

 Daily Herald

Rochelle snaps Geneva's 24-game streak

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Published: 10/10/2009 12:54 AM

Stunned? Shocked? Speechless? After all, it had been awhile - nearly three years - since Geneva walked off the field after a regular season defeat.

That's what happened Friday at Burgess Field, where a Rochelle team that had been embarrassed a week before by Sycamore led all night over the state's No. 5 ranked Class 7A team, prevailing 21-14 to snap Geneva's 24-game regular season winning streak.

More importantly, it drops Geneva (6-1, 4-1) into a tie for first in the Western Sun with Glenbard South heading into road games at Kaneland and Batavia. The Knights also have one Western Sun loss and play at DeKalb today.

The Vikings, who had not lost in the regular season since Batavia's 24-6 win to close 2006, seemed to follow the lead of their coach Rob Wicinski, who said the loss can make the team better.

"It stinks," said defensive lineman Frank Boenzi, who had not lost a varsity game to anyone except East St. Louis in three years. "Nothing you can do about it. They had some good plays and we didn't get it done on offense.

"We're going to come back, we're going to work hard in practice, we're going to get the next two games and see what happens in the playoffs."

Rochelle (5-2, 3-2) quarterback C.J. Navarro threw only 2 passes all night and both went for touchdowns, including a 29-yarder on the final play of the first half. That put the Hubs up 21-6, then they held off Geneva's fourth-quarter comeback bid.

The Vikings limited Rochelle to 37 yards in the second half, giving them several chances to rally. After the first of two botched punts by the Hubs gave Geneva the ball in great field position at the Hubs' 37, the Vikings were stopped on downs.

Not until midway through the fourth quarter did Geneva's offense come alive, marching 64 yards when Michael Santacaterina (21 carries, 127 yards) refused to go down. His 5-yard touchdown run and a 2-point conversion pass from Brandon Beitzel to Jack Delabar made it a 21-14 game with 6:48 remaining.

The Vikings got the ball back twice with a chance to tie and force overtime, and they were stopped on downs both times at Rochelle's 44- and 24-yard lines, the second after Rochelle again fumbled the snap on a punt to give Geneva a golden opportunity. Evan Tracy's interception on 4th-and-5 sealed the Vikings' fate.

"We've always played well against good teams," Rochelle coach Kevin Crandall said. "Our kids are warriors and they don't back down from anybody. Last week (26-0 loss to Sycamore) was one of the few times in my career I have been genuinely angry for not playing harder. We really challenged them to come back."

Rochelle jumped on Geneva early after the Vikings fumbled a short kickoff to start the game. Navarro's quarterback keeper put the Hubs ahead 7-0 just 3:56 into the game.

"We were unfortunate to have that fumble right off the kickoff," Wicinski said. "And when you are chasing

points against Rochelle it's a bad scene."

Geneva answered in the second quarter with Beitzel's 4-yard bootleg for a score, but the extra point was just wide right leaving the Vikings down 7-6.

Rochelle then turned the game around with a pair of passing plays, Navarro's only 2 attempts. The first came on 2nd-and-8 and went 28 yards to a wide-open Austin Gabriel behind the Geneva secondary for a 14-6 lead.

The real backbreaker came on the final play of the first half. This time Geneva had more defenders near the long pass, yet Chris Williams hauled it in.

"We were ready for it," Boenzi said. "They made a good play, there's nothing else to say."

"We talked about it in the huddle," Wicinski said. "It's a matter of guys doing their job. We'll go back and evaluate and see what happened. Give them credit. It looked like they made a really nice play there."

Rochelle outgained Geneva on the ground, 156-127. Beitzel, who fumbled three snaps in the slippery conditions and recovered them all, completed 5 of 9 passes for 56 yards.

"The victory is sweeter because they have such a great program and I have so much respect for Rob and his kids," Crandall said. "I'm not saying that because we beat them. I've told him that every year. They do things the right way. Their kids play hard. I'm going to miss playing them, not with the wins and losses, it's just a great atmosphere for high school football. They run a first-class program."

Wicinski made no excuses with the playing conditions on a field that made it near impossible for a quarterback to set his feet and throw.

"It cuts down your offense in half," Wicinski said. "I thought maybe it (the conditions) might favor us. We never talk about it that way. We don't give excuses.

"I'm really proud of those guys. You learn a lot from a loss. I think what doesn't kill you will make you better and this didn't kill us. I'm interested to see how the kids react."