



Vikings close ... but not to be

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Published: 11/11/2007 12:08 AM

EAST ST. LOUIS -- In danger of being blown out halfway through its Class 7A quarterfinal, Geneva instead nearly added another chapter to its recent string of quarterfinal classics.

The Vikings, playing nearly the entire game without injured quarterback Mike Mayszak, scored 20 unanswered points to tie the game in the fourth quarter and silence a large East St. Louis crowd.

Unfortunately for the approximately 600 Geneva fans who made the 5-hour trek south, the Flyers responded. On a 4th-and-9 play with eight minutes left, quarterback Detchauz Wray found Terry Hawthorn for a 23-yard touchdown that held up for a 34-26 victory.

Geneva got the ball back twice but couldn't move past the East St. Louis 40. Their game ended on a sack with the Vikings at their own 45.

A season that saw Geneva (11-1) match a school record for wins came to an end in a round in which the Vikings have lately excelled. The Vikings won a pair of thrilling quarterfinals against Freeport in 2004 and Oswego in 2006.

Geneva running back Michael Ratay led the comeback, running for 2 touchdowns, hauling in a touchdown reception and throwing the Vikings' final touchdown on a 15-yard halfback pass.

"We came back, tied it up," Ratay said. "It was a good fight, we battled back. We never gave up."

East St. Louis (11-1) will play Wheaton Warrenville South in a Class 7A semifinal next week.

"We told at halftime that we are playing a quality ballclub," said East St. Louis coach Darren Sunkett. "Our kids withstood that run. We had an answer for every touchdown they scored."

The Vikings took a 6-0 lead just 1:42 into the game on Ratay's 5-yard run after Jake Conforti recovered the first of 3 Flyers fumbles.

It was all East St. Louis after that. The Flyers scored the final 26 points of the first half to lead 26-6 at halftime.

They took the lead on Kraig Appleton's 79-yard interception return. Mayszak broke his collarbone while taking a hard hit on the play, and the Vikings played the final 3½ quarters with backup Steve Diemand under center.

"I was ready to play," Diemand said. "When Mayszak goes down, and I'm sorry he did, I was there for the team. I stepped in and did the best I could."

Geneva went deep into its playbook during its second-half comeback.

Wide receiver Michael Faught took a lateral from Diemand and fired a 49-yard touchdown pass to Ratay to start the rally.

Sean Grady recovered a fumble, and Ratay took the next snap 29 yards up the middle to cut East St. Louis'

lead to 26-19 with 8:47 left in the third quarter.

Geneva tied the game on the first play of the fourth quarter when Ratay took a pitch and lofted a 15-yard touchdown pass to tight end Colin McCaffrey.

"We were drawing half of them in the dirt," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said of the trick plays.

East St. Louis, who was penalized 12 times for 91 yards, collected itself and marched 80 yards for the game-winning touchdown.

Sophomore Vincent Arterbridge (25 carries for 177 yards) broke a 49-yard run to set up the Flyers' fourth-down touchdown pass.

"East St. Louis, what a great job of stopping the momentum," Wicinski said. "They were done. They turned it around. Fourth-and-9, if you can execute like that, you deserve to win."

Diemand completed 7 of 19 passes filling in for Mayszak. Four different Vikings completed passes, including Ratay who was a star in defeat, running for 145 yards, catching 5 passes for another 65 yards and accounting for all 4 touchdowns.

"He's a heck of an athlete and whenever we can get the ball in his hands we try to do it," Wicinski said.

Wicinski also praised Diemand's play.

"I felt horrible for Mayszak, he had a great year," Wicinski said.

"That's what dreams are made of, (Steve) did great. He lives the life of the second string quarterback, and you never know when your number is going to be called. It might be the toughest job on the team. He really showed his senior leadership and commitment to the program."