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Spears Bounced from Playoffs in Home Field Upset

For the second straight year, the Essex Ravens have bounced the Niagara Varsity Spears from the Ontario Varsity Football League playoffs, winning 10-7 at West Park on Saturday. After losing in triple overtime in last year's Conference final, the Spears looked to have turned the corner with a decisive 35-15 regular season win in Essex just two weeks ago. But five Niagara turnovers and a conservative, mistake-free Essex offense gave the underdog Ravens the edge they needed.

A 25-yard field goal from Ravens kicker Josh Willis gave Essex an early 3-0 lead. In the second quarter, Dave Daliasi scored the Ravens' only touchdown, running into the end zone from 16 yards out, giving Essex a 10-0 halftime lead. Niagara came out strong in the third quarter, as quarterback Nick Coutu capped a 78-yard drive with a 3-yard rushing major. Trailing 10-7 in the fourth quarter, the Spears mounted another impressive 80-yard drive, but came away empty-handed when running back Andrew Barry coughed up the ball on the Ravens goal line. After an Essex punt, Niagara's comeback hopes were snuffed out for good when Nick Coutu's pass was picked off by the Ravens. The loss brought a dramatic end to the Varsity Spears' 21-game unbeaten streak at West Park.

"Our guys played a good game, but it was too little too late", said Spears Head Coach Dave Howe after the game. "Essex did to us what we usually do to other teams, forcing turnovers and playing good, disciplined football". Ravens Head Coach Glen Mills admitted his team had to be nearly perfect to beat the Spears at home. "Our whole game plan was built on taking the ball away when we had the chance and not turning it over", said Mills. "The turnovers were 5-0 in our favour and it was still only a three point game. It was a great fight for field position".

Coach Howe has no regrets on his squad's 7-2 season. "We had a very young team this year, but we saw a tremendous amount of growth. They certainly exceeded expectations", said Howe. "We'll have about 35 players coming back next year, so we'll hopefully be able to pick up where we left off. We already have a great team atmosphere".

Campbell's Player of the Game: DL Andrew Buzzeo (Essex) WR Gary Spero (Niagara)

OFFENSIVE STATS - VARSITY

QB Nick Coutu: 7/17 passing for 128 yds, 2 interceptions; 9 carries for 31 yds, 1 TD

RB Andrew Barry: 20 carries for 79 yds

RB Kyle Danyluk: 5 carries for 25 yds

WR Gary Spero: 4 catches for 72 yds

WR Jake Harper: 2 catches for 37 yds

WR/K Michael Fortino: 1 catch for 13 yds; 0/1 FG (miss from 54 yds), 1/1 PAT

DEFENSIVE STATS - VARSITY

DE Zack Davis: 9 tackles

DB Jon Candeloro: 7 tackles

LB Josh Hipperson: 4½ tackles

LB Ryan Saunders: 4½ tackles

LB David Postman: 4 tackles

LB Adam Grilj: 4 tackles

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**).

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

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