

# Batavia-Geneva an oldie... and still very much a goodie

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Editor's note: Craig Brueske and Dave Heun have a combined 40-plus years experience covering Batavia, Geneva and St. Charles football games. Today, they take a look at 10 reasons that make the St. Charles East-St. Charles North and Batavia-Geneva rivalry games so great.

You know it's there, almost year-round, but you don't hear the combatants talk about it constantly. It qualifies as a rivalry for the ages, not just one pitting a couple of towns joined at the hip.

So it is with Batavia vs. Geneva on the football field, or any other field or sports venue. It is the game that makes or breaks seasons, and goes into the memory banks for an eternity.

So what is it that makes the Batavia-Geneva rivalry the grandest in the region and maybe even in the state?

Let us count the top 10 reasons:

1) Longevity has to count for something. When Batavia comes calling to Geneva's Burgess Field on Friday night, it will mark the 90th time these two have banged heads. That means some players may have had great-great-grandfathers competing against each other, so the tradition just carries on from generation to generation.

2) When two towns are rivals for this long, there is always anticipation of the "game for the ages," or at least that time when both teams are conference champion contenders. The series between these clubs has been as close as you can get (Geneva with 42 wins, Batavia with 42 wins and five ties), but the past four years, they've been battling for the top conference spot.

3) When you finally have that "game for the ages," you should be sure to make it a classic. Batavia and Geneva did not disappoint in October of 2003 with a four-overtime thriller won by the Bulldogs 20-17.

4) These fans don't even like each other's public address announcer on game nights. For years, Genevans felt it was like finger nails on a blackboard when the Batavia announcer bellowed "First down .... BAAAA....TAAAA ....VIAAAA!! "

Geneva fans have since countered with the equally annoying "That's another Geneva ... FIRST DOWN!! " And Batavia fans believe the Geneva announcer belongs in the "homer" Hall of Fame.

5) If you can't beat them in basketball, and many rarely do beat Batavia in basketball, then you want to be able to beat the Bulldogs on the football field.

6) Unlike a town like St. Charles, Aurora, Glen Ellyn or Naperville, where East and West or North and South teams from the same town compete in rivalry games, kids from Geneva and Batavia have not come from the same middle schools and feeder programs. Thus, there is the mystery of not really knowing the opponent as well.

7) A win or a loss in this game becomes the key moment in a high school career, no matter what kind of success was enjoyed or failure endured in between. But it isn't taken so seriously that the rivalry has been plagued with unsportsmanlike incidents amongst players or fans, which is a testament to the rivalry and the sportsmanship both schools have displayed.

8) Everything competitive about a Batavia-Geneva rivalry trickles down. If the Batavia Boosters come up with a good idea or a nice addition or donation for one of their programs, it is incumbent upon the Geneva Boosters to come up with something as good or better, and vice versa.

9) Coaches are as important in a rivalry as the players. Those with long tenures naturally had the most impact. Geneva's Jerry Auchstetter tops the "legends" list and the Batavia coaches who had to endure many losses at his hands were Tuenis Tait and Mike Rumpel. Current Batavia coach Mike Gaspari is writing his own history book, being at the helm of the Bulldogs for more than 20 years. His teams made life miserable for Geneva coaches through much of the 1980s and 1990s.

10) Most importantly, the rivalry has entered a new stratosphere on the football field because both teams are championship caliber.

Because it was Geneva that was down for so long and more recently rose to the top, I will finish with some thoughts and comments from Geneva players from the past two seasons who helped get that program back on track with coach Rob Wicinski. The comments could have come from any players on either side in the past 90 years and they would still hold true:

Nick Herrera, 2006 graduate, and featured running back for Vikings for three seasons: "The Batavia game is important because it is the most hyped-up game of the season and everyone in town and school wants you to win. You learn early on that Batavia is your top rival, but you don't realize how much so until your first varsity sports event."

Mark Carlson, 2006 graduate, tight end for two seasons: "I think what makes it so special is that Batavia is so close and you see those guys in stores and around the area, and you just develop an attitude that you have to beat them, and it intensifies the rivalry. Even in middle school, you know Batavia is an important game."

Nick Scofield, 2005 graduate, offensive lineman for three years: "In the past years, before our senior season, we had always lost to Batavia, so we felt it was time to get our respect. We were 4-0 and wanted to beat Batavia to be the only undefeated team in conference. These games were always so hyped up; you knew there were going to be a ton of people there. I knew in middle school that Batavia was always the best team, but that our team (2004 season) was one that could eventually beat them."

Alex Pokorny, starting quarterback for three seasons and 2005 graduate: "I think the first thing that made the Batavia game so much more important than the other games was the tradition. I moved to Geneva halfway through my freshman year and wasn't really fully aware of the intensity until the night of the Batavia game my sophomore year in 2002. I had never seen the passion that was poured out before, during, and after that game and from that night on I understood what it meant. It will be even more special this year because there are so many things on the line."

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