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Class 7A: Geneva 35, Carmel 21

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Led by the fully bearded Michael Ratay, 15 Geneva football players have gotten themselves into a hairy situation.

"We call it 'No-Shave November,' " junior receiver Michael Santacaterina said.

From the beginning of the month, for as long as Geneva is still playing football, these Vikings are letting it all grow out.

They'll put the shavers away for at least one more week after Geneva knocked off Carmel 35-21 Saturday at home in the Class 7A quarterfinals.



Geneva (12-0) will be back on Burgess Field next week to face Crystal Lake South (10-2) in the semifinals. The 12 victories are the most in one season in school history.

"My offensive linemen block their butts off for me, so I have to bust it for them," said Ratay, who rushed for 172 yards and three touchdowns on 26 carries. "All the numbers, it's because of the offensive line."

Ratay has rushed for 2,596 yards this season and has scored 43 touchdowns.

His 4-yard scoring run in the first quarter answered Carmel's opening salvo--quarterback Andrew Nerup's 27-yard touchdown run.

Carmel (10-2) went ahead 14-7 in the second quarter on Nerup's 53-yard touchdown pass to Jimmy Miller.

Geneva's rapidly improving quarterback Brandon Beitzel (10-for-14 for 106 yards) hooked up with Santacaterina on an 8-yard touchdown just 53 seconds before halftime to tie the game 14-14.

"The offensive line did a great job, and defenses have to play Michael first," said Beitzel, who also scored on a 1-yard run at the end of the third quarter. "When that happens, it opens up our passing game."

After third-quarter touchdowns by Ratay (14-yard run) and Beitzel had provided a 28-14 Geneva lead, Carmel came within 28-21 midway through the fourth quarter on a Mike Taylor 6-yard TD run. Taylor finished with 159 yards on 25 carries.

Ratay was constantly breaking tackles against a Carmel defense whose starters had given up only one rushing touchdown in its first 11 games. He broke two more on his game-clinching 15-yard touchdown run with 2:21 left.

Ratay has a unique way of rewarding his offensive linemen.

"They come over to my house every Monday, and my step-uncle (Chad Bullock) cooks them steaks," Ratay said. "With every playoff win, the cut gets better.

"Last week we had ribeyes. This week it's filet mignons."

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