



## Early birds get the best seats to watch the Geneva Vikings win

By Nancy Gier | Daily Herald Staff

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It was 10 a.m., but Chris Diemand and Tommy Kersting of Geneva already had been outside Geneva High School's Burgess Field for seven hours.

"We got here at 3:03 this morning," Diemand said Saturday, warming his hands over a mushroom-shaped aluminum propane heater. "We want to get a good seat. They have a great following because of the success of the program."

Diemand and Kersting already had tickets but were first in line to capture the best seats for the game that began at 1:30 p.m.

It turned out their efforts were worth it when the unbeaten Geneva Vikings defeated the Carmel Catholic High School Corsairs of Mundelein 35-21 in the Class 7A Illinois High School Association quarterfinal football playoff game.

Kersting is the stepfather of the Vikings' star running back, Michael Ratay, and Diemand coached some of the players in the Tri-Cities Youth football program.

"It's a great feeder program," Kersting said. "The youth program and the success of the high school program make for some great seasons. For the boys, it is the time of their lives."

It will be a time to remember for parents, too.

Nearby, Shelly James of Geneva was unpacking chips and peanuts, and laying out a tray of double-fudge brownies under a Viking blue canopy for a parents tailgate party. A Viking blue plastic sheet hung from one side, offering scant protection from wind gusts as the temperatures hovered around 40 degrees under dark gray skies. There were brats and venison burgers to put on the grill later.

"It's very exciting, but we also get very, very nervous," James said. She is the mother of wide-receiver Charlie James.

"I know I get more nervous than the boys do," said Dan Shannon. His son Brett Shannon is a linebacker.

"The boys don't get as nervous because they're too busy concentrating on what they have to accomplish on the field," James said.

Other parents sipped coffee and talked about the advantages a running game could offer on the blustery day. Fans huddled under blankets and occupied some of the chairs that had been lined up hours before the ticket gate opened at noon.

Denise Ross of Elburn, who lives in the Geneva school district and has children at Geneva High School, stood out from the crowd, wrapped in a pink blanket dotted with blue figures of the character Eeyore from Winnie-the-Pooh.

"I have no players or cheerleaders, but I am truly a supporter of all sports," Ross said. She had arrived at 7

a.m.

Billy Gregory, 14, a Geneva High School freshman, tossed a football with his cousin Phil Young, 18, of Chaska, Minn. Gregory's brother, Greg, plays left guard. The exercise probably did more to keep them warm than the sweatshirts they wore.

"I'm here to tailgate, have some fun and watch them win," Gregory said.

"I've heard a lot about the Vikings," Young said, "and I'm here to see a Geneva win."

No one on the Geneva side of the field was disappointed.