



Vacaville High School football team clinches MEL title outright with rout of Will C. Wood

By Mark Mazzaferro | Vacaville Reporter | October 30, 2021

Heading into Friday night's annual Black and Blue Bowl, the Vacaville and Will C. Wood high school football teams had identical 7-2 records. That might lead one to think the battle between the cross-town rivals would be a good ballgame even though, historically, Vacaville had a 31-4 edge all time in the matchup.

And for the eternal optimists in the stands at the host Wildcats' stadium, there were more than a few moments of elation and hope that just maybe their team could find a way to upset first-place Vacaville and end up with a share of the Monticello Empire League title.

But poor field position and a staunch Vacaville defense on the first three Wood drives together with the quick-strike offense of the Bulldogs sent those hopes down Marshall Road and into oblivion as Vacaville passed, ran, kicked and sacked its way to a 38-7 victory, securing sole possession of first place in the MEL.

"We were able to manage the game pretty well," said Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos. "And hats off to our defense. There was a stretch there going into the second half they (Wood) had negative yards total, and all year long our defense has put us in great spots to be successful."

While the Bulldog defense was its usual solid self, holding the host Wildcats to a measly 103 yards, the offense was equally solid. Quarterback Ryan Vaughan racked up 108 yards passing in just the first quarter, connecting with four different receivers, and finished the night with 243 yards and two touchdowns.

“We wanted to come out swinging because we knew they had some guys going both ways,” Vaughan said of Vacaville’s up-tempo offensive attack. “To get the ball in our playmakers’ hands as soon as possible and get a rhythm going, that was our goal, and we did it from the get-go, so it worked out good.”

The Bulldogs’ first drive ended with a missed 40-yard field goal, but after a quick three and out by Wood, Vacaville got the ball back and capped a nine-play drive with a five-yard score by occasional running back/full time defensive lineman Blake Espino to take a 7-0 lead.

“When one person does good, it opens it up for another person,” said Espino, who made several key stops on defense as well as scoring two touchdowns. “I used to run the ball a lot my freshman, sophomore year. I shifted my mind to defense, but I am there if they need me on offense.”

The next Wood drive started at their own 15, and three plays later the Wildcats punted again. Vaughan then connected with Darian Leon-Guerrero on a short pass that the senior running back hauled in on the left side of the field, dashed across to the right side and scampered 40 yards into the end zone for a 14-0 Bulldog lead.

Wood’s next drive started at their own 18 and ended when quarterback Ken Tilford had the ball taken away by Eric Gladney, giving the Bulldogs a first down at the Wood 23. Two incomplete passes later, Vacaville’s Ariel Till booted a 33-yard field goal for a 17-0 lead.

With 6:17 left in the second quarter, the Wildcats recovered a Bulldog fumble and put together their best drive of the first half. Starting at their own 39, Wood moved the ball downfield to the Vacaville 27 when, on fourth and 14, Wood quarterback Ken Tilford scrambled and ran to the nine. With 11 seconds left in the first half, Wood had the ball on the Bulldog 1 yard line when a bad snap sailed over Tilford’s head. The ball was recovered by Vacaville at the Wood 18, ending the threat.

“That would have been great, we could have picked up the points there, and get the ball after halftime, no question,” said a dejected head coach Jacob Wright after the game. His quarterback, Tilford, felt the same way, but added that despite the score, he and his teammates felt they still had a shot.

“That really killed us,” Tilford said of the miscue at the end of the first half. “But even in the locker room it was only 17-0. We thought we could still come back, we thought we were still in there and we kept pushing, so I am proud of our team.”

The second half got off to a bad start for Wood, as two consecutive bad snaps and a short pass from Tilford to Jayjay Olaes for minus-3 yards led to a fourth and 25. Wood punted the ball away, and an eight-play drive by Vacaville was capped by Leon-Guerrero cutting right and almost walking the nine yards needed into the end zone, making it 24-0.

Vacaville scored again when, on the first play of the fourth quarter, Vaughan hit Roman Price for a 28-yard TD, increasing the lead to 31-0. The final score of the night for the Bulldogs came when Espino bulled over from the one-yard line, making it 38-0.

Wood scored late in the game when a bad snap sailed over the head of Vacaville quarterback Mayson Olney and was recovered in the end zone by defensive tackle Matthew Qamar for the score.

“I really thought we tackled well, we turned the ball over a couple of times, but I am optimistic we can still correct things and do well in the playoffs,” said Wright of his team’s effort. However, he agreed that having his best players playing on both sides of the ball had an impact on the outcome.

“Depth is definitely an advantage that they have, no question,” Wright said.

Wood finished the regular season at 3-2 in the MEL, 7-3 overall, while Vacaville takes first place with a 5-0 record, 8-2 overall. The Wildcats hope to host a first-round playoff game next week as a No. 7 seed, while Vacaville is projected to be a No. 4 seed and enjoy a first-round bye. Seedings and game locations will be announced on Sunday, according to the section’s Twitter feed.

In the junior varsity game, Vacaville downed Wood, 47-0.