

Out for revenge

GENEVA – This is the day that Geneva senior quarterback Shaun Ratay has been waiting for since the end of last season.

Ratay lost his first-ever varsity start in Morris in Week 1 last year, 41-19. Then he and the Vikings had their season end to the Redskins, again in Morris, in the second round of the Class 6A playoffs, 32-6.

Tonight, the Redskins arrive in Geneva for a season-opener at Burgess Field for the first time since 1993 for the 7:30 p.m. kickoff. The Redskins will face a Vikings team that has not forgotten last season's disappointment.

"Everybody's real excited about the game because we lost to them twice last year, and those were two games that we definitely felt like we had," Ratay said. "We were totally in those games and we made some mistakes. You can't make mistakes against a team like that. They'll pound you."

Ratay is grateful that his varsity career as a starter, after spending his sophomore season on varsity as Alex Pokorny's backup, came against the eventual state champions last year.

"That's the way I liked it," Ratay said. "That was my first game, and that became my expectation, to face teams like that. Everything else was easy after that."

Geneva coach Rob Wicinski has seen first-hand the growth in maturity of his 6-foot-7 signal caller since he ran onto that field in Morris last August.

"The year has made a huge difference," Wicinski said. "What makes Shaun special is that he's just a student of the game. It's rare that he makes the same mistake again. Now with a full year under his belt, plus a couple playoff games, there's not going to be situations that are going to hurt him."

Ratay can tell the difference in his demeanor just in preseason drills. Starting 11 varsity games under center and playing a full season of varsity basketball can do that for a kid.

"I can definitely tell that I'm more relaxed," Ratay said. "I still get nervous before the game, but once I set foot on the field, it all goes away. I understand what coach is trying to do a lot more, so that definitely helps with the audibles and things like that."

Wicinski is banking that Ratay's experience, and the four starters returning on the offensive line, will help Geneva's young skill players along.

Juniors Joe Augustine, Michael Faught and Michael Mayszak have impressed in preseason practices at receiver. A pair of seniors, Chris Modjeski and Pat Schiller, will see time at tailback. Neither played much there last year with Nick Herrera starring at the position.

"[Ratay's experience] will carry us through some times where the other players have not been in tough situations," Wicinski said. "He'll be able to step up and carry those guys through those situations."

By PAUL JOHNSON

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