

Vikings right the ship in opener

Geneva 42, Grant 14

Why the Vikings won: Shaun Ratay passed for 220 yards on 7-for-11 passing to lead the Vikings to the second round of the Class 6A state playoffs.

Turning point: Ratay pitched the ball to running back Chris Modjeski and streaked down the left side of the field. Modjeski hit the quarterback with a 13-yard touchdown pass off the halfback option, and the Vikings took a 21-0 lead early in the second quarter.

Outstanding player of the game: In addition to Ratay's 220 passing yards, he threw touchdown passes of 11, 5 and 11 yards, and caught one from Modjeski.

By MAUREEN LYNCH

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GENEVA – Looming behind the west upright at Burgess Field, a blue, black and white painted wooden sword with "momentum" scrawled down to the tip stands as a reminder of the key element to victory in the postseason.

At first, the sword, a trademark at Geneva's Burgess Field, was much smaller. Now that it's playoff time, coach Rob Wicinski said a friend donated a much larger one, nearly triple the size of its predecessor and lodged firmly in the soft grass behind the post.

The Vikings can read the words on the sword from anywhere on the field. If it was the inspiration behind their 42-14 trouncing of Grant on Friday in the first round of the IHSA Class 6A playoffs, Wicinski is even more grateful.

Brushing aside the sour taste of last week's loss to Batavia, Geneva advances to play either Fenwick or Hubbard in the second round next week.

"Yeah, he thought we needed a bigger one, and so there it is," Wicinski said of his gift. "It's a constant reminder to us of what we need to do."

Geneva wasted no time doing exactly what it needed to get out of the first round. The Vikings held the Bulldogs (5-5) scoreless for the first three quarters and posted all 42 of their points to induce a running clock shortly after halftime.

The Vikings started with a 52-yard drive in which quarterback Shaun Ratay passed for 40 of his 220 yards. Chris Modjeski ran in a 2-yard touchdown with 8 minutes remaining in the first quarter for a 7-0 lead.

Geneva converted on its next drive, too. Ratay found Michael Mayszak for a 32-yard touchdown and a 14-0 lead.

"I think they came out with more focus than they had for the last three or four games," Wicinski said. "Let's hope they keep perspective on things and keep firing."

The Vikings (9-1) decided to get a little creative with their attack.

Sensing they could pull off a play Geneva hadn't in the regular season, Ratay and Modjeski decided to roll the dice. On a halfback option, Ratay pitched the ball to Modjeski, diverting Grant's defensive attention. Ratay split down the left side of the field and Modjeski hit him with a 13-yard pass for a 21-0 lead.

"First time we did it all year," Ratay said. "I knew from another play on the drive before it that once I pitched off the ball the defense wasn't paying attention to me anymore. I knew we could pull it off."

Modjeski then ran in a 1-yard score and, on the next drive, Geneva solidified its win.

Ratay hit Mayszak with a 65-yard pass to put the Vikings on Grant's 5-yard line with 4 seconds remaining in the first half. Ratay hit tight end Aaron O'Connell with a 5-yard pass to take a 35-0 halftime lead.

Ratay's 11-yard pass to Andrew Shad started Geneva's first drive of the third quarter for the running clock and the final score.

"This is really special, and we want to keep it going for as long as we can," Ratay said.