

Breakdown of Batavia at Geneva

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OFFENSIVE BACKFIELD

Quarterback Alex Schroeder is the catalyst for Batavia. He leads the team in rushing yards with 597, has thrown for 1,818 yards and accounted for 21 touchdowns. Tharryn Wright has thrived since taking over as the starting running back Week 9 against these Vikings. He is one of four Bulldogs with more than 400 rushing yards and leads the team with 11 touchdowns. Brett Bullock is also in the mix and sophomore Brian Krolikowski, a starter early in the season, is 100 percent healthy. Senior fullback Brandon Holl can't be discounted. He leads the team with 35 receptions and has eight touchdowns.

Geneva coach Rob Wicinski says, "We go as Shaun goes." That's senior quarterback Shaun Ratay, who has had a remarkably efficient senior season. He has thrown for 1,844 yards and 26 touchdowns to go with only six interceptions, none of which have come in the playoffs. After struggling for a couple of weeks, senior running back Chris Modjeski got back on track against Oswego. He has run for 1,329 yards and 12 touchdowns this season. Fullback Pat Schiller has added 433 yards on the ground and 10 total touchdowns.

Edge: Even

RECEIVERS

Senior Alex Warner has been the top big-play threat. He has caught only 31 passes, but they have gone for 916 yards, an average of 29.5 per catch. He also has nine touchdowns. Tight end Jordan Church has emerged as a threat, catching 22 passes for 289 yards and three scores, also adding the decisive two-point conversion against Cary-Grove last week.

Junior Mike Mayszak has been Ratay's top deep threat, catching 36 passes for 777 yards and 12 touchdowns. Senior tight end Aaron O'Connell has really emerged, giving the 6-foot-7 Ratay a 6-foot-6 target to look for over the middle. He's caught a team-high 43 passes for 595 yards and four scores.

Edge: Even

OFFENSIVE LINE

Drew Anderson, a three-year starter, has been the stalwart. Center Jake Tews has been overlooked, but he has done a fine job replacing three-year starter Alec Verone in the middle. Junior Sean Ramsey is a two-year starter. Standout senior defensive end Mike Garrity has been playing both ways of late, taking some snaps at tackle.

Vikings right guard Ryan McMillan and right tackle Dustin Douell have solidified that side of the line. They are among four returning starters on a line that includes massive sophomore Taylor Reed, who is coming along. The line struggles against bigger defensive tackles, making the match-up with 310-pound Nick Nather worth watching.

Edge: Batavia

DEFENSIVE LINE

There's not much left to say about this superb unit for Batavia. Garrity is a University of Illinois recruit at one end and equally dangerous senior Kevin McFarland is starting to gain college attention on the other side. Zach Mager is the other tackle along with the massive Nather.

Maxx Parcell has been solid in the middle, taking on blockers to help Geneva's talented linebackers fly around and make big plays. Colton Potts may be coming off his best game of the season against Oswego. Wicinski is worried about how this group will be able to maneuver around Batavia's large offensive line.

Edge: Batavia

LINEBACKERS

The mainstay of a group that has been in flux since the Week 5 loss to Kaneland has been senior middle linebacker Nick Bex. In order to make room for Brandon Holl at linebacker, Wright has switched to safety to help bolster that unit. Holl and his junior brother,

Shane Holl, have made some big plays. Andrew Sauer has been consistent on the outside, as well.

The best unit Geneva has resides here. Josh Brennan is the team's leading tackler and hardest hitter. Schiller is the fastest linebacker Geneva has and senior Alex Springhorn and sophomore Brennan Quinn, the team's second-leading tackler, handle the inside. Just an all-around strong group.

Edge: Geneva

DEFENSIVE BACKFIELD

This was a unit that struggled after getting lit up by Kaneland in the Bulldogs' only loss. Since then, Wright has shifted to safety and senior Dan Schmitt moved from wide receiver to cornerback to give the Bulldogs some help back there. Plus, the younger players in the unit are now in their 13th varsity game, giving them more than enough experience.

Brendan Cagney and Brian Maurovich, who may be the best punter and kicker in the area, have solidified this unit for Geneva. Cagney had troubles with Warner in Week 9, so that will need to be monitored. Maurovich's punting abilities have allowed Wicinski to be more conservative when need be to work the field position game.

Edge: Geneva

COACHING

This is Mike Gaspari's 22nd season at Batavia, and my how far the Bulldogs have come. His Bulldogs were 0-9 his first season, but now he has them in the state semifinals for the first time in school history. The offensive mastermind has succeeded by building loyalty and getting his players and community to believe in his program.

Wicinski came on at Geneva during dark times as well, also going 0-9 in his first season. But four years ago he posted a 5-4 record. That was followed by a magical run to the semifinals in 2004, a second-round appearance last year and the sixth semifinal appearance in school history this year.

Edge: Even

About Batavia: The Bulldogs have won seven straight games since their only loss of the season Week 5 to Kaneland, which is still alive in the Class 5A semifinals. That ramped up plans by Gaspari to make some changes to the team. Now, seven weeks later, the changes have had a chance to take effect, and the team is playing better than ever. Gaspari shrewdly played multiple players early in the season and still won games, allowing him to have his best players (such as Garrity, Holl and Wright) play both ways down the stretch.

About Geneva: The Vikings are back at home for a semifinal game for the second time in three seasons. Two years ago, after a miracle win at Freeport, the Vikings came home and got dominated by Bloomington. Wicinski admits that at the time Geneva was kind of just happy to be there, and unable to prepare for Bloomington after such an emotional game. This season is different. The mood after the Oswego game was more business-like than in 2004, a direct correlation to many of this season's key seniors being along for the playoff ride in 2004.

FINAL SCORE: Batavia 24, Geneva 22.

Compiled by Paul Johnson.

COMMENTS

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