



All on the line tonight fro Batavia, Geneva

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It's a game that's usually played at the end of the regular season. The outcome frequently determines who wins the conference and it's one that's had implications on what the teams will do in the playoffs.

While this sounds a great deal like the Michigan-Ohio State rivalry - one that many consider the best in college football - it's actually the annual Batavia-Geneva rivalry, which comes to Burgess Field on Friday night at 7:30 p.m.

One of the requirements of a good rivalry is to have a lengthy history of balanced, competitive games. This one certainly has it with Geneva enjoying a 47-38-5 record against Batavia that dates back to the early 1900s. But who cares about what happened in the past, the time is now for the 90th meeting between the two neighboring community high schools.

What's at stake

A win would give the Vikings their second consecutive undefeated regular season, second straight outright Western Sun Conference championship and 20th win in two years.

"In my mind I'm just looking for momentum," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "It's very important to have momentum going into the playoffs. That's where I'm more concerned than anything else. The game's not a deal breaker for either side. Regardless if they play well enough to win or we do, both teams will be playing again next week."

After beginning the season 1-2, Batavia responded by first finding respectability and then taking care of business every Friday. The Bulldogs have now won five straight games. Now in pursuit of win No. 7, the Bulldogs already know they're in the playoffs, but if they win tonight they'll earn a share of a conference championship with Geneva and potentially Glenbard South. They'll also bottle up the momentum and carry it into the postseason.

"For us it was nice that we were able to clinch a playoff berth last week so we don't have to consider this as pressure," Batavia coach Mike Gaspari said. "We're just going into the game like we normally do. You just go there, have fun, and try to improve on last week."

And try to win a championship.

"It would be huge to win and share a conference title but other than that there's no other pressure," Gaspari said. "I guess it's more on (Geneva) because they're expected to win."

Players to watch

Batavia: QB Jordan Coffey. The 6-foot-5 senior is coming off an astonishing 19-for-21 passing performance against DeKalb. Coffey has completed 115 of 203 passes for 1,740 yards and 18 touchdowns. Although he's thrown the ball often, he's averaging just a single interception per game.

Geneva: RB Michael Ratay. The senior has rushed for 55 touchdowns during the past two seasons. He has accounted for 1,590 yards on the ground during his 181 rushes this fall. He's rushed for 3 or more touchdowns 11 times in his career. The last game in which he didn't score a touchdown was against Rochelle on Oct. 5, 2007.

Batavia: RB J.R. Kabba. The speedster set a school-record a few weeks ago with 321 rushing yards against Sycamore. The only things that have slowed him this season are a knee injury in the season opener and a minor concussion late in the Sycamore game. He's rushed for 806 yards and 9 touchdowns on just 70 carries.

Geneva: QB Brandon Beitzel. The junior completed 7-of-9 attempts last week and has completed 49 of his 99 attempts for 673 yards. While he's had two interception-heavy games that have elevated his season total to 9, he has also thrown 6 TDs.

Batavia: S Mike Theriault. The Bulldogs own "Little Engine That Could" is the heart and soul of a Batavia defense, which has better and better each week. They have their biggest challenge of the season against the Vikings.

Geneva: LB Brennan Quinn. It's no coincidence that the 6-foot-2, 260-pound senior has posted double figures in tackles against three of the toughest opponents the Vikings have faced this season (St. Charles East, Glenbard South and Rochelle). He also has 2 sacks.

Batavia: LB/WR Ryan Webb. After a two-week drought of not having a reception, Webb broke out for 9 catches, 116 yards and a touchdown last Friday. Still, it could be on the other side of the ball where he'll need to come up the biggest. Either way, the Bulldogs need a superlative performance from the senior.

Geneva: S Sean Grady. The Vikings secondary has 11 interceptions on the season and they'll try to make Coffey spill some of his passes into their hands. Grady has returned both of his interceptions for touchdowns and he'd love to return one again against the Bulldogs.

Key matchups

Batavia's offense vs. Geneva's defense: The Bulldogs run arguably the most unpredictable offensive attack in the Western Sun. They've started a game this season with 17 consecutive running plays and they've begun games with a no huddle, empty backfield attack.

