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Junior and Varsity Spears Headed for Playoffs

The Niagara Varsity Spears (8-0) completed an undefeated regular season Saturday with a convincing 40-17 win over the visiting Mississauga Warriors (5-3). The Spears now enjoy a bye-week and will host an Adam Division semi-final on Saturday, August 5th at 4:00pm.

The Spears once again had to come from behind, as running back Holden Morales scored a 5-yard rushing TD on the Warriors' opening drive. A Mississauga interception on the ensuing Spears possession then set up Tomas Chester's 17-yard field goal to give the Warriors a 10-0 lead. Spears kicker Carlo Turavani returned the favour with a 27-yard field goal to open the second quarter. But it was linebacker Ryan Chmielewski's interception and 25-yard TD return on Mississauga's next possession that tied the game and seemed to shift the momentum to the Spears for the balance of the game. "I really think that was the turning point", said Head Coach Dave Howe. "Chummer read the play all the way, and reacted perfectly". Blake Allen's interception on the Warriors' next series set up quarterback Dave Benner's 13-yard TD pass to Giancarlo Rapanaro to give the Spears a 17-10 halftime lead.

James Savoie extended the lead early in the third quarter with a 50-yard punt return for a touchdown, his third of the year. Mississauga pounded the ball in from one yard out to momentarily close the gap to 24-17, but the Spears shut the door in the fourth quarter with two more TD passes, as Benner again hit Rapanaro from 29 yards out and threw to Jedd Gardner for a 43-yard major. Mississauga also conceded a safety for 2 points late in the game for the 40-17 final.

"We wanted to send a message that last year's championship wasn't a fluke", said Howe, referring to last year's OVFL title game, which the Spears took from the Warriors 25-22 in double overtime. "This was probably the most complete, attack-from-all-directions game we've played all year", said Howe. "We got the job done on the ground, through the air, on defense and on special teams. Dave Benner also had an exceptionally strong game. This was a nice set-up for the playoffs."

Offensive Stats (Varsity):

QB David Benner (Lakeshore): 10/19 passing for 184 yds, 3 TD, 1 INT
RB Jordan Barker (Sir Winston Churchill): 76 yds rushing on 24 carries
WR Giancarlo Rapanaro (St. Paul): 125 yds on 7 catches, 2 TDs
WR Jedd Gardner (St. Michael): 53 yds on 2 catches, 1 TD
SS James Savoie: 50 yd punt return for TD
K Carlo Turavani (Holy Cross): 5/5 PAT, 1 FG (25 yds)

Defensive Stats (Varsity):

DT Shane Baxter (Governor Simcoe): 6 tackles, 2 sacks
SS James Savoie (St. Michael): 8 tackles, 1 INT
LB Ryan Chmielewski (St. Francis): 8 tackles, 1 INT returned 25 yds for TD
DB Blake Allen (A.N. Myer): 3 tackles, 1 INT

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In the first game of the doubleheader, the JV Spears (3-4-1) lost to the Warriors (8-0) 51-15. Despite the loss, the Junior Spears still snagged the final playoff spot by virtue of Oshawa's 37-22 victory over the Halton Invictas later in the day.

Standout running back Jahmeek Murray scored on the Warriors' first possession with his first of four touchdowns on the day on an 11-yard run. Murray added two more rushing TDs and also caught a 48-yard TD pass from Warriors quarterback Chris Rosetti. In the process, Murray shattered the OVFL's single season rushing record, as Saturday's 249 yards gave him 2,023 yards on the season. He also tied the OVFL record for rushing touchdowns in a season with 22.

Trailing 44-0 at halftime, Niagara finally got on the scoreboard with two fourth quarter rushing touchdowns, as running back Aaron Sexton scored from 9 yards out and fullback Josh Hipperson hit the end zone from the 1-yard line. Sandwiched in between the two Niagara majors was an astonishing 105-yard rushing TD from Murray. Julian Tropea added a late rouge for the 51-15 final.

"It's not the finish we wanted, but the Warriors are a well-disciplined team, they executed to perfection and Jahmeek Murray is just an incredible talent" said Head Coach Brian Duguay. "The important thing is we're in the playoffs and happy to have another shot at Wentworth". Ironically, it was the single point earned in the Spears' quadruple-overtime loss to the Panthers in week three that made the difference in the final League standings. "Our team has improved a lot since that game, and we're looking forward to another shot at Wentworth", said Duguay. "It's a whole new season."

Offensive Stats (Junior):

QB Matthew Beardwood (West Park): 8/16 for 115 yds, 1 INT
RB Tyler Decou (St. Michael): 15 carries for 84 yds rushing
K/TE Julian Tropea (St. Michael): 2/2 PAT, 0/1 FG (miss from 25 yds), 1 rouge, 3 catches for 64 yds
TE Andrew Birnie (Denis Morris): 1 catch for 31 yds

Defensive Stats (Junior):

LB Adam Grilj (Blessed Trinity): 12½ tackles
LB Jamie Singleton (St. Paul): 1½ tackles, fumble recovery
DB Corey Davidson (Lakeshore): 1½ tackles, batted ball
DB Alex Hunchak (Centennial): 3½ tackles
LB Jamie Singleton (St. Paul): 2 tackles, 1 FR returned 70 yds, 1 TD

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Next Up... The Junior Varsity Spears travel to Wentworth Friday at 8:00pm for a wildcard playoff game. The Varsity Spears enjoy a first round bye and will host the Conference semi-final on Saturday, August 5th at 4:00pm at West Park High School in St. Catharines.

Both Head Coaches would be pleased to speak with the media and may be contacted directly. Junior Varsity Head Coach Brian Duguay may be reached at (905)687-9396 (h), (905)327-2465 (c), or via e-mail at duguay@niagaraspears.com . Varsity Head Coach Dave Howe may be reached at (905)937-4699 (h), (905)321-0973 (c), or via e-mail at howe@niagaraspears.com .

Additional information on the Niagara Spears may be found at www.niagaraspears.com. **Gameday pictures are available upon request.** Additional information on the OVFL, including standings, schedules and comprehensive individual and team statistics may be found at www.ovfootball.ca .

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