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Santacaterina stamps victory

MAPLE PARK – Geneva offensive linemen practiced screaming and yelling and pumping their fists one play prematurely Friday night, getting antsy over an outcome they had envisioned at halftime.

When Vikings running back Michael Santacaterina ran eight yards to the Kaneland 2-yard line on Geneva's first snap of overtime, it stirred a brief, bottled-up celebration that made what happened next seem almost like a formality.

Santacaterina plunged into the end zone for his fourth touchdown one play later, putting a stamp on the Vikings' 27-24 Western Sun Conference win. Geneva and Kaneland will join new conferences next season, and both sides sensed a showdown for the top spot this time around.

"We knew it was going to come down to the wire like that, and we knew we were a second-half team," Santacaterina said. "If we had them at halftime, we knew we could wear down their two-way players and be fine."

Geneva (7-1, 5-1 WSC) felt better after letting out a few more screams after the game officially ended. The Vikings survived the second-half resuscitation of Kaneland's pass-oriented spread attack highlighted by a breakthrough performance from Knights wide receiver Ryley Bailey.

After Santacaterina opened the second half with his second touchdown – a Charlie James point-after made it 14-7 Geneva – Bailey caught the next four passes from Knights (5-3, 4-2 WSC) quarterback Joe Camiliere. He finished with 13 receptions for 179 yards, benefiting from improved offensive line and quarterback play in the second half.

"We just went in and we knew if we got [Camiliere] a little time that we could get things going," Kaneland coach Tom Fedderly said. "We really looked at how we were protecting him. Give them credit, they still got some pressure on him, but Joe took big strides today stepping up and throwing the ball."

The teams entered overtime tied at 21 after trading touchdowns early in the fourth quarter. Camiliere, who threw for 245 yards and three touchdowns, hooked up with Bailey with 10:22 remaining in the final period.

Just under three minutes later, at 7:33, Santacaterina scored from six yards out. Earlier in the drive, he kept things alive by running 27 yards with a fake punt on a fourth-and-3 play from the Kaneland 46. Kaneland began overtime with a 23-yard field goal from Chad Swieca to go ahead 24-21, but Geneva pursued Camiliere and covered Bailey well.

"We condition a lot, so this is what we work for, to win like this," Vikings senior defensive tackle Frank Boenzi said.

With Boenzi, a 6-foot-3, 305 pound senior, back on the field blocking, the Vikings went immediately to Santacaterina, who found holes all the way to the end zone.

"All the O-lineman pushed [Kaneland] back five yards, and it was all on them," Santacaterina said. "Then you had Big Frank in there on that power package. They weren't going to stop us on that."

The Vikings won each of the four WSC meetings with Kaneland, outscoring the Knights, 154-73.

Geneva can capture the final WSC title if it wins at archival Batavia next week. Even if Glenbard South wins its regular season finale, the Vikings would win by virtue of their head-to-head victory earlier this season. The Knights, meantime, would have to beat Yorkville and hope for help.

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