"It stresses our defense, our base cover package," Wicinski said. "And if they start going five wide it leads to some substitutions and you have some issues when you start doing that."

If anything, the schedule really helps prepare Geneva for what Batavia will bring. Last week, the Vikings shut down Kaneland's spread, aerial attack and the week prior they had to slow the smashmouth approach of Rochelle.

"That's the thing about our conference," Wicinski said. "During the four years I've been in the playoffs there hasn't been one offense we haven't seen for the most part and after Rochelle and Kaneland we finish off with a nice balance which gets you very well prepared for the playoffs."

The Bulldogs' leading receiver is Erich Zeddies with 39 catches for 684 yards and 11 touchdowns. But he's not the only one Coffey targets, as Tyler Lindquist (28 catches, 403 yards, 2 TDs) and Webb (26 catches, 366 yards, 3 TDs) are both very dangerous and each enjoying good seasons.

"I've seen how Coffey has matured on film and he has so much more poise then in the previous couple years," Wicinski said. "I'm sure he's primed and has worked hard like we have and it's just a matter of not letting him make big plays."

Ratay's rushing ability vs. Batavia's defense: Ratay's skills in the backfield have flustered opposing defenses

for the past two years. Plus, he does it against the top teams. He's rushed for 134 yards or more in all 8 games this season and has 16 career 100-yard games.

"Obviously besides being an outstanding running back, he's just a tremendous football player and someone that certainly has to be the focal point of our team," Gaspari said. "We realize it's difficult to stop someone like that especially with the offensive line they have."

Gaspari acknowledges the fact that the passing game of the Vikings has come to life as the season has progressed, but that Ratay presents the biggest challenge.

"I know Geneva has developed other weapons in the last few weeks but (Ratay) is our focus and it'll be a tall order to contain him," he said.

"We need to try to contain him and hope for some mistakes."

Jason Holmes leads the Vikings with 17 catches, 315 receiving yards and 4 touchdown receptions. Brandon Lee has caught 11 passes for 203 yards and a touchdown, while Ratay, Drew Fagot and Michael Santacaterina have combined for 16 additional receptions and 119 yards.

They giveth, they taketh away

Batavia has been the area's leading team in take-aways and is currently at plus-13 on the season. Geneva has done pretty well too, with only 2 lost fumbles and is at plus-4. The Vikings did turn the ball over on three occasions in last year's rivalry game.

"We've been fortunate in not giving the ball away too much," Gaspari said. "The ones we've had have been on interceptions and as much as we throw it that's going to happen."

Back again for more

The scorers from last year's 14-12 Geneva victory are back tonight. Ratay scored both touchdowns for the Vikings (26 carries, 133 yards) while Kabba (23 carries, 173 yards, TD) and Zeddies (19-yard TD reception) scored for the Bulldogs.

Facts, figures, history

In Batavia's last two losses to Geneva (2004 and 2007), which were both 14-12 contests, the Bulldogs missed PAT kicks and 2-point conversions.

Last week, Holmes had a career-high 5 receptions for 159 yards to lead the Vikings past Kaneland. Holmes ended Ratay's streak of 17 straight games in which he led the Vikings in total rushing and receiving yards. Coincidentally, the last Viking to lead the team before Ratay was receiver Joe Augustine, who on Aug. 31, 2007, put up nearly identical numbers to Holmes with 5 catches for 156 yards against South Elgin.

In the rivalry Gaspari is 16-7 and Wicinski is 2-8.

Geneva assistant coach Jerry Auchsetter knows what it takes to beat Batavia. After all, he was the head coach for the Vikings when they beat the Bulldogs 19 straight times from 1967-1985.

Batavia has not lost to Geneva in back-to-back seasons since 1987-1988.

No end in sight

No matter what happens on Friday night both teams will be playing in the postseason beginning on Halloween or next Saturday. And that's no trick, but a treat for football fans in this area, and a well-deserved

opportunity for all of the hardworking coaches and players.

"I think that's very special given the schedule we both play, the opponents we've had and the variety of offenses we've prepared for," Gaspari said.

"I think it will bode well for both of us in the playoffs and regardless of what happens this week we're both going to have to start over next week and we'll both be ready."