

 Daily Herald

Geneva survives scare

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Things did not start out well for Geneva Friday night at Burgess Field.

The Vikings made a string of penalties, missed a field goal, were beaten for a long pass play, and found themselves down by 10 points just over 10 minutes into the game. They bounced back, though, established a dominant running game, and made just enough key plays to beat visiting Yorkville 21-10 in the Western Sun Conference opener. It was Geneva's 22nd straight regular-season victory.

"We just weren't intense enough. We weren't feeling it," Geneva senior Michael Santacaterina said, describing the slow start. "The coaches got on us a little bit, got in our ears."

Santacaterina helped to spark the turnaround, running for a pair of 4-yard touchdowns in the second quarter. The first capped a 10-play drive highlighted by an 18-yard pass from Brandon Beitzel to Connor Quinn and aided by a Yorkville horsecollar penalty. The second, less than a minute later, came just two plays after Geneva linebacker Bret Shannon intercepted Yorkville quarterback Luke Parece deep in Foxes territory and set up the Vikings with a first-and-goal at the 10-yard line.

Up 14-10, Geneva (3-0, 1-0) never trailed again despite taking 11 penalties for 110 yards in the game and punting six times in the second half.

"We just need to tighten up the ship, go back to film, and re-evaluate," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "It's baby steps."

He praised his team's overall effort, though, and especially the "two-headed monster" of Santacaterina and Jay Graffagna in the running game. Graffagna rolled up 148 yards on 18 carries, including a third-quarter touchdown. Santacaterina finished with 47 yards and the two scores.

"Our (offensive) line has improved a lot," Santacaterina said. "It's all based on them. We challenged them, and they came along this week a lot."

Even so, Yorkville (1-2, 0-1) nearly turned the tables in the third quarter with a tricky option pass from Sean Anderson to fellow receiver Robbie Eaton that would have set up the Foxes near the goal line. A holding call, however, wiped out the play. And worse, Eaton injured his ankle on the play. He missed the rest of the game and his status for next week is uncertain.

Yorkville coach Jim Still called that the turning point in the game, the kind of play his team has to make if it's going to improve and reach its goals.

"We didn't come here to just scare (Geneva)," Still said. "We've got to get that win that gets us over the hump. They were proud of their effort, but they wanted to win the ballgame. We're trying to become a playoff football program."

The Foxes did register 274 yards of offense Friday, including several long drives. Parece finished 10 of 30 for 254 yards with two interceptions and a first-quarter touchdown pass to Eaton. That, following Maxwell Brusveen's 30-yard field goal on the opening drive, staked them to the early 10-0 lead.

Junior tight end Jaden Richardson caught three of Parece's passes for 116 yards.

Yorkville will try to rebound next week when it hosts DeKalb. Geneva faces a tough matchup at Glenbard South, and it will have to play the game without stalwart defensive lineman Frank Boenzi who was ejected along with Yorkville's Jairo Perez for a fourth-quarter altercation following a punt.

"(It's) an opportunity for someone else," Wicinski said.