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Geneva turns to pass in first-round romp

GENEVA – Meet the Geneva Vikings, as they want to be.

A year removed from almost exclusively featuring running back Michael Ratay during the team's march to Champaign, the Vikings intend to be a more balanced offense this postseason.

That balanced offensive attack was on full display Saturday afternoon during a 36-8 whipping of Shepard (7-3) in the first round of the 7A state playoffs.

"Best game yet," Geneva quarterback Brandon Beitzel said. "We definitely came out first game of the playoffs ready to play."

The offensive attack of the Vikings (9-1) was led by Beitzel, who was able to exploit the Astros' goal line defense en route to 137 yards passing and three touchdowns.

"We saw eight men in the box," Beitzel said. "Whenever we have eight or nine men in the box we air it out. It was that simple."

Once again, Geneva had to make the best of a muddy Burgess Field.

"It was really tough conditions," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said. "It just doesn't end. It's like Groundhog Day."

Even though the sloppy conditions are not ideal for the Vikings because of how it limits the use of speedy running back Jay Graffagna outside of the tackles, Wicinski said his team is fine with the conditions. Moreover, he sees the mud as an advantage.

"I haven't seen a full-speed cut in the last six weeks," Wicinski said. "Even when it's dry, our fields are a mess. But this field has been way more of a positive than a negative. It's tough conditions and I wouldn't want to come in here if I hadn't been here before."

The one facet of Geneva's game that unquestionably benefited from playing in the mud was their defense, which held Shepard's quality rushing attack to 36 yards.

The Vikings received numerous big defensive plays against the Astros, including three turnovers and a safety forced by linebacker Matt Schuman in the third quarter. To add insult to injury for Shepard, Geneva's Jake Landau returned the kickoff following Schuman's safety for a 60-yard touchdown. The score gave Geneva nine points in 12 seconds.

"We've been liking our angles on defense (as well as) their positioning and staying low," Wicinski said. "But we're going to have really good angles next week."

That's because Geneva will next travel to take on powerhouse Wheaton Warrenville South, which defeated St. Laurence, 61-6, in its opening-round matchup.

GENEVA 36, SHEPARD 8

Shepard	0	0	0	8	-	8
Geneva	7	7	22	0	-	36

First quarter

G – Delabar 23 yards from Beitzel (Hince kick), 1:28.

Second quarter

G – Quinn 18 yards from Beitzel (Hince kick), 10:01.

Third quarter

G – Santacaterina 18-yard run (kick failed), 9:18.

G – Larson sacked by Schuman for safety, 5:13.

G – Landau 60-yard kickoff return (Hince kick), 5:01.

G – Williams 46 pass from Beitzel (Hince kick), 3:04.

Fourth quarter

S – Lucas 17 pass from Larson (Taylor conversion), 3:29.

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING – Geneva: Santacaterina 8-50, Quinn 5-36, Nobregas 2-7, Cella 1-2, Hudson 2-1, Graffagna 8- minus-1, Beitzel 3- minus 1. Totals: 29-94. Shepard: R. Taylor 3-22, Brewer 1-18, Davis 6-15, Cole 2-9, Smith 9-0, Ludwig 3-0, McCoy 7- -13.

Totals: 31-36

PASSING – Geneva: Beitzel 10-18-0-137, Santacaterina 0-1-0-0, Ward 0-1-0-0. Shepard: McCoy 4-14-1-76, Larson 4-6-1-76.

RECEIVING – Geneva: Williams 3-71, Delabar 1-23, Quinn 1-18, Graffagna 1-15, Santacaterina 2-7, Landau 1-2, Campbell 1-1. Totals: 10-137. Shepard: Lucas 4-72, McBride 1-45, Knoerzer 1-22, Cole 2-13. Totals: 7-152.

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