

## FOOTBALL: How sweet it is

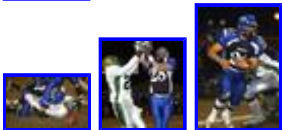
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By Steve Bittinger

Geneva's Michael Ratay, left, and Jason Holmes celebrate Friday night's victory in Geneva. The Vikings defeated Crystal Lake South to advance to the state finals in Champaign.

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By Ryan Lowry  
 Geneva Republican  
 Sat Nov 22, 2008, 01:01 AM CST

Geneva, IL -

The massive celebration between the Geneva football team, its fans and students said it all. The Vikings were on their way to the IHSA state finals.

Michael Ratay's 52-yard touchdown run put the Vikings ahead and Trevor Hyslop's interception with under two minutes to play put the finishing touches on a 25-21 victory over a stingy No. 6 Crystal Lake South squad in a Class 7A semifinal game Friday night in Geneva.

The Vikings (13-0) take on the winner of Saturday's Glenbard West-East St. Louis semifinal matchup next Saturday in the finals at 4 p.m. in Champaign. It is the first trip to the state championship game since Geneva finished runner-up in Class 3A in 1975.

The second half featured five lead changes after the Vikings trailed 9-3 at the break.

Ratay, though, had the final say on the scoreboard.

One play after the Gators (10-3) scored to go ahead 21-18, Ratay burst through the middle and went untouched 52 yards to the end zone. Sean Grady's extra point made it 25-21 with 9:57 left. The Gators never made it past midfield the rest of the game. Grady had a fumble recovery, the defense forced a punt and Hyslop picked off a pass with 1:57 to play.

Ratay, who scored three touchdowns to bring his season total to 44, scampered in from 30 yards out on the Vikings' first drive of the second half to tie it at 9-all. On a bad extra-point snap, Grady eluded the rush and found Cory Hofstetter in the back of the end zone for an 11-9 lead.

The Gators answered with a touchdown to retake the lead 15-11, but in the final seconds of the third quarter, Ratay bulled in from one yard to put the Vikings back in front 18-15. Ratay was held to 18 yards on eight carries in the first half, but finished with 152 yards on 28 carries.

Quarterback Brandon Beitzel threw two interceptions (his first of the playoffs), but still had a solid night. The junior completed 10-of-20 passes for 168 yards. His top targets were Jason Holmes (four catches, 79 yards) and Brandon Lee (three catches, 41 yards).

Sparked by a fake punt, the Gators jumped ahead 3-0 on a 28-yard field goal with 6:29 remaining in the first quarter. Grady tied it on a 34-yard field goal three minutes later. The Gators, who dominated the first half on time of possession (16 minutes to eight minutes), went ahead 9-3 on a touchdown run

to cap a 14-play, 7-and-a-half minute drive with 3:30 left before halftime.

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