

A can't-miss for area high school athletes

When Tom Thayer played football at Joliet Catholic High School in the 1970s, he kept letters from colleges "that could have filled bushel baskets."

Why was he so popular? "Because I was the brother of Rick Thayer," he said.

Tom went on to a career at Notre Dame and with the Bears. He currently is the color analyst on Bears radio broadcasts.

But he has not forgotten what it is like to be a young athlete.

"The recruiting process was relatively easy for me because I had an older brother who was a successful athlete," he said. "But now I understand the loopholes and all the rigmarole that goes on."

"You go to a Nike camp, and somebody tells you you're the next Michael Jordan. You believe it. You get letters. The thing is, you can't let a letter from a university or institution make you believe you are their top recruit, or the guy they plan to



Dick
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look after."

Thayer cares. His nieces and nephews went through the recruiting process. He is a lifelong JCA booster.

He also has had the opportunity to see Jack Renkens' presentation recently. That's why he was instrumental in arranging for Renkens,

a national recruiting guru from Recruiting Realities, to present his program in Joliet.

Renkens, who explodes the myths of college recruiting, will appear at the Joliet Catholic Academy gymnasium at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday. The program, free of charge, is appropriate for all high school athletes — girls and boys in all sports, under-

classmen as well as upperclassmen — and their parents.

He will answer questions such as: Who is responsible for initiating the recruiting process? What avenues are available to student-athletes who want to participate at the college level and are not being recruited? Where do college programs obtain names and addresses for their initial recruiting pool? When does a student-athlete need to become a member of a recruiting pool? Why are there so many opportunities to participate in a collegiate athletic program that student-athletes don't know about?

"The first thing," Renkens said, "is that you need to be realistic about a kid's future, what level he or she can play on, and the tremendous opportunities that are available."

What Renkens terms "The Name Game" also is key.

"That's one of my big issues," he said. "If kids never heard of the school, they don't want to go there. They don't realize how difficult it is

at the D-II, D-III, NAIA and junior college levels to recruit. But some very good schools and programs have openings available."

Thayer's experience?

"If you were in football, basketball or baseball and were being recruited by the big guys, fine," he said. "But everybody else seemed to fall through the cracks."

"When I was growing up, football players looked at USC, Notre Dame, Michigan, Ohio State, Texas and everybody assumed those had to be the top academic institutions as well. But look at the list of the top 50 schools sometime, and for the most part, they aren't the names you hear every day."

"And even at Notre Dame, I was there with kids who never saw the field. If they had gone a division lower, they would have been full-time participants."

Thayer mentioned James Randle, the standout running back on JCA's 1996 state runnerup football team. He went on to a solid career, as a

starter for much of his four years, at Northern Michigan.

"We always judge athletes on the D-I level, and that's unfair," Thayer said. "Even if statistically Randle was as good as anyone, there were a hundred guys ahead of him that were going to the big D-I programs. But there was a good opportunity out there for him."

Everyone offers advice on where a high school athlete should play in college. The advice is well intended — and often, wrong.

"I give kids and their parents a lot of information that they are being misled on," Renkens said. "But this is not a boring speech. It's a real interactive, in-your-face, humorous presentation."

For more on Renkens' presentation, check the Recruiting Realities web site at recruitingrealities.com. The information and video clips there will convince you this presentation is one you cannot afford to miss.

Literally.