

Unfamiliar position

GENEVA – The last time Geneva's football team reached the state quarterfinals in 2004, the Vikings learned how to play from behind.

Week in and week out, the Vikings were digging themselves holes only to dig themselves out and get the win.

This season, things have been different in Geneva. The Vikings have outscored teams by 24 points per game.

But in Saturday's 21-13 win against Hubbard in the second round of the IHSA Class 6A playoffs, Geneva had to revert back to 2004 form.

The Vikings trailed until posting a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns to improve to 10-1 and advance to the quarterfinals.

"Two years ago we were never ahead in the game," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "Every game we came from behind. We're kind of used to that as a staff. The players are a different story. I just reassured them that the things were there. We just needed to execute."

Geneva senior Alex Springhorn sacked Hubbard quarterback Sean Catthouse on a fourth-and-6 play late in the third quarter to get the Vikings the ball, trailing by six points. Seven plays later, Geneva found itself ahead, 14-13.

Senior quarterback Shaun Ratay and senior receiver Mike Mayszak worked the hitch-and-go to perfection, with Ratay finding Mayszak in the end zone from 23 yards out to give Geneva the lead with 11:22 remaining in the game.

The ball was underthrown, but Mayszak made a shoestring grab at the goal line for the eventual game-winning touchdown.

"We had been running that hitch and we both thought we could go to the outside with it," Ratay said. "So we ran a hitch-and-go and he had him beat and I threw it up there, but I should have thrown it a little further. I was aiming for the corner of the end zone and it came up a little bit short. He made a great catch."

After the teams exchanged non-scoring drives, Hubbard (9-2) found itself pinned at its own 8-yard line after another solid punt from Geneva's Brian Maurovich. With the drive seemingly stalled on the 15, the Greyhounds went for it on fourth down instead of punting with 6:20 on the clock. Robert Hughes was stuffed and Geneva took advantage three plays later.

Ratay sprinted to the outside on a broken play and scored from 12 yards out to take a 21-13 lead.

"Coach says all you have to do is win by one," Ratay said. "It turns out we didn't need that [touchdown], but it's nice to be able to say that the worst we can do is a tie if they score. It gave us momentum. Everyone exploded after that."

Geneva's first touchdown was a 4-yard pass from Ratay to Pat Schiller on a fourth-down play in the first quarter, opening a 7-0 lead.

Hughes was a thorn in Geneva's side all game. He scored on an 11-yard touchdown run in the first quarter and hit teammate Darius Purcell from 25 yards out for Hubbard's other score on a halfback option play. He ran for a game-high 111 yards on 23 carries.

"I think he might be the toughest running back I've ever played," Springhorn said. "He hits hard, he runs hard, he's a very physical runner. He's a very good back."

Geneva's celebration was tempered, however, after Hubbard running back Triviyon Seay was taken to the hospital on the stretcher. After getting tackled on a kickoff return early in the fourth quarter, following Geneva's last score, there was a 20-minute delay as Seay was taken off the field.

Next up for Geneva will be a trip to former conference foe Oswego in the quarterfinals. The Panthers topped Prairie Ridge, 56-42, on Saturday.

"This whole thing is just so much fun," Ratay said. "There's nothing better than this. Like coach says, there's no place better than this. The alternative is sitting at home on the couch."

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