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Geneva, Ratay too much for Carmel

By Chris Walker | Daily Herald Correspondent

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Geneva running back Michael Ratay has always been a fan of Walter Payton.

After rushing for 3 touchdowns during Saturday's 35-21 victory over Carmel in the Class 7A quarterfinals, Ratay delivered pure sweetness for the Vikings.

The victory was a school-best (12) for the Vikings and earned them an opportunity to host Crystal Lake South, a 14-7 overtime winner over Cary-Grove, in next weekend's semifinals. That game will be played either Friday or Saturday at Burgess Field with a trip to play for the Class 7A championship in Champaign on the line.

Carmel, which finishes 10-2, couldn't convert a first down on its first possession, but after stalling Geneva's long opening drive, the Corsairs answered with quarterback Andrew Nerup's 27-yard touchdown run which finished off a solid 13-play, 6-plus minute drive.

Trailing 7-0, the Vikings answered with a 10-play drive and a 4-yard Ratay touchdown run.

The momentum wasn't maintained though as the Corsairs surprised the Vikings with a 53-yard Nerup-to-Jimmy Miller touchdown pass to take a 14-7 lead.

"We just didn't finish the play there," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "I didn't think they could sustain that kind of (passing) and if they did, I thought we'd win. I was more worried about the run."

Geneva (12-0) was able to tie it at 14-14 before halftime. After stopping the Corsairs from converting a third-and-5 with less than three minutes left in the half, Geneva quarterback Brandon Beitzel hit Ratay for a screen pass that netted 19 yards, found Brandon Lee for an 11-yard pickup on a third-and-7, and then made an easy strike to a wide open Michael Santacaterina for an 8-yard touchdown.

"Punching that ball in was just huge for morale," Wicinski said. "The offensive line believed good things could happen and they really believed they could move the ball."

They certainly moved it in the third quarter. After the kickoff, the Vikings marched down the field and 7 plays later Ratay (31 carries, 191 yards) found the end zone with a 14-yard run. Carmel went three-and-out and then the Vikings devoured the clock with 16 plays, including Beitzel's 1-yard touchdown run. All told, the Corsairs only had the ball for 2 minutes and 24 seconds in the quarter and ran just 4 plays.

"That changed the game right there," Carmel coach Andy Bitto said. "We thought we played pretty well in the first half and had them guessing especially with our option game. Their defense actually looked a little tired and (Quinn) was limping around so we thought we'd be able to establish the running game, but lo and behold, they take the first drive and go 65 yards and score."

The Corsairs would make it a 28-21 contest with 6:44 left in the game on a 7-yard run by Mike Taylor (23 carries, 154 yards) but the Vikings answered with another touchdown run from Ratay, this one from 15 yards.

"He accelerates through tackles," Bitto said of Ratay. "Our defense, I thought, played pretty hard most of the day but that kid kind of took over the game in the second half."