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Spears Upset Hamilton in OT Thriller (June 21, 2008)

The Niagara Varsity Spears kept their home-unbeaten streak alive Saturday, handing the Hamilton Ironmen their first loss of the 2008 Ontario Varsity Football League season. After an impressive second half comeback sent the game into overtime, Michael Fortino's 12-yard field goal gave the Spears a dramatic 20-17 win in front of approximately 400 fans at West Park in St. Catharines. In the earlier Junior game, the Spears played probably their best game of the year, but still fell to the Ironmen 21-16 in a see-saw battle.

In the Junior game, the teams traded TD passes in the first quarter, as Spears quarterback Matt Woehl connected with Chris Dalbianco on a 6-yard major to tie the game at 7. Dalbianco pulled down a second TD pass from 35 yards out in the second quarter to give the Spears a 13-7 halftime lead. The Ironmen took a 14-13 lead early in the third frame on Cole Henwood's 18-yard rushing touchdown. On Niagara's next possession, Mitchell McMullen's 30-yard field goal gave the lead back to the Spears 16-14. However, Ryan Silvestri's 6-yard rushing major in the final frame sealed the deal for Hamilton, who improved their record to 4-1 with the victory.

POST-GAME COMMENTS FROM SPEARS JUNIOR HEAD COACH BRIAN DUGUAY:

"You want to win every game, but I've got nothing but praise for these kids today. We had a banged up O-line and a depleted backfield, but they gave all they had and truly played four quarters for the first time all year. We always knew Matt (Woehl) had a strong arm and we all saw it today. 200+ passing yards, 2 TDs and no interceptions...you can't ask for much more than that. (Running back) Jordan Kewll also really stepped up for us today. He ran hard and picked some tough yards after contact. We've got a week off now to rest up and get ready for Ottawa on July 5th. We've got a tough schedule to close out the season (Ottawa, Essex and London), and we really need to take two out of three to get into the post-season. At least it's in our hands."

OFFENSIVE STATS - JUNIOR

QB Matt Woehl: 18/31 passing for 232 yds, 2 TDs
RB Jordan Kewll: 24 carries for 124 yds
WR Curtis Kelly: 11 catches for 151 yds
WR Daniel Tisi: 4 catches for 50 yds
WR Chris Dalbianco: 2 catches for 40 yds, 2 TDs
K Mitchell McMullen: 1/2 FG (made from 30, missed from 27), 1/2 PAT

DEFENSIVE STATS - JUNIOR

LB Jack Rush: 6 tackles, sack, batted ball
DL Ian Marouf: 6 tackles
DB Justin Hipperson: 2 tackles, interception returned 25 yds
LB Patrick Brunet: 4 tackles
DB Matt Furgiuele: 3½ tackles, batted ball
LB Brad Souter: 3½ tackles
DL Kevin Denhollander: 3½ tackles

Campbell's Player of the Game: QB Matt Woehl (Niagara), RB Ryan Silvestri (Hamilton)

In Varsity action, Hamilton kicker Danny Cerino's 18-yard field goal gave the Ironmen an early 3-0 lead. In the second quarter, running back Michael Corvalho ran untouched 25 yards into the end zone on a draw play to extend the Hamilton lead to 10-3. Francis Dibartolomeo then gave the Ironmen a 14-point halftime lead on his 4-yard rushing touchdown.

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It was a different Spears team in the second half however, as defensive adjustments effectively shut down the Hamilton offence. Niagara quarterback Nick Coutu, who felt pressure all day from a tough Ironmen defense, brought the Spears back to within a touchdown with his 45-yard TD strike to Michael Fortino late in the third quarter. The teams traded interceptions and several punts in the fourth quarter, before Coutu connected with Sir Winston Churchill teammate Gary Spero on a dramatic 28-yard TD pass with just 58 seconds left on the clock, tying the game at 17-17. Hamilton's last minute drive was snuffed out by a Jordan Duncan interception, sending the game into OT. On the first Ironmen possession, quarterback Mike Chase threw up three incomplete passes, one of which was nearly intercepted. Danny Cerino's 43-yard field goal attempt sailed wide right and was safely returned out of the end zone by the Spears. On the Niagara possession, running back Andrew Barry stormed over the Ironmen defense for 18 yards on the first play from scrimmage, and nibbled further yards on his next three carries. On third down, Spears kicker Michael Fortino made no mistake on a 12-yard field goal to keep Niagara's home-unbeaten streak alive at 21 games since coming into the League in 2005. For Hamilton, the game marked the first touchdown given up all season by their dominating defense.

POST-GAME COMMENTS FROM SPEARS VARSITY HEAD COACH DAVE HOWE:

"We knew we were in for a very tough game today; Hamilton has a lot of very talented players. I was really pleased with the adjustments we were able to make at halftime; we were able to take away some of their strengths. The players really stepped up in the second half. We maintained discipline and respect and you could feel the momentum starting to swing. We saw a ton of teamwork out there and we've had enough experience with overtime to know the importance of conditioning. Of course, there was a little adrenalin at work too. We've got two weeks off now (bye week, plus a forfeit against a folded Kingston team), so we just need to keep having good practices and keep getting better. We finish against Essex and London, so they will be good tests for the post-season."

Campbell's Player of the Game: LB Ryan Miller (Niagara), LB Anthony Bak (Hamilton)

OFFENSIVE STATS - VARSITY

QB Nick Coutu: 5/19 passing for 127 yds, 2 TDs, 1 interception

RB Andrew Barry: 20 carries for 101 yds

WR Gary Spero: 2 catches for 41 yards, 1 TD

WR Jon Quagliariello: 2 catches for 30 yds

WR/K Michael Fortino: 1 catch for 45 yds, 1 TD; 2/2 FG (made from 27, 12 yds), 2/2 PAT

WR Jake Harper: 1 catch for 24 yds

DEFENSIVE STATS - VARSITY

DB Ryan Miller: 9 tackles, 2 batted balls, 3 punt returns for 63 yds

LB Mike Millar: 5 tackles, 1 batted ball

LB Adam Grilj: 2½ tackles, 1 interception

DB Jordan Duncan: 2 tackles, 1 batted ball, 1 interception

DL Jordan Weldon: 4 tackles, 3 sacks

DB David Postman: 3½ tackles

NEXT UP: After the bye week, the Junior Spears (2-2-1) travel to Ottawa for a game against the Ottawa-Cumberland Panthers (5-0) on Saturday, July 5th. The Varsity Spears (4-1) are off until their road game at Essex (5-0) on July 12th. Both teams will finish the regular season at home with a doubleheader against the London Falcons on July 19th.

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.ovflontario.com (note new website address).

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

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