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Worth the hype

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By **MIKE KNAPP** Staff writer

GENEVA -- Too many times, big games don't live up to their hype.

Friday's clash between Geneva and Kaneland wasn't one of them.

No, it was a game that played out as advertised, as two state powers in their respective classes slugged it out in front of a full house at Burgess Field. The game was up for grabs until Geneva defensive back Michael Mayszak intercepted a Boone Thorgesen pass with 79 seconds left to seal a 24-21 Viking win.

"Whether we won or lost, it was a great game to be a part of," said Geneva coach Rob Wicinski. "I'm glad it turned out the way it did, but I'm really pleased with the way the team responded."

"That's a good team, and we knew we would have to be there until the fourth quarter," said Geneva quarterback Shaun Ratay, who was visibly emotional after the game. "It was just a great football game."

Geneva seemingly sat in the driver's seat early on in the fourth quarter, when Brian Maurovich nailed a 25-yard field goal with 9:06 to go in the game to give the Vikings a 24-7 lead.

Led by two touchdowns by running back Christopher Modjeski (31 carries, 165 yards) and a bend-but-don't-break defense that turned away the Knights deep in their own territory twice, the Vikings seemingly had control of the game.

But as long as Thorgesen is pitching the football in Kaneland's spread offense, no lead is safe. The Kaneland senior, who finished the night with 382 yards passing and another 56 on the ground, got the Knights going in the fourth quarter when he hit Casey Crosby (eight catches, 187 yards) from 4 yards out on a fourth-and-goal play with 7:06 to go in the game to cut the lead to 24-14.

"(Crosby) is a tremendous athlete, and he is a reason why we are where we are," said Kaneland coach Joe Thorgesen. "He and Boone are in my opinion two All-State players, and it's fun to watch them."

After Adam Blazek recovered the onside kick, Thorgesen found Jamie Snyder (two catches, 52 yards) behind the Geneva secondary for a 49-yard touchdown strike just 13 seconds later to cut the lead to three points.

"If you don't hug 'mo' and let it get loose ... Kaneland has always been fighting like that, they are tough kids and have a lot of pride," Wicinski said. "Just to give them that sliver, that's all they needed."

The quick offensive outburst seemed to also energize the Kaneland defense, as the Knights held to Geneva to just 20 total yards in the game's final seven minutes. Geneva, which had methodically ground out close to 290 yards through the first 3½ quarters, tried to run out the clock but were forced to give up the ball when they punted it away with 1:54.

Taking over at their own 30, Thorgesen misfired on his first two passes before connecting with Crosby on a 37-yard pass to the Geneva 33. But his next pass was tipped at the line by linebacker Brennan Quinn, and Mayszak hauled in the deflection for his second pick of the night to ice the game and at least a share of the Western Sun conference title for the Vikings.

"The ball's in the air, and you just want to go up and get it," Mayszak said. "Brennan Quinn got a piece of the ball, and it fluttered up and into my hands."

"We got a shot at the end, and we didn't give up," Thorgesen said. "That's all I can ask of these kids."

For both teams, it was a chance to see where they stood against elite competition with the playoffs just two weeks away. Both Kaneland, ranked seventh in Class 5A, and Geneva, third in 6A, plan on playing into Week

10 and beyond.

For Geneva, the playoffs in a way started Friday, as it hosts rival Batavia next week before heading into the postseason.

"I thought it was a playoff-type atmosphere," Wicinski said. "We have to get that kind of emotion, and that's what teams do in a playoff run. We are in the hunt now."

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