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Geneva holds off St. Charles East

ST. CHARLES – Corey Campbell swept left with a Nolan Possley handoff in the final minute of Friday's game and, for the first time since the first half, looked skittish.

He feigned a move one way then came back another, all the while waiting for Possley to free open on the right sideline for an improbable fourth down conversion.

St. Charles East teammate Andrew Gomez flashed forward for a short shovel pass, but a holding call wound up rendering his reception moot. Driving in Geneva territory yet again, the Saints squandered their last chance and left the Vikings exhaling with a 13-6 win Friday to open the season.

"Wow," Geneva safety Michael Santacaterina said. "We knew East was going to make some plays but we just had to keep our head, keep our intensity and keep attacking them."

Supplies of all of the above spilled over in the first half, with the Vikings' defense sacking Possley five times and forcing a fumble that led to their first score.

Backed up inside its own 10-yard line with 2:17 to play in the opening quarter, East botched a snap exchange on the 6 that Vikings defensive tackle Frank Boenzi alertly fell on. Boenzi remained in the game as a blocking back in the team's jumbo, two tight end package, protecting quarterback Brandon Beitzel long enough for him to find Connor Quinn for an 8-yard touchdown.

Those kinds of plays figure to be the only times Boenzi, a senior, will be on a signal-caller's side. The emerging college prospect, who battled mono during the Vikings' run to the IHSA Class 7A state championship game last year, recorded two sacks in the first half and numerous pressures the rest of the way at defensive tackle.

"I was excited to be out here," Boenzi said. "What else is there to do? I just wanted to get after it and show everybody I'm back."

His Geneva teammates shared that sentiment even though only five starters return from the 13-1 team of 2008. One of them, Santacaterina, wore graduated all-state running back Michael Ratay's Superman undershirt during the game, calling it one of his most prized hand-me-downs afterward.

Santacaterina and Jay Graffagna will look to shoulder the void left by Ratay – who attended Friday's game – and both took turns emulating him. The best impression: Graffagna's 43-yard dash on Geneva's first snap of the second quarter, a run that took the Vikings to the Saints' 10 and set up Beitzel's scoring pass to Jack Delabar two plays later.

East trailed, 13-0, and struggled to build consistency against the Vikings' defense.

"They were kicking our butts, they were beating us to the spot," said new Saints coach Mike Fields, who left Geneva last spring after 10 years as an assistant to Rob Wicinski. "But our kids have a lot of sense of pride and they responded in the second half I thought and played a lot better."

Still favoring the run, East gained much more ground after intermission behind seniors Matt Payne and Campbell. The hosts snapped Geneva's shutout with 6:34 to play in the third quarter when Payne scored on a 25-yard run that stayed alive when he bounced off contact at the Vikings' 10.

A botched point-after attempt matched one from Geneva and put the game at the final margin.

East started four of its five second-half drives inside Vikings territory but only came away with the Payne touchdown.

Boenzi disrupted the Saints' last-ditch try from Geneva's 37 on fourth-and-4.

"He pushed Possley back and snuffed it out," Campbell said. "I had nowhere to throw."

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