



## **Vacaville puts on a defensive clinic; overcomes four turnovers**

**By JASON NAHAL – Vacaville Reporter**

A little over a month ago, Vacaville High School head football coach Mike Papadopoulos said things needed to change after his team allowed 65 points in an overtime loss to Atwater.

Change, they did. And in a big way, too.

Despite turning the ball over four times Friday night, the Bulldogs outlasted rival Vanden, 7-6, behind a stellar defensive effort headlined by junior defensive end Brody Rogers.

“Everybody was counting us out of this game,” Rogers said. “Everybody was doubting us, and we showed them that we’re here to play.”

The Bulldogs limited the Vikings to 205 yards of offense and became the first team to shut them out since McClymonds did it in 2017. Rogers, Jake Williams and Dino Menicou each totaled five tackles, while Dylan Borjesson had six.

“I cannot say enough about the defensive effort that our guys put together tonight in so many really difficult positions that we put them in,” Papadopoulos said. “For our defense to bail us out that many times, it hopefully bodes well moving forward, but definitely there are some things we can fix as well.”

Vacaville’s lone touchdown came on a 19-yard scamper from senior running back Roman Conner-Owens with 59 seconds remaining in the third quarter. Conner-Owens piled up a team-high 123 rushing yards while totaling three tackles and a forced fumble.

“This shows that we’re a team that just doesn’t give up.” Conner-Owens said. “We’re a team that no matter how we start games, how we finish games, or just how we play in general, we finish games as a team.”

Conner-Owens eighth touchdown of the season capped a 16-play, 85-yard drive. The Bulldogs may have looked methodical there, but that was far from the case in the first half.

On the second play from scrimmage, senior quarterback Brendan Jackson threw a screen pass that was intercepted by Vanden defensive lineman Jaeden Dickens, who rumbled 25-yards into the end zone. It marked the second week in a row that Vacaville allowed a defensive score on its opening drive.

Jackson threw two more interceptions in the first half – the first being a ball that Brandon Brown ripped out of Aiden Gillard’s hands in mid-air. The second was picked off by Elijah Thompson near the sideline.

Three plays after Brown’s interception, Vanden junior quarterback Xavier Zambrano found Kimani Dokes for a 19-yard score. The triumph was short-lived, wiped away – along with the score – by a holding penalty. It was one of nine penalties Vanden committed in the loss.

“We’re just not at that place as an offensive unit where we can overcome those self-inflicted wounds,” said Vanden head coach Mike Clark. “We’ve got to score touchdowns. We can’t have touchdowns being taken off the board.”

The Vikings marched down to the Bulldogs’ 15-yard line to open the second half but turned the ball over on downs after Vacaville cornerback Julian Garcia blanketed his man on consecutive targets.

From there, the Bulldogs leaned on Borjesson and Conner-Owens to power their aforementioned 16-play drive. Jackson was much sharper on the drive, completing a key 11-yard pass to Devin Bishop over the middle of the field.

“I remember I went up to him. I was like, ‘you’re good,’” Rogers said. “Just rally your guys and let’s go.’ They put up that score and that gave us all the momentum to shut them down.”

Vacaville’s defense then forced Vanden’s fourth unsuccessful red zone trip and a three-and-out to give it’s offense the ball back with 5:34 left in the fourth quarter. The

Bulldogs picked up four first downs on the drive, the last on a 13-yard reverse by Williams to seal their fifth straight win.

“We just came alive. There’s no other way to put it,” Rogers said. “Everybody was anxiously excited for this game, and everybody came out and played to the best of their abilities. It’s not a one-man show”