The East Palo Alto Bulldogs survived a tough clash with the Sacramento Lions at Robla Park in Sacramento, Calif., to win 27-22 in NorCal DI club action Saturday.

“It was a very tough, physical game,” stated Lions Head Coach Iferemie Tawake. “We played defense the majority of the game and the Bulldogs ran very hard lines. The Bulldogs were hungry for the victory and earned their win today.”

Despite the Bulldogs emerging victorious, it was not an easy win and the game certainly could have gone either way. The two teams continued to trade scores and the defense was unrelenting on both ends.

Lions flyhalf Jerry Tavai notched a drop goal in the 5th minute to open the scoring. The Lions would score again when fullback Ratu Rinakama raced downfield on a counter attack dodging several defenders. Rinakama dished to winger Davita Pale who finished the job and dotted down near the corner.

The Bulldogs were persistent in attack and forced the Lions defense to stay on their toes, but eventually the line would have to give. A foray into the Lions 22 produced a 5-meter scrum for the Bulldogs, and a nice eight-man shove produced the try.

The second half opened up with more brutal defense. Bone-jarring tackles in the backline caused both teams to work on keeping the ball tight within the forwards, where the defensive effort was just as hard-nosed. The Bulldogs pack began to get organized and it showed in the midfield attack. In the 55th minute, EPA broke through midfield and scored under the posts. The conversion gave them the lead for the first time in the game, 12-8.

On the restart, the Lions answered when wing Davita Pale intercepted a Bulldogs and pass galloped to the tryline and a 15-12 Sacramento lead.

The Bulldogs would then score two more tries and take the lead 22-15. Things were looking grim for the Lions but they continued to press on offense. The ball went wide and lock Joel Scott drew in the remaining defense before dishing to hooker Tone Finau who hit the gap and dove in for the try. Flyhalf Jerry Tavai converted a difficult kick to tie the game. To make things more interesting, a Bulldogs forward threw a punch as Finau scored the try and the Lions were awarded a penalty on the following restart. The Lions now had possession again and with the game tied 22-22 and time winding down, everything was up for grabs.

The Lions had the momentum and they continued to press on attack. But when the Lions were awarded a scrum, the Bulldogs pushed forward and created a difficult ball for the Lions backline. The ball squirted out and a risky Lions pass was intercepted and the Bulldogs scored the final try of the game to take home the win 27-22.

“We did not stick to our pattern and the result showed this,” Coach Tawake acknowledged. “We will continue to move forward and work to improve all areas of our game, increase our strengths and improve our weaknesses. It is a long season and I believe we have all the right components to be successful.”

“Northern California rugby is going to be anything but easy,” stated Lions Manager Aaron Frederick. “Today proved that this season should be a thrilling one. Although we obviously would have preferred the W, Northern California has some talented, physical matchups and that was showcased today.”

The Bulldogs will count themselves somewhat fortunate to come away with a bonus-point victory, but they will have to credit their strength in the scrum for much of that victory.