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Geneva's defensive front a winning formula

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GENEVA – When Geneva sophomore defensive tackle Frank Boenzi was called up from the sophomore team to varsity for the playoffs last year, junior teammate Cory Hofstetter termed him as “goofy.”

“Immaturity, I guess, being a freshman,” Boenzi said. “The guys have prepared me this year.”

Now a sophomore, Boenzi has become the statistical leader of a defensive line that has been one of the anchors this season for the 9-0 Vikings, who open the IHSA Class 7A state playoffs Friday against visiting Bradley-Bourbonnais.

The defensive line also features a pair of two-year starters at defensive end in senior Matt Caliendo and Hofstetter.

Boenzi has 46 tackles to lead the line and has a team-high four sacks.

“We had to get used to him,” Hofstetter said. “We kind of showed him the ropes a little bit and he’s actually stepping up and being a good leader this year, even with the older guys.”

As the season has worn on, the 6-foot-3, 280-pound Boenzi has picked up on the nuances of the varsity game to go with his natural ability, emerging as a force at a position not typically occupied by a sophomore.

“I think his potential is unlimited,” Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. “He’s got tremendous strength and good quickness off the ball. Now he needs seasoning. Sometimes he gets upfield too much. But when he does get in there, he can blow up a play all by himself.”

Boenzi’s quick acclimation to the varsity game, coupled with the tandem of senior Jono Craig (5-11, 275) and junior Andrew Clausen (6-5, 265) rotating at the other interior slot, have helped Hofstetter and Caliendo do their thing. Clausen has 42 tackles in a reserve role.

A team captain, Caliendo has 35 tackles and a sack and is the veteran leader of a fairly young group. Craig and Boenzi are first-year starters and Clausen is on varsity for the first time.

“He knows the game,” defensive line coach Dave Carli said. “He knows how I do things and how I do my drills. Caliendo leads the way for the younger players and he sets the tone for our practices. We make eye contact, and he knows what I’m thinking. He’s my mouthpiece on the field.”

Hofstetter is listed at 6-4 and 210 pounds, but still is growing into what figures to be an imposing frame by next season. An all-conference baseball player last year, Hofstetter is one of the best athletes on the defense. And his massive wingspan has led to a large number of pass deflections, 30 tackles and two sacks.

“Cory’s just an athlete,” Carli said. “He’s really shined this year. The last couple of games, we’ve been trying to get him to the next level, move him up a notch. It was about finishing plays by himself and making tackles, which he’s done. He’s got speed and ability and good knowledge on the field.”



Geneva’s young and dominant defensive line includes sophomore Frank Boenzi (left) and junior Cory Hofstetter. Boenzi leads the line with 46 tackles and leads the Vikings with four sacks. (H. Rick Bamman photo)

The group will face a challenge against Bradley-Bourbonnais. The Boilermakers come from the tough Southwest Suburban Red, which consists of mostly Class 8A schools. Four of the five teams in the conference reached the playoffs.

But they run a spread offense, something the Vikings have seen quite a bit. Of the Vikings' nine opponents, five have run a similar offense. Boilermakers quarterback Travis Moliga rushes out of the formation more than he passes, similar to Sycamore's style. The team has gained nearly twice as many yards (1,434) on the ground as through passing (777).

"We've seen it all year," Caliendo said of the spread. "We just have to work on our base techniques and fire off the ball."

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