

This is a Sun-Times Spotlight article done on Geneva High School Senior Running Back Michael Ratay. Michael mentions RJ's in his Pre-game meal.

SUN-TIMES SPOTLIGHT BY TAYLOR BELL

MICHAEL RATAY

SENIOR | RUNNING BACK | 5-10 | 205 | GENEVA

Why football? I started playing flag football in second grade. I played basketball and baseball, but I stopped to focus on football. I like hitting guys, running around and breaking tackles and being with the guys in a team sport.

Coach Rob Wicinski said you are a once-in-a-lifetime kid. Is this a once-in-a-lifetime season? Yes. Going undefeated into the state-championship game is a rarity, especially with all the guys on the team, all friends in high school. Some of them go back with me to the Tri-City Chargers in seventh grade, like Brennan Quinn, Andrew Clawson and Frank Boenzi.

The most memorable of your 44 touchdowns? The last one that gave us the lead last Friday in the Class 7A

semifinal against Crystal Lake South. It was a 52-yard run in the fourth quarter, the last touchdown I scored on Burgess Field.

Who is your hero? Walter Payton. He never quit when he was running. He always gave his all. His running style was amazing, a combination of power and balance. He never took a play off. And he was a nice guy on and off the field.

Saturday's Class 7A championship game against East St. Louis? Last year, they beat us in the quarterfinals 34-26. They got a late touchdown on a fourth-and-17. We kept fighting, but they sacked our quarterback to seal the deal. This time, we want to give it our best game.

When you look back on 2008, what will be your most significant



"I'm not real fast, but I have deceptive speed," said Michael Ratay, who will lead Geneva against East St. Louis for the Class 7A title.

memory? Gaining a running clock against Batavia, our rival. They always give us a fight, but we came out focused, especially on our field. They beat us twice two years ago,

including the state semifinal. This year, when we beat them, we won the conference outright.

State title or a date with Lauren Conrad? The state title. We've been working for that for four years. That is my priority. But afterward, a date with L.C. doesn't sound bad.

Bears or Packers? I'm a Chargers fan. After LaDarian Tomlinson got there, I started to follow them.

The athlete you admire most? Tomlinson. He's having a bad year this season. But he was so good last year. I admire his ability to break tackles and score touchdowns, how diverse he is. That's why I wear No. 21, his number. I used to wear No. 22 for the Tri-City Chargers, but I asked for No. 21 as a freshman.

Dream prom date? Jessica Alba. If she was good enough for Derek Jeter, she is good enough for me.

Does it bother you that more major colleges aren't recruiting you? I'll worry about that after the season. I'm sending out tapes. Illinois,

Northern Illinois, Western Michigan and Dayton have shown interest. Some say I'm too slow [4.6] for my size [5-10, 205]. Some say they're looking for smaller backs with more speed or looking for bigger backs.

Superstition? Before every game, we go to the gravesite of [former teammate] Dustin Villarreal [who died May 5, 2006, of heart failure]. I drive in Jason Holmes' car and listen to the same music.

Pregame meal? Each Friday, my mother makes pancakes and eggs. Before each game, I go to R.J.'s Deli for a smoked turkey sandwich.

Your dream college? Iowa. Or any Big Ten school. I like Shonn Greene, the running back at Iowa. A lot of my friends go there. Playing in a Big Ten stadium would be amazing.

Describe your running style. I'm always trying to make contact and break tackles. I follow the holes that my offensive line opens up. Some say I'm slow, but I'm not that slow. I'm not real fast, but I have deceptive speed.