

# And then there were four...

## How many area teams will survive the second round?

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Posted Friday, November 03, 2006

Two area football teams were in this position the last two years, one hasn't been here since 2000, and the other has never been here before.

That's the breakdown for the Tri-Cities football teams that are still alive after round one of the IHSA playoffs.

Batavia and Geneva both saw its seasons end in the second round last year, Kaneland last played a second-round game six years ago and St. Charles North is still ecstatic over last Friday's 14-13 victory over Moline for the first playoff victory in school history.

At Geneva:⌘The Greyhounds are coming to Burgess Field on Saturday afternoon and the Vikings will aim to have them whimpering home after a Class 6A second round meeting.

Each team is averaging over 30 points per game and has come up big defensively. Geneva (9-1) has shut out two opponents and yielded seven points or less five times, while Hubbard (8-2) has three shutouts and has held opponents to six points or less six times.

The Greyhounds are led by several exceptional players, including a handful of Division I prospects, but the biggest concern for the Vikings will be figuring out how to limit four-year starting running back Robert Hughes (5-foot-11, 230 pounds).

Hughes, who has already received scholarship offers from Ohio State and Notre Dame, is a quick and powerful runner who has rushed for more than 4,000 yards during his high school career.

"I don't think we've seen a team on tape that brings this much speed and size to the table and creates mismatches on both sides," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "There's a very small margin of error with their talent. We're in the playoffs and it's great, but when you have six D1 kids it brings a little extra spice to the table."

Offensively, the Vikings will turn to the arm and leadership of quarterback Shaun Ratay (93-of-148, 1,447 yards, 25 TDs). He will try to avoid defensive tackle Brian Thomas (6-1, 280) and linebacker Justin Hickman (6-3, 215). He'll also attempt to keep the ball out of the hands of safety Darius Purcell (5-10, 220) in order to get it into the hands of his running back Chris Modjeski (1,164 rushing yards, 11 TDs) and wide receiver Mike Mayszak (29 catches, 642 yards, 11 TDs).

At St. Viator:⌘Batavia knows it has quite a task tonight when it faces St. Viator and reigning East Suburban Catholic Conference MVP, quarterback Dante Warren, in a Class 6A second round game.

The strong-armed Warren has completed 86-of-162 passes for 1,918 yards and 22

touchdowns. He's also rushed for just under 600 yards and 12 additional touchdowns.

St. Viator (9-1) runs primarily a one-back set with Warren in shotgun and tailback Pat McAvoy (1,347 rushing yards, 15 touchdowns).

"They're very much like Geneva. That's the comparison for us," Batavia coach Mike Gaspari said. "They run the ball and throw the ball very well. They're very solid offensively and they come off the ball very well."

Batavia (9-1) will look to its defense to disrupt Warren and the St. Viator offense.

"Their defense reminds me of (ESCC rival) Notre Dame because Notre Dame plays physical defense," St. Viator coach Chris Kirkpatrick said. "They're big and physical...and they're going to come and get you. If you hurt them they're going to blitz you."

Gaspari liked how the Bulldogs jumped on Crystal Lake Central last week and he believes the big game experience of his ball club helps in the win-or-go-home atmosphere of the playoffs.

"We won't be phased," he said. "There's a lot of big game experience and they're very excited about the opportunity more than anything else."

At North Chicago: Kaneland's defense came up big last week in shutting out Evergreen Park, but they'll face an even bigger test tonight in North Chicago.

"They're an explosive team centered around their quarterback and they have a lot of good athletes," Kaneland coach Joe Thorgesen said. "We're going to have to be at our very best defensively. Our kids have improved throughout the year and I think our conference has helped us in that regard."

North Chicago (7-3) began its season 1-3 with several players out with injuries. The Warhawks are pretty healthy now and that's one of the main reasons why they've been able to win six straight games.

It should be interesting to see how the Knights match up with the Warhawks, who have several outstanding skilled players, including Brandon Bone, quarterback D.J. Brown and running back Jimon Hill.

Defensively, lineman Darius Scott, all 6-foot-5 and 330 pounds of him, will try to get to quarterback Boone Thorgesen while middle linebacker Davelle Frierson and defensive back Dominique Young (2 interceptions last week) will look to slow the potent attack of the Knights and force mistakes.

On the flip side, the Warhawks will have to find a way to slow the fast-paced Kaneland offense. A wet field, wind and cold weather didn't slow it down last week.

So far this season, Thorgesen has over 3,700 yards of total offense and has been involved in 42 TDs.

"When we first researched this offense we knew that it was a great running offense because you spread people out," Joe Thorgesen said. "In a lot of offenses I think Boone would be a very good tailback. We don't consider ourselves a pass only offense."

At St. Charles North: The North Stars are the sole survivor of the Upstate Eight Conference, which sent six teams to the playoffs. Now they face No. 3 seed St. Rita at home.

Two weeks ago, North Stars coach Mark Gould was scratching his head because his players didn't display much energy in a loss to rival St. Charles East. Last week the energy returned in a big way as the kids turned it up a level in Moline.

What about St. Rita? After getting upended 19-17 by Fenwick in Week 3, St. Rita (9-1) has won seven consecutive games. More impressive is the fact that these wins have come against very good teams. They've beaten five playoff teams during their streak, including a win over 10-time state champion Mt. Carmel.

"After that loss early in the season it changed the attitude of the team and we practiced harder and stressed the need to get better each day," St. Rita coach Todd Kuska said. "We've been on a roll for awhile now, but we can't get complacent. The farther we get (into the playoffs) the more you have to keep reminding them that."

The Mustangs feature a potent offense that is averaging 31.4 points per game. Running backs Darieon Hood and Clifford Moore have combined to rush for 24 touchdowns and approximately 1,800 yards, while quarterback Peter Balsam has contributed over 500 rushing yards and thrown for nearly 1,000 more.

North Stars quarterback Jeff Pechan has completed 68-of-138 passes for 883 yards and 6 TDs while fullback Jack Brooks leads the team in rushes (95) and rushing yards (464). The team will need to do better than the 175 yards of total offense it had last week if it wants to win its second post-season game.

"We watched film and they're a good football team," Kuska said. "They do a lot of good things on offense. Defensively, from what I can see, they run a lot of multiple fronts and come after you. It's going to be a great ballgame."