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Niagara Spears Post Pair of Wins in Home Opener

Both the Junior and Varsity squads of the Niagara Spears kicked off their 2007 Ontario Varsity Football League season in winning fashion Saturday at West Park High School in St. Catharines. The first game of the doubleheader was a seesaw battle, with the Junior Spears topping the Hamilton Ironmen 29-22. In the Varsity match-up, the Spears dominated the Guelph Bears 46-3.

The Junior Spears got off to a shaky start on special teams, as the Ironmen returned the opening kick-off to the Niagara 8 yard-line. The defense held tough however, and Hamilton had to settle for a rouge on a missed field goal attempt. On the next series, Hamilton's Cody Lynch returned a Spears punt 95 yards for the major to give the Ironmen an early 8-0 lead. A 24-yard field goal from Spears kicker Jon Demetriades closed the gap to 8-3. Spears QB Matt Beardwood, who went 8/11 and 128 yards passing in the first half, then connected with Gary Spero on a 54-yard TD pass to give the Spears a 9-8 lead. A 17-yard field goal from Demetriades, a conceded safety and a rouge extended the Spears lead to 15-8 at halftime. Hamilton regained a 22-15 lead in the third quarter on a 52-yard rushing touchdown by Alex Pongetti and a 15-yard TD catch by Davor Stojanov. The fourth quarter was all Niagara though, as Beardwood ran the ball in from one yard out to tie the game and then re-connected with Spero on a heart-stopping, acrobatic 45-yard TD pass to take a 29-22 lead. Hamilton's final two possessions were snuffed out by back-to-back interceptions by Niagara defensive back Daren Butcher.

Spears Head Coach Brian Duguay knew his team had their work cut out for them against the defending OVFL Junior champions. "We knew this was going to be a battle, but our guys showed a ton of heart and determination out there today. We faced a lot of adversity, especially early on, but they just found a way to battle back", said Duguay. As unhappy as he was with special teams, Duguay was pleased with his team's defensive effort. "We only gave up eight points to their offense, and our offense was really starting to click. We've got more depth and experience this year, and it shows."

The Junior Spears (1-0) are back in action next Sunday at 4:00pm as they visit the Wentworth Panthers (1-0).

OFFENSIVE STATS - JUNIOR

QB Matt Beardwood: 13/23 passing for 233 yds, 2 TDs, 1 rushing TD, QB rating: 102.26

RB Devon Egerter: 25 carries for 96 yds rushing, 1 reception for 7 yds

RB Andrew Barry: 14 carries for 50 yds rushing

WR Gary Spero: 9 receptions for 181 yds, 2 TDs

K Jon Demetriades: 2/3 FGs from 27 and 17 yds

DEFENSIVE STATS - JUNIOR

DB Darren Butcher: 1 tackle, 2 INTs

DB Justin Hipperson: 1 tackle, 1 INT

LB Ryan Saunders: 3½ tackles

LB Cody Herbert: 3 tackles

DB Zak Marchant: 2½ tackles, 1 BB

In the Varsity match-up, Guelph quarterback Ryan Lovejoy was knocked out of the game with a shoulder injury on the third play from scrimmage after being sacked by Spears defensive end Steve Cecchini. The Bears' fortunes didn't improve on the ensuing punt, as a mishandled snap and a poor kick sent the ball directly into the arms of Tyler DeMoel who easily scampered into the end zone. A rushing touchdown from Rick Savage (18 yards), two rushing touchdowns from Jerimy Hipperson (3 yards and 41 yards), and an 18-yard field goal from Julian Tropea gave the Spears a comfortable 31-0 halftime lead. Starting quarterback Nick Coutu had a strong first half, going 4/5 passing for 61 yards before making way for Evan Burke. The Spears' ground game was relentless, as seven different running backs racked up 233 rushing yards and Burke scrambled for another 47 in the second half. Running Back Brandon Carrier ran the lead to 38-0 in an impressive Spears debut, and James Savoie returned one of his two interceptions 41 yards for the final Spears major of the day and a 46-3 victory.

Having faced Guelph in each of the last two Conference finals, Spears Head Coach Dave Howe was clearly pleased with the play of his team. "There was a lot to like today, two TDs from the defense, one from special teams and our defense was very aggressive". Howe was also very happy with the performance of quarterbacks Coutu and Burke, who both went 4/5 on the day. "Nick had a lot of poise and looked very confident out there today", said Howe. "It was also nice to be able to go to our bench early...we have so much depth at so many positions this year."

The Varsity squad (1-0) should be in for a tougher battle next Saturday as they host the Sault Ste. Marie Sabrecats (1-1) for a 3:00pm kick-off at West Park High School. "They had a very convincing win over Wentworth in week one", said Howe. "We'll need a good week of practice".

OFFENSIVE STATS - VARSITY

QB Nick Coutu: 4/5 passing for 61 yds, QB rating: 117.50

QB Evan Burke: 4/5 passing for 34 yds, 2 carries for 47 yds rushing, QB rating: 95.00

RB Rick Savage: 7 carries for 62 yds, 1 TD

RB Jerimy Hipperson: 3 carries for 52 yds, 2 TDs

RB Brandon Carrier: 7 carries for 42 yds, 1 TD

RB Jordan Barker: 7 carries for 27 yds, 1 TD

RB Nic Moreau: 6 carries for 23 yds, 1 TD

K Julian Tropea: 1/2 FGs, made from 18, missed from 14 yds

DEFENSIVE STATS - VARSITY

DL Steve Cecchini: 7½ tackles, 1½ sacks

DL Shane Baxter: 4½ tackles 1½ sacks

DB James Savoie: 3½ tackles, 2 INTs, 1 TD

LB Tyler DeMoel: 4 tackles, 1 INT, 1 TD

DB Sebastian Howard: 5½ tackles, 1 INT

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)682-3754 (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 may be found at www.ovfootball.ca.

Thank you for your continued support. For more information, please contact:

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