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To state, baby! To state!

By KEVIN DRULEY
kdruley@kcchronicle.com

GENEVA – Every last Geneva football player to raise the question immediately offered the answer.

Where are we going next Saturday?

To state, baby! To state!

Much less boisterously, Vikings center Anthony Strauss announced his plans for this Saturday – today. He's off to Glenbard West, baby.

"I'm going to go study up on my opponent for sure," Strauss said.

Geneva will play the winner of today's Glenbard West-East St. Louis semifinal for the IHSA Class 7A state championship. Strauss remained unsure which teammates might accompany him to scout, but they'll all be there at 4 p.m. next Saturday at the University of Illinois' Memorial Stadium in Champaign.

Surviving a 25-21 scare from Crystal Lake South, the Vikings (13-0) advanced to their first state championship game since 1975.

"Everybody knew that this was the year that they were going down," said former Geneva quarterback Shaun Ratay, who shivered through the game from the stands. "They just wanted it."

Ratay's bearded little brother, Michael, proved the point, recovering from a sluggish first half to again pace the offense. Rushing for 156 yards and three touchdowns on 28 carries, the senior tied the all-time state record for scoring runs in a season, tying Highland's Billy Greenwald with 45.

"It's not all about the records," Michael Ratay said. "It's all about winning."

Crystal Lake South (10-3) appeared to be en route to denying him both early in the game. Ratay ran left on a sweep on his first carry midway through the first quarter and found only Gators linebacker John Walsh, who pulled him down for a two-yard loss.

Gains of three, one and three yards followed before Ratay lost four.

Suddenly, the running back who entered the game averaging 217 yards couldn't find a hole.

"Stop the run, make them pass," Gators defensive end Ryan Miles said. "We thought if we could do that, we could have a really close game."

Making the Vikings pass turned out to be a better strategy in the first half. Quarterback Brandon Beitzel – who had limited his mistakes in the team's first three playoff wins – threw a pair of interceptions, including one in the end zone in the final minute of the half.

Still, Geneva found success through the air at key moments, as senior receivers Brandon Lee and Jason Holmes freed open for big gains on a number of third downs.

Ratay took over after intermission, capping the opening possession of the second half with the first of his touchdowns, a 30-yard run in which he jukeed the Gators' Alex Macaulay before cutting back inside.

Do-it-all senior safety Sean Grady, who had an interception and forced fumble among his other credits, then tossed a two-point conversion pass to Cory Hofstetter after a botched PAT snap to put the Vikings ahead, 11-9.

It was the second of five lead changes, but Geneva pulled through by staying patient with Ratay, who added a 14-yard run at the end of the third quarter and a 52-yard dash early in the fourth to make the score 25-21, after the PAT.

"We just kept pounding them and pounding them, and then they finally fell apart and we got in the end zone," Strauss said.

Crystal Lake South did the same, with junior running back Colin Masterson (15 carries, 67 yards, one touchdown). The Gators, who defeated unbeaten Rockford Boylan and Cary-Grove in the two previous rounds, saw their hopes for a third straight upset fade with 1:58 to play.

Vikings linebacker Trevor Hyslop jumped Drew Ormseth's sideline pass for an interception and set off a frenzy in the stands.

Geneva is headed to state, where it could possibly avenge last fall's quarterfinal loss at East St. Louis.

"As soon as we left there, we had this goal in our mind," Holmes said. "Two weeks after, we were in the weight room, we were working hard, we were doing everything we could to get here, and we're finally going."

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