 48 yards and broke the touchdown drought of a game that Vacaville was up 6-3. Mcleod dove over the from the 1-yard line for a score to cap another drive in the fourth quarter. Then the Vikings had the game-changing connection between Mcleod and Chandler.

Chavez finished with eight catches for 163 yards. Chandler had three catches for 112 yards. The Vikings netted zero yards on the ground, though they did have some key running plays.

"We made too many mistakes," Murphy said. "I think we get way to hyped for this game so we do some stuff that is uncharacteristic for us. It's the first time we were able to overcome it."

Rafael Ortiz Velez had a 38-yard field goal on the Vikings' opening drive. He added three extra points.

Navarro did all of Vacaville's scoring with field goals of 33, 37 and 32 yards. Vacaville thought it had a rushing touchdown with 1:24 left in the first half. Quarterback Brody Fortunati raced 16 yards for a score but was ruled to have fumbled in the end zone and Chandler scooped it up.

The Bulldogs are now 3-4 overall and 1-1 in the MEL. The league title isn't necessarily lost but they might have some company in the end.

"It definitely hurt us a bit," Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos said of Vanden's big 83-yard touchdown. "We had to take some chances and press a little bit. Our kids gave maximum effort the whole time. Vanden just did a great job. It was a great championship environment."