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## Viking victory on minds of many

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 Comments (No comments posted.)

GENEVA – Geneva High School football center Eric Strauss said his teammates would continue a game-day tradition today before going to their playoff game in East St. Louis.

The team gathers at the grave of Dustin Villarreal, a 15-year-old Geneva football freshman who died in May 2006. Villarreal had such a passion for football that players and teammates wore their jerseys to his funeral.

“It’s just a chance for us to reflect on how lucky we truly are, how games – as much as they seem important to us – aren’t that important in the grand scheme of things,” said Strauss, 17. “It gives us that little extra kick we need.”

Strauss and other Geneva students and community members hope that an extra kick will push the football team past the East St. Louis Flyers.

The IHSA Class 7A state quarterfinal is at 3 p.m. today.

So many Geneva residents want to watch the game that a caravan of buses has been organized, Geneva Sports Boosters President Pat Hofstetter said.

“This has been an incredible year from a fan standpoint,” said Hofstetter, 49, whose son Cory is a defensive end on the team. “It’s fun to watch. It’s better than going to some college games. The excitement is there in the stadiums. It’s the stuff that we just don’t want to miss out on.”

Kelly Hilgart, a 17-year-old Geneva senior, said the fans made the atmosphere more exciting.

“I love going to football games,” said Hilgart, whose boyfriend, Jordan Boser, is a linebacker. “It’s such a good atmosphere. Everyone is cheering. It brings our school together.

“I think it would be great if, as a whole community, many people could watch and support the team.”

Hilgart will be traveling to today’s game.

“It will be a good experience to have in high school,” she said.

Jillae Langman, a 15-year-old Geneva sophomore, said the players were excited but have a good attitude.

“I think they’re going to win because they’ve been winning a lot,” she said. “They’re confident. They’re not cocky about it.”

Langman said she planned to go to the game to watch her boyfriend, junior football player Chris Baldwin.

Jen Smith, a 17-year-old Geneva senior, said the sophomore cheerleaders would join the varsity cheerleaders in East St. Louis to add school spirit.

“It’s just to show, ‘You know what, we can do this,’ and root our team on,” said Smith, a varsity cheerleader.



Geneva High School cheerleaders, Linsey McDowall, right, and Nicolette Orichiella practice cheers in the Mac Olson gym at the school Thursday. (Bob Gerrard photo)

Hofstetter said the Vikings would have to beat a tough Flyers team.

"This is a great team we're going to go play," he said. "We're at this level now, by the third round, you're not going to hit weak teams."

Staying on the same path the team has taken all season could lead them to victory, he said.

"I think the team needs to do everything they've been doing all year," he said. "This team has got the talent. If we continue on the track this team's been on, we can win this."

Strauss said he thought that the team had intangible qualities that could help them win.

"We're a really tight team," he said. "There's not fighting amongst us. We just really have a special bond this year that can take us further than we've ever gone before."

Geneva High School Principal Tom Rogers said he planned to wear the same shirt, sweatshirt and jacket that he had worn to other games.

"It's been a real exciting fall," he said. "I think it just really helps the climate around here. There just seems to be a constant buzz in the halls."

## COMMENTS

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