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## SPORTS

# Gonzaga girls grab flag football title

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By: David Winer

**November 10, 2007** - A steady drizzle coupled with a muddy field at the Mississauga Valleys created a perfect backdrop yesterday for Region of Peel Secondary School Athletic Association's (ROPSSAA) reigning cats and dogs fighting it out for the Tier I flag football championship. In the end, the defending Tier II champion Bulldogs from St. Aloysius Gonzaga prevailed 8-6 over last year's Tier I champion Jaguars from John Fraser in a titanic defensive battle that deserved two winners.

"We wanted it way more," said winning Grade 11 quarterback Stephanie Lemaza, who has guided the Bulldogs for three years. "We felt like we were destined." John Fraser co-coach Joe Mandarino didn't have a better explanation.

"The two teams were evenly matched on both sides of the ball," said Mandarino, whose troops came away 19-7 winners in a match between the same teams earlier this season. "If we played again, maybe the outcome would flip again."

After praising both teams' efforts, Mandarino took time to console one of his players, who's accustomed to seeing gold around her neck, rather than silver.

"Hold your chin up," he said. "We'll be back next year."

Considering the Jaguars, Bulldogs and Tier II winners Lorne Park Spartans all come from the dominant South Division, Mandarino's words held a ring of legitimacy.

The Jaguars were the better team in the first half.

Assorted backfield formations, coupled with outstanding running by John Fraser quarterback Leah Urquhart and Lisa Belbeck kept the Bulldogs off balance.

After a long pass to Sheraine Henry, Urquhart eventually put the Jags in front by evading a tackler and scoring on a 10-yard quarterback sneak. However, the Jaguars' convert attempt failed.

The Bulldogs appeared to even the score in the second quarter when Lauren Leon put the finishing touches on a 50-yard hook-and-ladder play, but the officials blew an "inadvertent whistle," that left the play dead.

"Unfortunately, the referee could have made a difference in the game (had we not scored)," explained Bulldogs' coach Joanna McNish. "He called the play early. It was an honest mistake."

Luckily for all concerned, the Bulldogs scored in the third quarter when Lemaza rolled out left on an option play before pitching the ball to Keesha Danso-Dapaah, who used her speed to earn the final few yards.

It was once again Lemaza connecting with Danso-Dapaah for the two-point convert when Lemaza, this time, rolled out right and threw a perfect spiral to the open receiver.

"The play we ran was not the play we called. But I rolled right and I gunned it to her," said Lemaza. "It was extremely tough, especially since I threw it on my back foot."

For Danso-Dapaah, it was a week she will never forget, after winning the provincial cross-country championship last weekend in Niagara Falls.

"Both (wins) are pretty sweet," she said. "But when you win as a team there's more people to celebrate with."


And from that go-ahead score, the Gonzaga defence took over with Andrea Childs making two timely interceptions and the Bulldog D-line of Camille Diullio, Natalie Stradiotto and Nicki Commisso applying steady pressure on a chewed up field that made the footing treacherous.

The Spartans defeated Brampton Centennial Bucks 18-7 in the Tier II final on touchdowns by Rebecca McTavish, Denise Thompson and Nicole Wedlock.


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Staff photo by Rob Beintema  
The Gonzaga Bulldogs won the Tier I Flag Football championship over the John Fraser Jaguars in a final game at the Mississauga Valleys football field yesterday.



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