

 Daily Herald

# Beitzel makes clutch throws in Geneva's win

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As if Western Sun Conference teams needed to hear about another Geneva Viking stepping up his game a notch.

But that was the case Friday night when Geneva followed the lead of senior quarterback Brandon Beitzel, who commandeered a balanced offensive attack to topple host Sycamore 28-20 and remain undefeated.

Geneva (5-0, 3-0) piled up 401 yards of total offense, with Michael Santacaterina scoring twice on the ground and wide receiver Charlie James hauling in two touchdown passes to overcome a fired-up Spartan team.

Beitzel completed 11 of his 15 passes for 151 yards and the two scoring strikes to James, but he also showed plenty of poise in the pocket in completing two crucial third-and-long passes during a fourth-quarter drive that sealed the game.

"We just worked hard all week, and I have to thank the wideouts and the linemen, who really gave me time to throw," Beitzel said. "I actually had to go to my second or third option a few times and the wideouts made great plays."

Geneva coach Rob Wicinski was pleased with how his quarterback managed the game.

"We had those two big third-down passes and Brandon stepped up nice in the pocket," Wicinski said after his team notched its 23rd straight regular-season victory.

"We talk all the time about pitching and catching on those third downs," Wicinski added. "You don't like getting in those third-and-longs, but we have the tools to get ourselves out of that once in a while and it showed tonight that we can do that."

The passing game was aided by the rugged running of fullback Connor Quinn, who went straight up the middle on most of his 16 carries to notch a game-high 153 yards rushing.

The Vikings used seven minutes of the first quarter in driving 83 yards on their first possession to take a 7-0 lead on James' 16-yard TD reception.

But Sycamore (3-2, 1-2) answered quickly and started a first-half trend with quarterback Ryan Bartels connecting with receivers on long passes to get in scoring position for speedster Marckie Hayes (19 carries, 87 yards), who scampered in from 9 yards out to tie the score.

Bartels hooked up with wideout Eric Ray for a 46-yard reception that took the Spartans to the Geneva 1-yard line early in the second quarter. The Spartans took a 14-7 lead when Joe Dougherty slammed in from 2 yards out.

The Vikings mounted their second 83-yard drive of the half after a Sycamore drive stalled because of a delay of game penalty on third-and-short. Santacaterina finished that drive with a 2-yard scoring run.

Sycamore took the lead again early in the third quarter when backup quarterback Trevor Mathey entered the

game for an injured Bartels and proceeded to cap a 56-yard drive with a 12-yard touchdown run.

"Mathey did a great job coming in there for us," Sycamore coach Joe Ryan said. "We played better tonight, and we played against a ranked Class 7A team and battled them toe-to-toe."

Facing a third-and-13 at the Sycamore 31, Beitzel found James with a bomb in the end zone that vaulted Geneva into a 21-20 lead late in the third quarter.

The Vikings' defense dug in from there, holding Sycamore to only 75 yards total offense in the second half, while Beitzel completed his key third-down passes - an 11-yard strike to James and a 17-yard slant to Jacob Landau - while driving to the final touchdown, which came on a 5-yard carry by Santacaterina.

Santacaterina put an end to Sycamore's hopes with a diving interception moments later.

"In the first half they hurt us with some big plays, and we made some adjustments on defense in that second half," Santacaterina said. "We played them with a little more zone and I think that helped us a lot."