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## WSC's blue-collar leader

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GENEVA – How fitting that Geneva's football team moved to 7-0 on the season and captured a share of the Western Sun Conference title by using the same formula it has all season.

The Vikings won, 24-15, against Rochelle on Friday. They did it with solid defense, an efficient running game and a penchant for making the pivotal plays go their way.

Aside from a blowout win against DeKalb last week, that is what Geneva has done all year.

"Every game we've had has been like that," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "We could have won every game, we could have lost every game. It's been a really strange year. Every one's been tooth and nail. The kids hold on and finish, and that's a testament to their consistency."

The win clinched at least a share of the Vikings' fourth consecutive conference title. The only other time that happened in school history was under Jerry Auchstetter from 1968-71.

Geneva (7-0 overall, 5-0 WSC) seemed to halt Rochelle's chances with 9:02 remaining in the fourth quarter.

With the Vikings leading, 21-8, Devon Mancillas was stuffed by Geneva at the Vikings' 1-yard line on fourth-and-goal.

Disaster struck, though, when Geneva quarterback Mike Mayszak fumbled the next snap and Rochelle recovered, setting up Mancillas' 1-yard plunge to cut the Vikings' lead to 21-15 after the point after.

But Geneva controlled the ball the rest of the game. A nine-play, 41-yard drive took more than 5 minutes off the clock and ended with a missed Sean Grady field goal. The Vikings then forced a turnover on downs from Rochelle to set up redemption for Grady. He drilled a 32-yard field goal with 41 seconds left to put the Hubs (5-2, 3-2) away.

The defensive stands of the second half were a far cry from the Hubs' first drive of the game. After Mayszak threw the first of two interceptions to Rochelle's Nate Eyster, the Hubs went on a 10-play, 80-yard scoring drive, capped by a 7-yard Mancillas run.

"In kind of a sick way, we expected it," Wicinski said. "That first drive, it was like that last year. Our kids just don't see that kind of speed or that kind of intensity. I wish it wouldn't, but it takes us a series to kind of adjust to what they were doing."

Rochelle only had two series the rest of the game that were more than four plays as the Vikings scrapped the five-man front they opened with for their traditional defense.

"We were ready for them," Geneva senior defensive back Jake Conforti said. "They hurt us with that first drive, but we pretty much controlled the rest of the game. We went back to our old-school defense and we were on our way."

After Rochelle's first touchdown, the Vikings scored 21 unanswered points in the second and third quarters. Michael Ratay softened the Hubs up with 149 yards on 23 carries. But it was his teammates that scored the touchdowns in the second.



Geneva running back Michael Ratay (right) avoids a tackle by Rochelle defender Niche Anaya during the Vikings' 24-15 Western Sun Conference victory Friday night in Geneva. (Kendra Helmer photo)

Grady scored from 12 yards out, and Drew Fagot followed from 63 yards to give Geneva a 14-8 halftime edge.

In the third, Mayszak connected with Joe Augustine for a 38-yard score.

"A lot of people said they're bigger and hit harder than us, but all throughout, I think we pounded them," Ratay said.

The Vikings close the season on the road at Kaneland and Batavia.

"We've got two more [games], and hopefully five more after that [in the playoffs]," Conforti said. "It's huge for us. It's huge for everyone in the program. When Coach Wicinski took over [nine years ago], we were 0-9. I think we came out and proved ourselves tonight."

Geneva 24, Rochelle 15

Why the Vikings won: The Vikings controlled the ball on the ground, rushing for 256 yards on 39 carries. Michael Ratay carried the load with 149 yards on 23 carries, and Drew Fagot (63 yards) and Sean Grady (12 yards) added rushing scores.

Turning point: After running the ball effectively all night, senior quarterback Mike Mayszak was finally able to deliver a big passing play. His 38-yard touchdown strike to Joe Augustine with 7:48 left in the third pushed Geneva's lead to 21-8.

Outstanding player of the game: Ratay did not get into the end zone, but his running controlled the game and set up both of Geneva's rushing touchdowns. He ran for 149 yards on 23 carries, including bursts of 24, 21, 20 and 18 yards that produced first downs.

## COMMENTS

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