



Vacaville High wins Black and Blue Bowl against Will C. Wood

By Matt Sieger | Vacaville Reporter | April 16, 2021

VACAVILLE — The final score was lopsided. But both teams deserved medals for courage and determination in making it through this COVID football season.

Vacaville and Will C. Wood high schools clashed on Friday night at Vacaville's Tom Zunino Stadium in the annual rivalry game, the Black and Blue Bowl. Vacaville won 58-20 to finish first in the Monticello Empire League with a 4-0 record, while Wood ended its league campaign at 2-2.

What appeared to be a short season on paper was actually 11 months of hard work for the athletes, who began conditioning last spring without any certainty of having a season due to the pandemic.

"We've never obviously had an experience like this," said Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopolous. "For them to do what they have endured for all these months... And for teenagers not knowing if you're going to get anything, that's the biggest part. So huge life lessons for the kids who hung in there and did it and we're really, really happy for them."

"I am extremely proud of our seniors," said Wood head coach Kirk Anderson. "Nobody really expected a season but these guys never wavered, they never complained, they came out on short notice and gave it everything they could, so I'm super proud of those guys... And really our whole football team, I am proud of our roster sticking together through this because it was definitely a trying time."

Though attendance was limited to family members on a clear, warm night partially illuminated by a crescent moon, it was Senior Night, so families turned out in good numbers to show their appreciation.

Vaca wide receiver Timothy Plowman breaks the grasp of Wood's Kanye Kroon as he runs for a 45-yard touchdown reception during the third quarter of the Bulldogs' Black and Blue Bowl victory. (Photo by Jay J Karuzas)

Wood would probably like the first quarter back, as the Bulldogs steamrolled them and led 30-0 by the end of the period.

Wood won the coin toss and elected to kick off. The Wildcats limited Vacaville to a yard on two carries to open up but then, in what would become a theme, Vacaville quarterback Ryan Vaughan scrambled out of trouble and scampered 17 yards for a first down.

Vaughan, who finished with 283 yards in the air on 14-for-21 passing, showed his versatility by hitting Geremiah Brown for a 20-yard gain, then executing a quarterback draw for a 23-yard pickup to the Wood two-yard line. Darian Leon-Guerrero ran it in for the first of Vacaville's eight touchdowns, followed by the first of Ariel Till's eight successful kicks for an extra point.

Vaughan had 69 yards rushing on the night on four carries.

"Most of them were broken plays, but I just tried to make something out of nothing," said the junior signal-caller. "But it worked out good. My receivers blocked well for me."

After forcing Wood into a three-and-out, Vacaville struck again. Vaughan gained 14 yards on a keeper to advance the ball to the Wood 30. Then, with the ball on the Wood 18, he scrambled again, this time all the way into the end zone with 6:07 left in the frame for a 14-0 Bulldog lead.

The wheels then fell off the Wood bus in dramatic fashion. On the first play from scrimmage on their own 28-yard line after receiving the kickoff, the Wildcats fumbled in the backfield. The ball squirted away like a greased pig as players dove for it, but it ended up in the arms of Vacaville's Luke Levengood, who scooped it up and carried it into the end zone for a touchdown.

After Vacaville kicked off again, Wood started on its own 11-yard line, gained a yard on its first play, then fumbled again on the next play. A Wood player had to fall on the ball in the end zone, giving Vacaville a safety and a 23-0 lead with 4:52 still remaining in the quarter.

Wood then had to free-kick to Vacaville, which advanced the ball down to the Wood 8-yard line, where Darian Leon-Guerrero executed a nice spinning run for a touchdown and a 30-0 lead.

“They played well in all phases and just came out of the gates really hot,” said Papadopolous of his players. “We jumped on them, great momentum in the first quarter and they played well the whole time.”

He also had praise for his quarterback.

“Ryan’s really become a complete player,” said the coach. “He had a tremendous night tonight.”

Wood showed some life in the second quarter, sparked by an interception by Josiah Flores, giving the Wildcats the ball on the Vacaville 25-yard line. From there Wood found itself in trouble with a fourth down and 12 yards to go on the 14-yard line. But quarterback Ken Tilford found Krishna Clay on a nice pass down to the one-yard line to make it first and goal-to-go. Tilford then ran it in on a keeper to put Wood on the board,

But Vacaville struck right back on its next possession on the prettiest play of the night, a 64-yard connection down the left sideline between Vaughan and senior wide receiver Evan Adams.

“We liked the match-up that we had on the outside,” Vaughan said. “We knew that Evan could beat him. It just worked out good and Evan got a good break on it and he made a good play.”

“The coach just told me to run and I could trust my quarterback,” said Adams. “So I ran as fast as I could and he put it in the right place.”

That made it 37-7. Vacaville held Wood on another three-and-out, and the Bulldogs got the ball back on their own 40-yard line. Vaughan tossed a screen pass to Leon-Guerrero, who weaved down the right sideline for a 45 yard gain to the Wood 15. On the very next play, Vaughan found Logan Cunningham in the end zone for a 44-7 lead with just 29 seconds left in the half.

Wood received the kickoff to begin the second half. After advancing the ball to Vacaville’s 42-yard line, Tilford ran a keeper all the way into the end zone to make it 44-14.

The Wildcats forced a fumble on Vacaville’s next possession, Clay emerging with the ball. But on the ensuing possession, Wood fumbled it right back, Blake Espino rippling the ball out of the running back’s arms. That led to another Vacaville drive for a score, this one on a short pass by Vaughan to Timothy Plowman, who accelerated down the left sideline for a 45-yard score and a 51-14 Bulldog lead with 2:21 remaining in the third quarter.

Vacaville got its last points on a 22-yard run by Brown early in the final quarter.

Wood had some fun celebrating the final play of the game, a 25-yard heave by Damien Gutierrez into the end zone to Xavier Copeland as time expired.

But for both teams, the biggest accomplishment was completing a season through all the uncertainties surrounding the coronavirus.

“We started during the summer and we heard we weren’t going to get a season in, but we just kept working and working as a team, getting along together,” said Adams. “And toward the end of January they told us we were going to have a season... We were ready.”

The teams will soon ramp up again for the fall season, and both are looking forward to it.

“We’re really young in the offensive line and defensive line, so we’ve got some guys coming back we’re excited for,” said Anderson. “It’s going to be a short turnaround, firing right back up again in June.”