

Late TD carries Geneva

OSWEGO – The season hanging in the balance, there was little doubt that Geneva's football team was going to look for 6-foot-6 tight end Aaron O'Connell on Saturday.

With Geneva down four points, O'Connell caught a 21-yard pass on a fourth-and-8 play from quarterback Shaun Ratay to keep the season alive in the final 2 minutes of the Vikings' Class 6A quarterfinal game against Oswego.

Two plays later, Chris Modjeski punched it in from 1 yard out to give the Vikings a thrilling 17-14 win against the Panthers.

"You've just got to stay focused," Ratay said. "We knew it wasn't going to end right there. We knew we had more fight in us, and we just got it done."

The win sets up a game the likes of which central Kane County has never seen – Batavia/Geneva II next weekend at Geneva – with a trip to the state championship game at stake. Batavia beat the Vikings, 24-6, in the final week of the regular season.

"It's like a second chance for us," O'Connell said. "We get home-field [advantage] again. It's like a re-do. We're just amazed."

Geneva (11-1) held a 10-7 lead late into the fourth quarter before Oswego (10-2) seized the lead. On third-and-1, fullback Matt Casula took a draw play 31 yards for a score to give the Panthers a 14-10 lead with 3:12 left.

"They creased us," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "We fired some linebackers to the outside and they caught us. [Oswego coach Karl Hoinkes] is not a hall-of-fame coach for nothing."

Geneva, which had struggled most of the night offensively, suddenly needed a big drive to save its season. The calm demeanor of Ratay helped that happen.

"I thought Shaun kept his composure there," Wicinski said. "We looked like we had some receivers open throughout the day, and we just weren't quite clicking all the way. He even said that coming into the last drive, 'It's time for me to start hitting some receivers.' It wasn't out of panic. It was matter-of-fact."

Modjeski got things going with a 12-yard gain. Ratay then hit junior Mike Mayszak on a 21-yarder to get the Vikings into Oswego territory. But two incompletions and a short gain from Pat Schiller had the Vikings staring at fourth down.

That's when Ratay drilled a pass over the middle that hit O'Connell between the 8 and the 1 to set up a dramatic finish.

"We switched up the route a little bit, offensive line gave him great time, and he put it right there," O'Connell said. "Right on the numbers. I just had to make sure I caught it."

The Vikings called the same play on the next snap, but Oswego blitzed. Ratay tucked it in and got forced out of bounds at the 1, following a 12-yard gain. That set up Modjeski's second 1-yard touchdown of the game to win it.

Modjeski had struggled the past three weeks, but broke out at the right time, gaining 102 yards on 18 carries.

"We really worked our running game hard the last two weeks," Wicinski said. "We had to tweak some things, some minor adjustments. It was good to see Mojo back a little bit."

Oswego did get the ball back, but Geneva senior Josh Brennan sacked Panthers quarterback Chris Schulz on fourth

down to ice the win.

"It just felt so great," Brennan said. "The only reason I got there is because the defensive backs covered them."

The Vikings took a 3-0 lead on Brian Maurovich's 24-yard field goal on the first play of the second quarter. Oswego answered with an 18-play, 82-yard drive that was capped by Sean Dietz's 4-yard touchdown run to make it 7-3 at the half. The drive took 8:12.

After running just 16 offensive plays in the first half, Geneva went 11 plays on the first drive of the second half to take a 10-7 lead. Modjeski ran the ball 40 yards on the final five plays of the drive, capping it with a 1-yard TD.

The focus now shifts to Batavia, but the team would rather spend the next day basking in this win before digging in for next week's rumble.

"Let me get my 24 hours, and then I'll talk to you," Modjeski joked. "It's going to be a great game. State semifinals, rivalry week, winner goes to the big dance. It's great."

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