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Media Release – August 6, 2006.

Spears Win, Headed For Conference Final

The Niagara Varsity Spears will host the OVFL Adam Conference final after defeating the London Falcons 29-21 at West Park High School in St. Catharines on Saturday. Their opponents will be the Guelph Bears, who upset the Essex Ravens 37-24 in Essex later in the day.

The Spears got on the board early, as quarterback Dave Benner connected with Giancarlo Rapanaro for a 15-yard TD. But London tied it up when Falcons quarterback Blake Lamond scrambled into the end zone from 12 yards out. After Linebacker Ryan Chmielewski's safety opened the second quarter, a 1-yard rushing TD from Jerimy Hipperson and Benner's 69-yard TD pass to receiver Jedd Gardner gave the Spears a 23-7 lead. However a late rushing touchdown from London's Aaron Geisler narrowed the lead to 23-14 at halftime. In the third quarter, Falcons Running back Mike Talbot shaved the margin to three points with a 7-yard rushing TD. But James Savoie's 66-yard return on the ensuing kick-off set up a Brett Maitland 5-yard rushing touchdown to give the Spears a 29-21 lead they would not relinquish. Halfback Curtis Neheli's interception late in the fourth quarter snuffed out the Falcons' final drive to seal the victory for the Spears.

"This was by far our toughest game of the year", said Head Coach Dave Howe. "London is a big, physical team, their tackling was sound and they had a very strong running game. We had a tough time moving the ball; fortunately our special teams really made a difference and helped give us good field position. Our defense also really stepped up when they had to." Howe anticipates a shootout against Guelph's high-powered offense next week. "I think the game will come down to defense", said Howe. "We need a solid week of practice and we'll have to stay very focussed."

The Spears were playing with heavy hearts Saturday, as Eddie Wright, a defensive end from their 2005 championship team died in a car accident early Thursday morning. The team dedicated the game to the 18 year-old St. Michael student and presented the game ball to Wright's parents following the game.

Offensive Stats (Varsity):

QB David Benner (Lakeshore): 11/21 passing for 166 yds, 2 TDs
RB Jerimy Hipperson (Denis Morris): 84 yds rushing on 19 carries, 1 TD
TE Brett Maitland (Denis Morris): 6 yds rushing on 1 carry, 1 TD
WR Giancarlo Rapanaro (St. Paul): 3 catches for 42 yds, 1 TD
WR Jedd Gardner (St. Michael): 1 catch for 69 yds, 1 TD

Defensive Stats (Varsity):

DE Steve Cecchini (Denis Morris): 10 tackles, 1 sack
SS James Savoie (St. Michael): 7 tackles, KO returns of 55 and 66 yds
HB Curtis Neheli (Blessed Trinity): 6½ tackles, 1 interception, 1 batted ball
HB Martin Pytlewski (Lakeshore): 7 tackles, 1 sack
LB John Surla (St. Michael): 6½ tackles
LB Ryan Chmielskewski (St. Francis): 5 tackles, 1 sack, 1 safety
DB Sebastian Howard (St. Michael): 4 tackles, 1 batted ball, 1 fumble recovery

→ OVER →

In Saturday's Junior Varsity action, the Spears' winning ways on the road came crashing to a halt in Hamilton with a 40-2 thrashing at the hands of the Steel City Ironmen. The first quarter was a tight defensive battle, as Steel City scored on quarterback Nicholas Williams' 62-yard TD bomb to receiver Nathan Lane and a strong defensive stand by the Spears forced the Ironmen to concede a safety for a 7-2 lead. But it was all Steel City in the second quarter, as a safety, two rushing touchdowns and a 26-yard field goal extended the Ironmen lead to 27-2 at halftime. The Spears simply couldn't mount any meaningful offensive threat in the second half, as the Ironmen contained the Spears' usually strong ground game. Two Steel City passing touchdowns in the third quarter put the game out of reach for the 40-2 final.

Despite the lopsided score, Head Coach Brian Duguay was happy with his team's overall progress this season. "We had a very young team this year, but we met our goal of making the playoffs and we won a big playoff game against Wentworth", said Duguay. "My hat goes off to the players and coaches...it was a lot of fun this year. We'll have a lot of returning players next year, so I'm pretty optimistic".

Offensive Stats (Junior):

QB Matthew Beardwood (West Park): 3/10 passing for 16 yds
RB Tyler Decou (St. Michael): 16 carries for 42 yds rushing
RB Aaron Sexton (St. Paul): 3 carries for 10 yds
WR Shane McGilly (St. Paul): 3 catches for 16 yds

Defensive Stats (Junior):

DB Derrick Peachy (Denis Morris): 4½ tackles, 1 batted ball
DB Justin Hipperson (Denis Morris): 3½ tackles, 3 batted balls, 1 interception
LB Alex Hunchak (Centennial): 3½ tackles, 1 sack
LB Adam Grilj (Blessed Trinity): 2½ tackles, 1 sack
DL Jordan Weldon (Lakeport): 1 tackle, 1 sack

NEXT UP...

The Niagara Varsity Spears (9-0) host the Guelph Bears (8-2) on Saturday August 12th for the OVFL's Adam Conference title. Kick-off at West Park High School is at 4:00pm. In the Wettges Conference final, the Etobicoke Eagles (7-2) will host the Toronto Thunder (8-2). Conference winners will move on to the OVFL championship game, scheduled for Saturday, August 19th at 6:00pm in Oshawa.

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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