

Daily Herald

Practice pays off for Geneva

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Geneva's football team found itself in unfamiliar position Friday night.

Facing a Morgan Park team that has made 4 state quarterfinal appearances in the past 6 years and was fresh from a 32-10 season-opening victory over Brother Rice, the defending Class 7A state runners-up Vikings felt more like underdogs as they stepped onto Burgess Field.

Geneva (2-0) obviously took a liking to its newfound position, scoring 17 unanswered points in the first 17 minutes on the way to a convincing 31-20 nonconference triumph over the Mustangs (1-1).

"It was fun coming out here being the underdog," said senior tailback/safety Michael Santacaterina, who scored the Vikings' first 3 touchdowns and finished a busy night with 15 carries for 55 yards along with 9 tackles, 1 pass deflection and a 16-yard reception that kept a fourth-quarter scoring drive alive.

"We all came out focused. We had a great week of practice and our offensive line stepped up big. We challenged them all week and they came through."

The Vikings' defense came through with the game's first big play when cornerback Nolan Block intercepted a DaRon Brown pass and returned it to the Morgan Park 11-yard line on the Mustangs' first offensive series.

Two plays later, Santacaterina scampered around left end for a 4-yard touchdown and 7-0 Viking lead.

"That first series, I thought we got in their heads a little bit," said Santacaterina. "Block's interception gave us a ton of momentum and after that we thought we could play with them."

Late in the opening quarter, the Vikings forced another turnover as defensive lineman Frank Boenzi jarred the ball loose from Brown and Blake Champer recovered the fumble at the Geneva 26.

Once again, Geneva made Morgan Park pay as Santacaterina capped the 10-play, 74-yard drive with a 5-yard TD run. The key play on the drive was a 36-yard pass completion from quarterback Brandon Beitzel (13-of-16, 190 yards) to sophomore wide receiver Matt Williams.

"I thought it was real important that we came out of the chute fast," said Geneva coach Rob Wicinski.

After Morgan Park scored a late second-quarter touchdown to make it 17-6 at halftime, the Vikings took the second-half kickoff and marched 73 yards on 13 plays, culminated by Santacaterina's 1-yard TD plunge that extended the lead to 24-6.

Jay Graffagna (20 carries, 88 yards) capped the Vikings' scoring on a 24-yard TD run with 8:31 remaining.

"I was pleased with the offensive consistency that we didn't have last week (in a 13-6 win over St. Charles East), especially with the offensive linemen," said Wicinski. "I think the offense, and basically the whole team, was a little disappointed last week - not necessarily with the score but with our consistency.

"I thought the guys were really focused and had two really good practices.. I told them that's why you had success tonight - because of what you did during the week."

Geneva, which plays host to Yorkville in its Western Sun Conference opener Friday, has now won 20 consecutive regular-season games (dating back to October, 2006).

"I did not know that," said Wicinski. "We do talk about being sound at home and protecting our turf. But I didn't know about the 20 straight regular-season victories - until now."