



## Ratay returns in impressive fashion for Geneva

By Craig Brueske | Daily Herald Correspondent

Published: 9/28/2007 12:22 AM

You could say that Michael Ratay is making up for lost time.

Through five games, the Geneva junior running back leads all area players in scoring with 12 touchdowns (10 rushing, 2 receiving).

He has rushed for 540 yards on 104 carries (5.19-yard average) and is coming off a career-best 177-yard, 26-carry, 3-touchdown performance during the Vikings' 37-14 triumph over Sycamore last weekend.

Pretty gaudy numbers by high school football standards.

Even more impressive numbers considering that a year ago at this time, Ratay was watching games from the bench while trying to maneuver the sideline with crutches after suffering a broken fibula and torn ankle ligaments during a football camp held last July.

Meanwhile out on the playing field, his older brother, Shaun, was capturing a great deal of the headlines while guiding the Vikings all the way to a Class 6A state semifinal berth from his starting quarterback position.

"It was pretty tough not being out there," admitted Michael. "I had always wanted to play on the same football team with my brother. A lot of guys on the team were my brother's friends who I had always looked up to."

Rather than feeling sorry for himself, the younger Ratay did his best to fit in.

"I wanted to be a part of the program so I did what I could from the sideline," said Michael. "What made things a little easier was the success the team was having. I was very proud of what Shaun and the rest of the team was doing out there."

"It was quite a setback just when he was primed for the season," said Geneva coach Rob Wicinski. "I also knew how much he was looking forward to playing with his brother. But he remained very positive with the team."

Unbeknownst to some, Michael did return to the playing field last year -- for one play.

"We actually got him a carry in our first playoff game (against Grant in a 42-14 Viking win)," said Wicinski.

After that game, Michael was officially shut down for the rest of the postseason -- before playing basketball last winter.

While Shaun is now attending Northern Illinois University, Michael has fully recovered from his injuries -- thanks to a vigorous off-season spent both in the weight room and in physical therapy.

"I went to physical therapy a couple times a week during the summer," said Ratay. "My (left) leg was fine during basketball season but it was still weaker than the other one."

Once your body is back on the mend, the next thing you have to work on is your frame of mind.

"There's always the element of the physicalness of the sport," said Wicinski, who blew out a knee (second-degree ACL tear) and suffered a shoulder injury during his playing days as an outside linebacker at NIU from 1981-85. "But a huge element is mental. How am I going to feel when I first come back?"

"In practice, we made it a point with him during our interior drills in doubles (sessions). The first hit is always a relief when you get up and realize that all of the pieces are in place. I don't see it fazing him (Ratay). He's always throwing his body around."

Injuries are nothing new for Ratay, who was called up to the varsity ranks late during his freshman season.

"We were playing Sycamore and I carried the ball twice," said Ratay. "I broke my finger on one of the runs and kept getting hit on the same place in practice throughout the rest of the playoffs. I wound up having pins inserted into my finger."

Now injury free, Ratay has helped carry the load for the unbeaten Vikings, who play host to DeKalb tonight at Burgess Field.

"I think he's in a good place right now," said Wicinski.

And so are the Vikings.