

 Daily Herald

Geneva tops Sycamore to remain unbeaten

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Published: 9/27/2008 1:28 AM

If Michael Ratay was carrying too much of the scoring load for the Geneva Vikings the past month, then Friday night's 45-21 rout of Sycamore represented a spreading of the wealth and an equal opportunity for all.

Six different Vikings tacked points on the board for Geneva (3-0, 5-0), but the Western Sun Conference victory and joyous Homecoming celebration wouldn't have occurred without a dominant second half because a potent Sycamore offense provided plenty of scary moments in the game's first 25 minutes.

The first quarter featured Geneva quarterback Brandon Beitzel striking through the air with a 17-yard touchdown pass to Jason Holmes, and fullback Drew Fagot churning up 81 all-purpose yards, including a 14-yard touchdown run.

"We run a lot of plays for me in practice, but it really depends on how the game goes and how things are working out in the beginning," Fagot said. "It's great for me to take pressure off Michael, and then let him run as hard as he can run."

But the Spartans were ready to exchange blows with the conference front-runners. Marckie Hayes brought Sycamore (1-2, 3-2) back to within a point with two second-quarter scores when he capped a 65-yard drive with a 1-yard plunge, then bolted to the end zone untouched from 56 yards out two minutes later.

Geneva countered with its main weapon as Ratay (19 carries, 189 yards) scooted across the goal line from 9 yards out to give the Vikings a 21-13 halftime lead.

When Hayes started the second half with a 76-yard kickoff return touchdown, the Vikings found themselves in a deadlock after Spartan quarterback Michael Buckner ran in the two-point conversion.

After that, it was all Geneva in a dominant defensive effort and contributions from several offensive players.

"We got jacked up during halftime and we made a little bit of an adjustment to our defense in the second half, with guys staying home, filling their gaps more," said Geneva middle linebacker Brennan Quinn, whose first-quarter interception deep in Viking territory thwarted an early Sycamore drive. "This was a real eye-opener and it just shows there are no weak teams in the conference."

Geneva's blitz began with a 67-yard march to quickly answer Hayes' impressive kickoff return as Beitzel appeared to overshoot Holmes in the end zone, but Brandon Lee tapped the ball to himself for a 10-yard touchdown. Ratay added a 20-yard touchdown burst, and Michael Santacanterina joined in the third-quarter fun with a 13-yard scoring run.

With Geneva's defense holding Sycamore to only 47 yards rushing in the second half, kicker Sean Grady put on the finishing touches with a 37-yard field goal.

"We've been trying to get the offense spread out, and I'm really happy for the wideouts and for Beitzel because they were feeling a little heat because they don't want to let anybody down," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said.

But Wicinski felt his defense was tested and put back on its heels for the first time this year.

"This was an eye-opener for our defense, because they were feeling pretty good about themselves coming into this game," Wicinski said. "They didn't really come in with the focus they needed."

Sycamore coach Joe Ryan said his team eventually wore down in the second half.

"We're trying to rotate people, but we still have people playing two ways, and they owned the line of scrimmage in that second half," Ryan said.

"We feel like we're a pretty explosive team, but we kept shooting ourselves in the foot," Ryan added. "You have to keep moving the chains against a team like Geneva."