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Vikings cook up another winner

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The recipe for success remained perfect on Friday night for the Geneva Vikings football team in a second round 7A playoff game against nearby St. Charles East.

Battling the Saints for the first time in nearly 30 years, the Vikings used Michael Ratay to run the ball well, utilized the height advantage of wide receiver Joe Augustine and attacked the Saints offensive attack by sacking Saints quarterback Sam Gunther 7 times as the hosts defeated the Saints 35-14.

Geneva (11-0) tied the school record for victories and will attempt to set a new standard when it faces the winner of East St. Louis/Moline next week in the state quarterfinals.

The Vikings didn't turn the ball over, recovered one fumble and have now combined for 47 fumble recoveries, interceptions and sacks this season.

"It's a good recipe isn't it?," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "We talk about protecting the ball on the offensive side and getting it on the defensive side."

"We just try to keep our poise," Wicinski said. "We know the other team is going to make plays but we figure out ways to handle that and get momentum on our side."

St. Charles East (8-3) tried to grab the momentum early when Matt Hammer's 18-yard punt return set up good field position and ultimately lead to Wes Allen's 4-yard touchdown run.

The momentum shifted soon after when Ratay scored on a 9-yard run on Geneva's next possession to knot the score at 7-7.

The touchdown would be the first of three on the night for Ratay who has now scored 30 touchdowns this fall.

The Saints jumped ahead 14-7 early in the second quarter when Gunther eluded pressure and fired a perfect pass to Matt Hammer for a 62-yard touchdown, but the Saints wouldn't score again and Gunther wasn't so fortunate the rest of the evening.

"They brought some pressure from different spots that they hadn't done and we weren't really as prepared for that as we could've been," Saints coach Ted Monken said.

They also didn't expect to lose defensive leader and standout Dave Mashal who severely injured his knee and left the contest.

"I think some of it was an emotional letdown as much as a physical letdown," Monken said. "When you lose a big leader like that it makes a difference."

The Vikings defense didn't lose anything with Frank Boenzi, Brennan Quinn, Matt Caliendo and Jordan Boser all pulling Gunther down into the turf for major losses.

"The defense has been there and the kids have bought into it," Wicinski said. "They don't panic."

The Vikings scored a pair of touchdowns in the final five minutes of the first half to take a 21-14 lead. They extended that lead on Augustine's second TD reception of the night when he hauled in a 43-yard pass with 3:01 left in the third quarter.

Then, the Vikings put the game away when Ratay broke a pair of tackles on a 4th-and-1 and turned it into an 18-yard touchdown run with 4:50 left in the contest.

The perfect balance of the run and pass proved to be too much for the Saints.

"I was trying to throw to set up the run and they're a nice defense," Wicinski said. "I didn't know if we'd able to handle them up front consistently so we knew we had to get the ball to (Augustine)."

And they did, and more importantly, it means they get to play next weekend.