



Mayszak, Henningson both doing fine after switch

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The broad definition of the word versatility is "the ability to do many things well."

Simply put, it may be the single-most wanted trait of an athlete by a high school, collegiate or professional coach.

It's the basketball player blessed with the ability to knock down 3-point attempts while also being able to handle the ball adeptly at the point guard position.

It's the baseball player who can play all three outfield positions while also displaying the skills needed to take over as a late-inning defensive replacement in the infield -- or the pitcher who can play more than one position.

Without being versatile, there's very little chance that Rick Ankiel currently would be the starting right fielder for the St. Louis Cardinals.

Ankiel, who originally made it to the big leagues as a highly touted, hard-throwing left-handed pitcher and appeared in postseason play in 2000 until he lost the ability to throw strikes, was versatile enough to try and make it back to the majors as an outfielder.

Seven years ago, he was toeing the rubber while pitching in the National League Divisional Playoffs.

Two years ago, he was playing left field at Elfstrom Stadium as a member of the Swing of the Quad Cities -- the Cardinals' Class A affiliate.

It's the football player who can start at wide receiver one year, and then take over as the team's starting quarterback the next season.

If you need further proof, just ask Geneva's Mike Mayszak or Kaneland's Jody Henningson.

Last fall, Mayszak was one of the leading receivers and a favorite target of then-senior starting quarterback Shaun Ratay during the Vikings' postseason run that included a berth in the Class 6A state semifinals.

Meanwhile, Henningson combined with Casey Crosby to form a dynamic receiving duo for all-state quarterback Boone Thorgesen (now at Northern Illinois) during the Knights' Class 5A state semifinal run.

Now, they're on the other end of those passes -- and loving every minute of it.

"I'm having a lot of fun," said Mayszak, who has tossed 5 touchdown passes while helping lead Geneva to a 3-0 start and No. 7 state 7A ranking.

"Obviously, you get more touches at quarterback and the opportunity to make more plays."

"Playing quarterback is a lot more fun," said Henningson. "You're more into the game on every play. And I've been pretty busy."

That would be an understatement of sorts considering the fact that the senior signal-caller has completed

69-of-121 of his passes for 891 yards and 8 touchdowns -- in just 3 weeks.

It should come as little surprise that Mayszak and Henningson made the switch from pass catcher to pass thrower.

"Last year, I figured that I'd be a quarterback this season," said Mayszak, who was the Vikings' starting quarterback on the sophomore team two years ago before suffering a broken collarbone late in the season.

"I pretty much knew that I'd be the starting quarterback (this year) when I was Boone's backup last year," said Henningson.

While both Mayszak and Henningson have enjoyed a relatively smooth transition period, the road to becoming a starting varsity quarterback has included a few speed bumps along the way.

"The varsity game is a lot quicker," said Mayszak. "You don't get a second to think about it when you're back there."

"The most difficult thing for me has been learning to read coverages," added Henningson. "And there's a lot more pressure."

Geneva coach Rob Wicinski admittedly "thought hard and long" during the off-season before handing the quarterbacking reins to Mayszak.

"This is the first time I've had a player who was a true wideout make the move to quarterback," said Wicinski. "The big advantage is that he already has experience under the lights having played receiver last year. He knows the intensity of the game.

"The other advantage is that he knows what we're trying to do on offense."

Taking advice from successful former high school quarterbacks like Ratay and Thorgesen hasn't hurt either.

"Boone helped me out with (defensive) reads last year when I was his backup," said Henningson.

"Shaun was at our first two games this season and gave me a bunch of pointers," added Mayszak, whose goal is to go the entire season without throwing an interception.

With two-thirds of the regular season remaining, one thing is certain -- Mayszak and Henningson are quick learners...and versatile.