

[Print Page](#)

Vikings' defense leads the way

By ANDREW MITCHELL - editorial@kcchronicle.com

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GENEVA – Contrary to most people's expectations, the Round 1 playoff victory did not come easily to Geneva – nor was it pretty.

Nonetheless, the Vikings fought their way to a 27-7 win Saturday against Rolling Meadows in the first round of the Class 7A playoffs.

"This is the way football should be – the way I always remembered it," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "Four quarters ... you've got to battle it out."

The Vikings (10-0) will play at Rockton Hononegah in the next round.

The win showed just how vital the Vikings' defensive line is to their success, keeping the Mustangs scoreless until the fourth quarter.

"Our defense has been the strength of our team all year long," Wicinski said.

The Vikings' offense, meanwhile, had a tougher time trying to get points on the scoreboard. The Vikings came up short on their first quarter drives, and senior Sean Grady had his field goal attempt blocked early in the second quarter.

"All of them were hitting until the whistle," senior running back Michael Ratay said of Rolling Meadows (5-5).

The half was also plagued by penalties. For Geneva especially, the calls interrupted momentum and incited some boos from the Burgess Field faithful.

There was also some concern the defense would be lessened by the absence of standout junior defensive tackle Frank Boenzi. Boenzi missed the game because of mono, and his timetable for a return is uncertain.

But in Boenzi's absence, seniors Cory Hofstetter and Rich MacDonald made some momentum-stopping sacks on Mustangs quarterback Jim Garoppolo.

"They came out strong," Hofstetter said. "It took us that first [quarter] to get our bearings."

The Vikings turned a seven-point lead to a 20-point lead in the third quarter thanks to a 4-yard rush from Ratay and a 20-yard pass from junior quarterback Brandon Beitzel to senior Jason Holmes. Ratay, as usual, dominated with 232 rushing yards.

"It's been the same formula," Wicinski said. "We give to ball to Ratay and our defense shows up and plays."

But the Vikings might have to do more than follow the formula – especially if the penalties keep mounting.

"We take a lot of pride in doing things the right way and being really crisp on our assignments," Wicinski said. "You don't want playoff games with 16 penalties."

Nonetheless, the Vikings remain perfect, with Champaign in their sights.

"As long as we come out on top of that scoreboard, that's all that really matters," Ratay said.

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