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Sack happy

Vikings meet at the QB, reach 7A quarters

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Meet you at the quarterback.

Geneva defensive line mates Frank Boenzi and Andrew Clausen like to say that to one another, and about halfway through the second quarter in the Vikings' 35-14 victory over St. Charles East in the second round of the Class 7A playoffs Friday night, the duo did meet while taking Sam Gunther to the turf.

The sack, the first of seven by the Vikings, began the turn of the tide.

At that point, the Saints held a 14-7 advantage and had moved the ball to the Vikings' 33. Boenzi and Clausen's sack pushed the Saints back to the Geneva 48 and a play later, the Saints had to punt.

One minute and five seconds after that, the game was tied 14-14 on a 64-yard touchdown by wide receiver Joe Augustine.

"Me and Frank, we just made that play," said Clausen, a smile on his face as steam swirled off his shaved head. "And me and him just kept on going with that and it just helped our whole team out when we got jacked up about it. It was great. It's the best feeling of my life."

Earlier in the week, Geneva head coach Rob Wicinski forecasted what was happening late in the first half: "I really believe it's going to be a day of momentum. I think once you get the momentum, boy, it's going to be hard to stop the other team."

To ensure that Geneva maintained that momentum, Vikings defensive coordinator Frank Martin sent his Blue Wave after Gunther, pressuring the senior quarterback with line stunts and blitzes.

On the Saints' next possession following Augustine's touchdown, Boenzi tackled Wes Allen for a loss on first down and then bull-rushed guard Alex Putz right into Gunther, wrapping one hand around Gunther's helmet while squashing the two Saints together for another sack. St. Charles East punted again, giving the ball back to the offense at the Saints' 42. Seven plays later, running back Mike Ratay bulled into the end zone for a 21-14 halftime lead.

"They gave us great field position all night," said Ratay, who rushed for three scores. "It was a huge part of the game right there."

Unfortunately for Gunther and St. Charles East, Geneva's Blue Wave wouldn't crest until late in the fourth quarter, preventing any sort of comeback.

After receiving the ball to start the second half, the Saints began to move toward a tying score. But on the drive's sixth play, defensive end Matt Caliendo stopped Allen for no gain. On second down, Caliendo sacked Gunther to force a 3rd-and-18. Two plays later, Gunther fumbled a snap and Clausen covered him up to give the ball back to the offense at the Geneva 24.

"They're good. They got pressure on us with the front four, which they needed to do," Gunther said. "It was part of their game plan, to get pressure on me with their front four and drop seven in coverage. But they blitzed a lot and they were successful and I couldn't step up and make a throw when I needed to."

Nine plays later, Mike Mayszak hit Augustine again for 43 yards and a 28-14 lead.

In the remaining 14:54 of the game, linebackers Trevor Hyslop, Brennan Quinn and Jordan Boser all got to Gunther.

Meet you at the quarterback.

"We love getting on those quarterbacks," Boser laughed. "The more we see 'em, the more we hit 'em, the less they want to run. Everybody just wants to get to the quarterback when you're up front."

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