



Vacaville uses second-half surge to win MEL title outright

By Jahson Nahal – Vacaville Reporter

The Vacaville High School football team couldn't go trick-or-treating on Halloween night, yet it still took home a prize bigger than a king-sized candy bar.

A Monticello Empire League Championship.

The Bulldogs used a 28-point second half to crush Will C Wood 49-20 in the annual Black and Blue Bowl on Friday night, claiming outright possession of the MEL title for the first time since 2022.

"Vacaville is all about community and I'm just glad that we can bring it back," Vacaville senior quarterback Brenden Jackson said. "After a two-year drought of not having it in our gym, it definitely deserves to be there."

Jackson might be too old for trick-or-treating, but that didn't stop him from putting on his superman cape. He completed 13-of-15 passes for 268 yards and three touchdowns while rushing for 79 yards and two more scores.

"I just got out of my mind today," Jackson said. "Everything we worked on at practice was working. We were just taking everything that was open."

Jackson's scoring passes went for 17 and 66 yards to Connor Golden and 72 yards to Devin Bishop – the last giving the Bulldogs a 42-14 lead in the fourth quarter.

"He's been trending the right way as we'd hope for this time of year," Vacaville head coach Mike Papadopoulos said. "I'm very excited for him."

With the win, the Bulldogs extended their win streak to eight and will head into the Sac-Joaquin Section playoffs with an 8-2 overall record and a perfect 6-0 mark in the MEL. They will find out their seeding when brackets are released on Sunday.

“We understand the gravity of everything and that we’re playing on borrowed time,” Papadopoulos said. “We’re just excited for where we’re at and we’re still chasing that perfect game for us.”

Wood finished year two under head coach Cha’pelle Brown with a 3-7 overall record and a 1-5 showing in the MEL. Brown said he’s proud of how much the program has grown since he took over.

“As a coach, you’re always getting judged on the wins and losses and you’re supposed to, but behind the scenes, the amount these dudes have grown, it’s been huge,” Brown said. “They’ve grown, they got better, they know we care about them and we’re gonna continue to care about them. Even when they’re gone, we’re gonna be their coaches forever.”

The Wildcats got off to as great a start as they could have hoped for in the first quarter. Vacaville’s Jake Williams fumbled the opening kickoff and two plays later, Wood junior quarterback Tanner McCottrell found senior receiver DJ Seymour for an 18-yard touchdown.

McCottrell connected with Seymour once more in the first half – this time from four yards out – before Jackson answered on the very next play with his 66-yard touchdown strike to Goldenm giving the Bulldogs a 21-14 lead at halftime.

Lost in the shuffle of Jackson’s stellar day was a season best 206-yard, 3 touchdown performance from McCottrell. His favorite target was Seymour, who hauled in nine receptions for 57 yards and two scores.

“Everybody’s looking at his speed, but the most impressive part about him is his character and his leadership,” Brown said. “You’re talking about a 4.0 student that leads by example.”

“So what you see out there as far as his play, that’s really just his character, and his play happened to match it.”

The Wildcats couldn't carry their momentum into the second half, turning the ball over on downs before punting on each of their next two drives. Junior defensive end Brody Rogers led Vacaville's defense, piling up five tackles and two sacks. Jackson capitalized on the defensive stands with rushing touchdowns on back-to-back drives, the first being a 10-yard scramble after stepping up in the pocket, and the second being a 48-yard tackle breaking scamper.

"I think we came into this game and we weren't in the right mindset," Jackson said. "We just turned it around at halftime."

From there, Vacaville got into the Halloween spirit and reached into its bag of tricks.

The Bulldogs sold a reverse perfectly, and the Wildcats bit, leaving Bishop wide open for a 72-yard touchdown. On their next drive, they faked a sweep before snapping the ball to Aiden Pope, who ran untouched for a 67-yard touchdown to put the final nail in the coffin.

"We just want to keep our same mentality." Rogers said of going into the playoffs. "Go 1-0 every single week, nothing bigger and nothing less."