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Vikes' Beitzel passes test

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GENEVA - Geneva football coach Rob Wicinski knew early in the season his offense was far too one-dimensional.

At times in passing situations it seemed he was hoping as much for the ball not to be turned over as he was for a completion. The Vikings didn't ignore the problem, fully realizing their wholehearted reliance on the run could come back to hurt them late in the year.

You're still not going to see junior quarterback Brandon Beitzel throwing the ball 40 times a game anytime soon, but the coaching staff certainly isn't cringing these days when he drops back.

"He's a good boy," Wicinski said. "He works hard. If you've got that combination, and it doesn't hurt to have an arm. So throw in the arm and keep the head on straight. It was a three-phase process. And we were just breaking down early in the year. ... It's a process. We just had to stay patient."

Beitzel did what was asked of him in Saturday's IHSA Class 7A state quarterfinal win against Carmel, completing 10 of 14 attempts for 130 yards and a touchdown without turning the ball over.

The junior quarterback thinks having a workhorse running back like Michael Ratay only makes his job easier and opens up the passing game.

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"If I was on defense I'd be watching him every play too," Beitzel said. "... It opens up [the passing game] a lot."

The success in the air has helped to spell Ratay to some extent. While the senior standout is still the focal point of the offense, his 30 carries and two receptions Saturday were a far cry from his 47 overall touches in a hard-fought win over Glenbard South in Week 4 when Wicinski had no confidence in his passing game.

"I guess the idea is you stop Ratay, you stop [the] Geneva offense," Wicinski said then after a 14-7 Western Sun Conference win. "I guess that was kind of the idea coming in. If somebody does it, they win. I guess that's kind of where I'm at right now."

While Beitzel has been successful in helping develop the Vikings' passing game, he's done so while managing an offense in general that has been relatively mistake-free.

Geneva (12-0) didn't turn the ball over in the 35-21 win Saturday and the offense was penalized just once – a 5-yard false start in the fourth quarter. Beitzel said the offense was able to find a rhythm in the second half because of the mistake-free football.

"We just were able to push the ball, control the time," Beitzel said. "It was big. It was key."

Wicinski wasn't sure Saturday if he'd get the Friday night game time he wanted for his semifinal matchup with Crystal Lake South (10-2), but it turns out he will after Gators coach Jim Stuglis agreed to make the trip down to Geneva for the 7 p.m. start.

"We'd love to play on Friday night," Wicinski said Saturday. "That extra day is just messing with us. I know a lot of coaches like that extra day. We're ready. We're anxious."

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