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WW South ends the discussion, silences Geneva

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Geneva's statement was it deserves mention among the state's top football programs.

Wheaton Warrenville South, however, settled the argument.

The host Tigers dominated the first half of Friday's Class 7A second-round game at Red Grange Field in Wheaton, then held off Geneva's second-half push to win 30-16.

"The last couple games we've been fortunate to have some big wins," Tigers quarterback Reilly O'Toole said of a cumulative 122-6 margin, "but this week was tough - and we knew it was going to be tough. We had a great first half, and the second half we need to improve on."

No. 2 seed WW South (10-1), advancing to next week's 7A quarterfinal at St. Rita, a 34-14 winner over Marian Catholic, led 23-0 at halftime then saw No. 3 Geneva (9-2) respond with 16 unanswered points.

"If we would have put up maybe a touchdown or two in the first half it would have been a different story," said Geneva senior defensive tackle Frank Boenzi, who added fullback and tight end duties when the Vikings made their move. "But we didn't and that's the score, that's the outcome, that's what it is."

WW South began with the confidence of a champion, converting three fourth-down plays that each continued a touchdown drive. Mack Tracey's pass off a fake punt led to O'Toole's 21-yard touchdown pass to Steve Kmiotek, and next time out O'Toole hit Greg McAndrew on fourth-and-2 for a 42-yard touchdown pass and 13-0 lead.

A costly Geneva penalty on a fourth-and-12 play helped out WW South, and Matt Rogers immediately scored on a 21-yard run for a 20-0 Tigers lead at 5:31 of the second quarter. Nick Immekus' 25-yard field goal closed the first-half scoring.

Just because Geneva had only 3 first downs didn't mean it was over.

"I wanted to stay patient, stay the course and let's see what happens," Geneva coach Rob Wicinski said.

He stuck with the ground game, and Michael Santacaterina made it 23-6 on a 2-yard run at 6:05 of the third quarter.

Aided by a rash of penalties that plagued the Tigers in the second half, Charlie James converted a 29-yard field goal at 2:20 of the third, and just inside the fourth quarter Geneva pulled off its own fake punt. Jake Landau wrestled Jack Delabar's rainmaker pass away from a defender.

"I just threw it up there as high as I could and he made a big play," said Delabar, who then caught an 11-yard touchdown pass from Brandon Beitzel to bring the Vikings within 23-16 with 8:19 left to play.

And the Tigers were nervous.

"I remember thinking to myself, 'Oh man, this could be it, we've got to step it up,' " said WW South defensive end Matt Ives.

Geneva forced a three-and-out, but Ives did step it up, forcing a fumble recovered by Mike Heaton.

The Tigers didn't score that possession, but Joe Krob's interception led to Rogers' second touchdown run for the 30-16 final. WW South's Tom LaBelle picked off another pass with 2:03 left to basically close the book.

"A quality program, a team on the rise trying to get into the bigger division, and they have nothing to be ashamed about," WW South coach Ron Muhitch said of Geneva. "They played great football and I'm proud of our kids for hanging in there and pulling the game off when we needed to."

Santacaterina, who ran for 83 yards to Rogers' 88, was among the few starters back from Geneva's 7A title game loss to East St. Louis.

"No one really expected anything of us, and we fought hard all year," he said. "From the first day at camp we came together as a team, and we fought all season, overcame everything. We had a great year."

Wicinski said: "We always talked about we need to get into the fourth quarter with (WW South), they've not been in the fourth quarter with anybody. And by gosh we were there and we just couldn't finish the drives. We just didn't make the last plays. I'm really proud of them, though. They fought hard."