

By KEVIN DRULEY - kdruley@kcchronicle.com

Vikings ride late wave to title

BATAVIA – Geneva fans unleashed a cheering section staple in the waning seconds of the Vikings' 23-0 victory against archrival Batavia on Friday night.

"Just like last year!" spoke to Geneva's 47-14 victory in 2008 and to the team's fourth straight Western Sun Conference title – the Vikings will share the league's final crown with Glenbard South – but the similarities stopped there.

Unlike last year, no first-play touchdowns surfaced for Geneva, nor any visions of running clocks at halftime. The Vikings (8-1, 6-1 WSC) led, 3-0, entering the fourth quarter and relied on defense and field positioning above all to capture their regular season finale.

"We're really glad the offense kicked it into gear the second half," linebacker Asa Bielenberg said, "but we figured if we kept playing this well, Batavia doesn't score, they don't win. We knew the offense would click eventually; we just had to keep doing our job."

Batavia (2-7, 1-6 WSC) echoed the Vikings' approach. After the Bulldogs started the game with the first of several three-and-outs, Geneva went for a fourth-and-2 from the Batavia 32 with 9:52 left in the opening period.

Linebacker Mike Greco blazed through the line to meet Vikings senior Michael Santacaterina one yard short and the home crowd erupted, but a penalty for a Bulldogs block below the waist took the ball to the Batavia 17.

The Bulldogs limited the damage to a 27-yard Charlie James field goal, however, and culled a moral victory out of the stand. A Batavia offense that would manage just 105 yards – 39 from sophomore running back Danny Seiton – retook the field but responded with a three-and-out.

Santacaterina scored on runs of 4 and 59 yards in the fourth quarter and added a 60-yard touchdown reception from punter Jack Delabar on a botched snap as Geneva escaped with its third straight win in the series. Both schools will move to the Upstate Eight Conference beginning next season, but for at least the first two years of that affiliation will not meet in Week 9.

"This was our Super Bowl, this was going to be the one," said Greco, a senior. "It hurts. We prepared all week. I can't even say how much these coaches prepared. They let us into this game. They showed us film, showed us keys and we followed it, we prepared very hard for this team. The score doesn't show it, but I believe we all laid it on the line."

Coaching against Geneva for the 25th straight fall, Batavia coach Mike Gaspari said both sides generally know each other's schemes well and the game boils down to who plays better.

Geneva at least found one thing to be surprised about: James' ejection after an unnecessary roughness call on a punt with 7:37 to go in the third quarter. The senior wide receiver/place kicker will miss the Vikings' first-round playoff game – against an opponent to be determined today – as junior Dan Hince steps in at placekicker.

"Brutally tough. I feel for the kid," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said of James. "He doesn't have a mean bone in his body. It was an overreaction again but you've got to keep yourself out of those types of situations."

Largely accustomed to breaking away early during last season's run to the IHSA Class 7A state title game, the Vikings needed overtime to defeat Kaneland last week before mudding it up with the Bulldogs for most of Friday night.

"Their linebackers flowed to the ball very well," Santacaterina said. "Our line, we had a tough start. Our backs did, too. We weren't finding the hole very well, but we knew we were going to eventually break it open."

Just like last year. Sort of.

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