



## Geneva hoping to relive the past

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Geneva hopes tonight turns out just like it did 22 years ago.

The year was 1985 and it was Week 9 of the high school football season.

On the Batavia sideline was a first-year coach who was still wet behind the ears and in search of his first victory at the school. Today, Mike Gaspari has led the Bulldogs to more than 125 victories.

On the Geneva sideline was legendary coach Jerry Auchstetter, in his 19th year of coaching the Vikings. The Vikings were pursuing their ninth consecutive win, their 19th straight over the Bulldogs and attempting to complete an undefeated regular season.

As for current Vikings coach Rob Wicinski, he wasn't coaching; he was playing. Wicinski was finishing his career at Northern Illinois University, playing outside linebacker for the Huskies.

And for the entire player rosters for both sides tonight? They were still a few years away of blessing their parents with their births.

Tonight, the Vikings will be striving for their first perfect regular season since the one that was wrapped up on an October evening in 1985 when the Vikings routed the Bulldogs 48-0.

Geneva (8-0, 6-0) has already clinched the Western Sun Conference championship and a playoff berth, but would love to finish undefeated, and in the process defeat a Batavia team which beat them twice a year ago and has won 11 of the previous 12 meetings.

Last year, Geneva was just as close to a perfect regular season before the Bulldogs took a bite out of the Vikings in Week 9 with a 24-6 victory.

"If you look at the game it's not going to affect our playoff seeding basically, it's not going to affect conference, it's not going to affect that we'll be out of the playoffs," Wicinski said. "When you look at it like that, it's for pride and we're looking forward to it. I think we're just entranced with (Batavia) and the possibility of beating them."

Batavia (5-3, 4-2) feels pretty safe that it will earn a bid into the playoffs regardless of tonight's outcome, but the Bulldogs want to head into the postseason on a high especially if they could ruin the Vikings' bid for perfection.

"Given the past history of the playoff format it appears we have enough points so it would be a pretty big shock (to not get in), but stranger things have happened," Gaspari said. "We want to continue a winning streak and carry some momentum into the playoffs."

The Bulldogs have won three consecutive games averaging 46 points a game. What's allowed their offense to click has been manifold. It's been a combination of underclassmen gaining experience week-to-week and a diverse attack utilizing several potent weapons.

"I think Gaspari's calling the game for the quarterback instead of calling it for last year's team and I think that

takes awhile," Wicinski said. "He's doing a nice job of getting (quarterback Jordan) Coffey situated early, a lot of short passes and using the nice weapons in the backfield while not throwing the ball as deep as he used to.

"We're going to try to force him to and we're preparing our DBs for that, but their running game has also really come along and they've figured out a nice rotation."

Coffey has completed 81 of 175 passes for 1,334 yards and 13 touchdowns. The passing game needs balance though and having a speedster like J.R. Kabba (70 carries, 638 yards, 6 TDs) and bruising fullback like Brian Krolkowski (68 carries, 486 yards, 10 TDs) has proven effective.

Coffey has an overflowing handful of receiving targets in his arsenal with Ian Wallis (23 catches, 312 yards, 5 TDs), Ryan Webb (19 catches, 378 yards, 2 TDs), Erich Zeddies (14 catches, 312 yards, 4 TDs) as well as Kabba and tight end Jordan Church among others.

"If you look at the stats, most of the guys scoring points are juniors," Gaspari said. "They're just getting confident at the varsity level and learning to keep the confidence level high even when losing games."

Led by middle linebacker Brennan Quinn's 82 tackles, the Vikings will look to keep the Bulldogs from moving the ball downfield and then getting it into the hands of Geneva quarterback Mike Mayszak and running back Michael Ratay.

"I think they're very comparable to their recent teams and they might be a little better on the defensive side of the ball and I thought they were outstanding last year," Gaspari said. "They're a very solid team."

There are many reasons why Geneva is undefeated but some of the keys have been getting good field position and protecting the ball. Mayszak has only thrown 2 interceptions while the Geneva defense has 21 takeaways. That's given the Vikings plenty of opportunities to score and a shorter field. Can they continue that trend tonight?

"That's been critical to our success. Protecting the ball and working half a field," Wicinski said. "We don't have to put 10- to 12-play drives together to put points on the board. Out of all the stats we go through the No. 1 stat is giving the ball away and it makes a huge difference."

Ratay is also making a huge difference. He single-handedly ended Kaneland's playoffs hopes last Friday in scoring 6 touchdowns and now has 1,022 rushing yards and 18 touchdowns. Containing him will be a major task for the Bulldogs.

Mayszak has been efficient; completing 63 of 138 passes for 1,165 yards and 14 touchdowns. His favorite targets have been Joe Augustine (30 catches, 605 yards, 7 TDs) and Michael Faught (15 catches, 219 yards, 2 TDs) but don't be surprised if Ratay and tight end Colin McCaffrey aren't utilized more this evening.

"We're just going to go out there and keep doing our thing," Mayszak said. "I need to keep the turnovers down and we need to stick to the basics and not get caught up in the hype. If we do that we'll do pretty well."

### **Odds and ends**

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Here's a few tidbits about the 90th Batavia-Geneva game, which will kick off at 7:30 p.m. tonight.

**Blast from past:** The 1985 Geneva team was led by running back Derek Swanson who rushed for a school-record 1,314 yards and 20 touchdowns. Similarly, with 1,022 yards and 18 rushing touchdowns, Ratay is pacing the Vikings.

"He's a meaty kid, a stronger runner," Swanson said. "I relied on speed and my linemen because we were primarily an option and passing team because of our speed. We had speed throughout the specialty places and we used those players accordingly."

Swanson, who was named Little Seven Conference MVP in 1985, continues to follow the Vikings this year

and even assisted Wicinski for a few years when he first took over the Vikings program. On behalf of the rest of his 1985 teammates he's hoping that this year's group can equal his team's undefeated regular season.

"I have to say Geneva is going to win this year," he said. "They know what it felt like last year and they don't want that feeling again. It's going to be a tough, hard game and both will bring their 'A' game. I respect both team's coaches and wish the best, but I believe in blue and white."

**Playing both ways:** Sean Ramsey and Jordan Church haven't had much time for breathers as the two have been playing considerably on both sides of the ball for the Bulldogs.

"It has made a huge difference on the defensive front," Gaspari said. "We were struggling there so having those two guys step in with more size and athleticism then we had at beginning of the year has been huge."

**Deja vu:** Batavia assistant coach Matt Holm was a junior and the lone all-Little Seven Conference Batavia player on the 1985 team that lost 48-0. He also played on the 1986 team that snapped the 19-game losing streak to the Vikings with a 14-6 win.

**High School GameNight:** ESPN AM1000 is featuring tonight's Geneva-Batavia game during its "High School GameNight." Tune in to AM-1000 from 10 p.m. until 11 p.m., for a recap of the game and interviews with coaches and players.

-- Compiled by Chris Walker