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Rematch made in heaven

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Trip to Champaign on the line when Vikings, Bulldogs meet again Saturday

Geneva and Batavia have never played each other when the game didn't carry added weight.

The natural rivalry alone brings fans -- and emotions -- out in droves, creating a playoff atmosphere at least once every regular season.

Much was on the line when the neighboring schools met in the regular-season final. The Vikings were fighting for a perfect 9-0 season, while the Bulldogs needed a win to force a share of the Western Sun Conference title with Geneva and Kaneland.

Now, in an unprecedented second meeting, the playoff atmosphere will be real when No. 3 Geneva once again hosts No. 5 Batavia in the Class 6A semifinals at 6 p.m. Saturday at Burgess Field.

"I heard people already comment that its the biggest sporting event in the history of Kane County," said Mike Gaspari, now in his 22nd year as Batavia's head coach. "I don't know whether that's true or not, but I know that it's a fantastic opportunity for all those involved."

It's also a fantastic chance for the Vikings (11-1) to avenge their 24-6 loss to Batavia (11-1) back on Oct. 20.

"Last time I think they just out-played us," said Geneva defensive end Karl Sandman. "They stepped up a lot more than we did. Now we're wanting to take it to them."

When the Bulldogs spoiled the Vikings' perfect season -- upsetting many predictions -- a month ago, both teams still had the postseason to look forward to. This time around, not only is the season on the line, but a trip to the state championship game lies in the balance.

"When we step out onto the field, it's going to be crazy," said Batavia senior fullback/linebacker Brandon Holl. "We're going to walk on like we did in Week 9, with a chip on our shoulders, with a point to prove."

Geneva hasn't played for a state title since 1975, when it was in Class 3A, but is in the semifinals for the second time in three seasons. Batavia has never advanced this deep into the postseason.

"It's a great, great opportunity for our kids," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said, "to bring a successful end to the season."

Gaspari said beating the Vikings already once this season will have little impact on Saturday's game.

"We have to have the mindset of starting over," he said. "It's a one-game season. The season's over for the loser. If anything I think it's more incentive for (Geneva). They lost the first round. It's a second chance for them."

Batavia used a well-balanced attack in Week 9, that saw quarterback Alex Schroeder throw for 148 yards, including an 83-yard scoring strike to Alex Warner. Meanwhile, Tharryn Wright busted out of his shell with a 113-yard rushing performance.

On the other hand, the Vikings struggled to figure out Batavia's staunch defense, managing just 112 total yards. Most of the yardage came via quarterback Shaun Ratay's 8-of-16 passing for 80 yards, including 41 yards and a touchdown completion to Mike Mayszak.

Since then, the Vikings have opened a new winning streak with three playoff victories, beating Grant 42-14, Hubbard 21-13 and upsetting No. 2 Oswego 17-14 last Saturday.

"You don't get a chance like this," Wicinski said. "We walked off the field thinking these seniors would never get a chance to play Batavia again. This is electric for us."

Geneva running back Chris Modjeski will look for a carryover from last week when he rushed for 108 yards and two touchdowns. Ratay effectively opened the ground game on 11-of-24 passing for 126 yards.

The Bulldogs own a seven-game win streak since losing their only game of the season to Class 5A semifinalist Kaneland, in Week 5. They defeated Crystal Lake Central 35-12 and upset No. 4 St. Viator in the second round.

In an even bigger upset last Saturday, the Bulldogs used late-game heroics for the second straight week to beat No. 1 Cary-Grove 15-14.

And the same balanced attack that worked against the Vikings last time was in effect last weekend, as Batavia piled up 266 yards, including 138 on Schroeder's 15-of-22 passing.