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Confidence building for Beitzel

Geneva QB drawing rave reviews entering his senior season

The following screaming accolades about Brandon Beitzel represent the views of the Geneva football team and are subject to change throughout a nine-game regular season. The players and coaches who deliver them admit they do not guarantee the performance of their senior quarterback, contending only that it's late July and everyone has the right to be giddy about high school football:

Geneva wide receiver Jake Landau gets the Beitzel ball rolling with a super superlative.

"When he's a confident player," Landau said, "he's the best quarterback in the state, I think."

Interesting.

Beitzel threw for 1,378 yards, 12 touchdowns and 12 interceptions in 14 games last year and was not even the best quarterback in the IHSA Class 7A state championship game, getting outpassed by East St. Louis' Detchauz Wray in a 33-14 Vikings loss in November.

Still, helping the team get there counts for something, so those given the opportunity to back Beitzel step right up.

"Brandon Beitzel by himself is probably going to be the shocker," said Steve Gregory, Beitzel's four-year instructor at Blue Chips Quarterback Farm in Naperville. "As far as his abilities at quarterback, no one really saw what he could do because coach just didn't feel the need to throw."

Geneva's offense under 11th year coach Rob Wicinski ran predominantly through record-setting running back Michael Ratay in 2008, which sat just fine with Beitzel.

He threw when coaches called for it but largely watched his All-State teammate roll through defenses designed to stop him. Ratay will look to do the same this season at NCAA Division II Grand Valley State.

"When you have a player like Michael, why not give him the ball and let him go to work as often as you can?" Beitzel said. "That's what the offense was, and why not? This year is going to be different without him, though. I know I'm going to be called on more, and that's something I'm ready for."

Repetition from drills, camps and sessions with Gregory – now the Vikings' quarterbacks coach after coming over from Marmion – leaves Beitzel confident about delivering during games.

Viewing each opportunity as a learning experience, he especially found value in the 7-on-7 camps he attended with fellow skill players throughout the summer.

At the same time, he sounds level-headed, realizing the Vikings are grooming an entirely new crop of receivers while spreading Ratay's old carries between Jay Graffagna and another Michael, Santacaterina.

"It's coming along slowly, but it's coming along strong," Beitzel said. "We're finding out who can go out, who can explode, who's going to lay out and catch the football."

College coaches and scouts see that Beitzel can move with and throw the ball, intrigued equally by his size – 6-foot-3 and about 200 pounds – and speed.

Despite missing several spring showcases to rehab a broken foot suffered during basketball season, he appeared on recruiting radars soon after his recovery, thanks in part to an online highlight reel through the Quarterback Farm.

Beitzel exchanges e-mails with some school representatives and receives feedback from Wicinski or Gregory when the latest coach comes calling. He visited Iowa State on Friday and has also drawn varying degrees of interest from such schools as Western Illinois, Tennessee, Virginia, Wisconsin, Marshall, Baylor and Arkansas.

"He's looked great," said Landau, a favorite target of Beitzel's when they were teammates on the sophomore team. "I'm excited to be with him this season, to be a receiver for him, because I know he's going to get me the ball right where I need it to be."

The best quarterback in the state should do nothing less. Even if that title doesn't suit Beitzel, he can at least aim as high.

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