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Spears De-Claw Bears, Headed for Championship Game

The undefeated Niagara Varsity Spears have a date at Ivor Wynne Stadium next weekend, after handily defeating the visiting Guelph Bears 38-14 Saturday to win their second straight Adam Conference championship. Their opponents in the Ontario Varsity Football League championship game will be the only team to have ever defeated the Spears, the Etobicoke Eagles, who beat the Toronto Thunder 30-21 Saturday to capture the Wettges Conference crown.

Carlo Turavani's 44-yard field goal gave the Spears an early first quarter lead, and quarterback Dave Benner quickly stretched it to 10-0 when he connected with Giancarlo Rapanaro on a 26-yard touchdown strike. Sebastian Howard then picked off Bears quarterback Lance Fergin to set the tone for the day. After trading punts, Benner threw 45 yards to tight end Brett Maitland for his first of two touchdowns on the day. The Bears settled for a field goal late in the second quarter, but Benner responded by running into the end zone from a yard out to give the Spears a 24-3 halftime lead.

After Guelph kicked a field goal to open the second half, Benner once again found Maitland for a 29-yard TD toss. Having been frustrated by the Spears defense most of the day, Bears' running back Nick Fitzgibbons finally found the end zone courtesy of a 10-yard TD pass from Lance Fergin. Dylan Heap's 2-point conversion closed the gap to 31-14, but Spears fullback Ricky Savage quickly responded with a 5-yard TD run to cement the 38-14 win for the Spears.

According to Spears Head Coach Dave Howe, it was the week leading up to the title game that really made the difference. "It was a very focused week of practice for us, very business-like", said Howe. "Players and coaches alike put a lot of time and energy into game prep. We knew who we had to key on and our guys executed exceptionally well". By comparison, the Spears' depth on both sides of the ball can be confounding for opposing teams. "I heard a comment this past week that we have no players in the top 10 on defense. To me, that's a compliment and reflects both our depth and consistency".

The Spears will attempt to become the first-ever OVFL repeat champions when they take on the Eagles on Saturday at 6pm at Ivor Wynne Stadium in Hamilton. The Eagles handed the Spears their only loss of the past two seasons, taking a 34-13 decision last June in Etobicoke. Howe is glad to have another crack at the Eagles. "The first thing I think of when I hear 'Etobicoke' is a blistering hot day where we had the game in hand and let it slip away", said Howe. "It's a bit of a black mark for us, so we've got something to prove".

Offensive Stats (Varsity):

QB Dave Benner (Lakeshore): 10/18 for 258 yds passing, 3 TDs; 13 yds rushing, 1 rushing TD
RB Jeremy Hipperson (Denis Morris): 134 yds rushing on 14 carries, 1 catch for 22 yds
FB Rick Savage (Port Colborne): 55 yds rushing on 11 carries, 1 TD
TE Brett Maitland (Denis Morris): 2 catches for 74 yds, 2 TDs
WR Giancarlo Rapanaro (St. Paul): 5 catches for 132 yds, 1 TD
K Carlo Turavani (Holy Cross): 1/1 field goal (40 yds), 5/5 PAT

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Defensive Stats (Varsity):

SS James Savoie (St. Michael): 9½ tackles
LB Ryan Chmielskewski (St. Francis): 7 tackles
DE Steve Cecchini (Denis Morris): 6½ tackles
HB Curtis Neheli (Blessed Trinity): 6 tackles, 1 batted ball
DB Sebastian Howard (St. Michael): 3½ tackles, 1 interception
DB David Benner (Lakeshore): 2 tackles, 1 batted ball, 1 fumble recovery

NEXT UP...

The Niagara Spears (10-0) will face the Etobicoke Eagles (8-2) on Saturday August 19th for the OVFL Varsity Championship. Kick-off at Hamilton's Ivor Wynne Stadium is 6:00pm. The Junior Varsity championship game between the Kingston Grenadiers and the Steel City Ironmen gets under way at 1:00pm.

Head Coach Dave Howe would be pleased to speak with the media and may be contacted directly 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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