



## 2023 Player and Parent Handbook

Welcome to the 19th season of Niagara Spears Football!!!! The purpose of this handbook is to provide players and parents with the who, what, where, when, why of the coming season, along with a clear picture of what you can expect from the Spears and what your team expects from its players and families. While we have tried to anticipate most questions, emerging issues will be addressed in newsletters located at [www.niagaraspears.ca](http://www.niagaraspears.ca)

### A Brief History

The Niagara Varsity Football Club was formed as a non-profit corporation in 2003 with a goal of fielding a Junior Varsity (16 & under) football team in the Ontario Varsity Football League. The NVFC, in conjunction with the Region's Minor and High School programs, is committed to building bridges of opportunity through football for the youth of the Niagara Region. A Junior Varsity Niagara Spears team took the field for the first time in 2004. A Varsity squad was added in 2005, turning heads across the province as they stormed their way to an OVFL Championship in just their first season of competition. The Bantam Spears team played their first OVFL game during the 2010 Season. The Niagara Varsity Football Club made another expansion in 2014 by entering a Senior Varsity team into the Ontario Minor Football League, and now have 3 competing teams in the Ontario Summer Football League.

### COACHES

We are very fortunate that so many outstanding football coaches from across the Region have stepped forward to assist with this year's teams. Coaching staffs are once again committed to a "program" approach in conditioning, practice structure, drills, even play calling. The consistency of having all four teams working together whenever possible will help ensure a smooth transition for players as they move from U14 to U16 to U18.

#### Varsity:

Head Coach Brian Duguay

Team Manager Stephanie Schryer

#### Junior Varsity

Head Coach TBA

Team Manager TBA

#### Bantam

Head Coach Austin Huh

Team Manager TBA

### Team Fees

2023 player fees are \$825.00

\$300.00 non-refundable tryout fee is payable at registration.

\$525.00 season fees are payable no later than May 4, 2023.

Players will not participate in games until full team fees have been paid.

The Cost PER Football Player:  
(Season Fees breakdown):

Banquet \$35

Player Team Photo \$12 Practice Jersey \$44

League Fees \$62

Officials/Score Keeper \$67

Coach Bus to and from all away games \$170 Field Rentals \$310

Trainer Fees \$118 Team Polo \$37

Equipment & Equipment Maintenance \$164

Total: \$1, 019.00

What Players pay: \$825.00

Difference that must be made up from fundraising and sponsorship PER player: \$194 X 150 players = \$29, 100.00 PER SEASON!

Niagara Spears does everything possible to keep fees for players at a low cost to make it affordable for everyone, we are unable to operate without our fundraisers and sponsorship and encourage everyone to participate to help us, help you.

Volunteering is highly encouraged, we do not expect or wish for parents to volunteer during their own athletes home game, however if parents could assist with at least one home game (Gate, 50/50, BBQ) and contribute to the success and popularity of our game day that would be fantastic. High school students earning their community service hours are more than welcome.

*The Niagara Spears is now implementing a Volunteer Bond, all parents must issue a post dated cheque or pre-authorization form for \$100 to the registrar or volunteer coordinator prior to the beginning of the season, once a family has completed the minimum of 6 hours, parents will than be issued their bond back at the end of that month. If a parent wishes to opt out of volunteering a \$100 payment can be made.*

Our athletic therapists utilize the resources from Football Canada for Concussion Return to Play ([www.thinkfirst.ca](http://www.thinkfirst.ca)). Ontario Football Association requires all team staff to participate in Safe Sport training as well as Making Headway Training. Niagara Spears also abides by Rowen's Law. All athletes, parents, coaches, officials, spectators are responsible for recognizing and reporting athletes who demonstrate signs of head injury or who report concussion symptoms. We also have the Player Code of Conduct resource from [coach.ca](http://coach.ca) available for coaches and their athletes.

#### Removal-from-Sport Protocol

An athlete is immediately removed from further training, practice or game if the athlete is suspected of having sustained a concussion, and the parent or guardian is informed of the removal. Once removed from activity due to concussion symptoms or declaration, the athlete is not permitted to return to training, practice, or game until cleared by a medical doctor and than our athletic therapist utilizing the return to play protocol. Emergency medical services will be activated where there is loss of consciousness or where a more serious head or spine injury are suspected.

#### Return-to-Play Protocol

Return to school strategy and return to sport strategy ([www.thinkfirst.ca](http://www.thinkfirst.ca) six steps; attached) are implemented and discussion with Athletic Therapist will be regular. Return to sport does not occur until medical clearance is provided in writing by the athlete's physician and the athletic therapist provides assessment and clearance for return to play.

## Player Evaluations

More than 100 prospects are likely to participate in each team's evaluations. A player's athleticism, football skills and experience will naturally factor into the team selection process. However, the Niagara Spears coaching staff unanimously believe that these are not the only qualities, or even the most important qualities that we seek in a successful player. Football skills, knowledge of plays and formations, even athletic ability and aggressiveness can be taught and developed. First and foremost, the Niagara Spears coaching staff will be watching for "coachability indicators", including positive attitude, work ethic, leadership potential, self-discipline, ability to follow directions, team focused behavior and heart. Needless to say, commitment to attendance at practices will also be an important factor. All of the time and energy of our coaching staffs, particularly during the six week evaluation period, will be devoted to player development and assessment. The cooperation of parents and families is sought in providing coaches with a necessary level of "insulation" from issues not related to these priorities. In the event a concern is identified, players are encouraged as a first option to discuss and resolve issues directly with their coaches. Parents with issues that cannot be appropriately addressed at the player/coach level may request an appointment through the Governor. We would also ask that parents/family/fans please respect our "24 hour cool -off policy". Please wait a minimum 24 hours after a game or practice before approaching coaches with "constructive criticisms" or concerns. In terms of assigned positions, we hope that players and families alike will respect that in all cases; decisions will be made with the best interests of the team in mind. Given the depth of our rosters, there will be minimal need for players to play both ways. However, in light of possible injuries, vacation or other unavoidable absences, and to increase the flexibility with which players are deployed, all players will be asked to learn and be comfortable playing at least one and possibly two additional positions, to ensure depth at each position.

It must be stressed that all the Niagara Spears teams are elite teams representing the best the Niagara Region has to offer. Expectations of "equal playing time" or the presumption that all players will participate in a given game are unrealistic. That being said, the coaching staff will, in the interest of developing fundamentally sound players, make every reasonable effort to ensure that all players see the field during game situations.

## 2023 FOOTBALL CODE OF CONDUCT

**General:** No player will participate in a game until all eligibility forms and fees have been completed, signed and given to the Governor

**Registration/Fees:** Before a player receives Spears equipment, he must be paid in full. No player will participate in a contact practice unless that player has full equipment. Before a player may participate in an indoor or outdoor workout, he must pay the tryout fee of \$300.00 non refundable fee, \$100 volunteer bond and \$400.00 equipment deposit.

Misconduct will be dealt with at the Coaches discretion with the support and assistance of the Niagara Spears Executive. Discipline can include, but not limited to:

- a- Automatic dismissal
- b- 3 strikes your out – players will receive no more than two warnings by the head coach due to misconduct. The third incident will result in the player being dismissed from the team.
- c- Equipment Abuse (throwing helmet 1st time =warning, 2nd time = game suspension) Other equipment abuse will be dealt with by a warning for a first offense followed by a penalty for second and reduced playing privileges for a third.

d- Verbal misconduct – excessive use of vulgarity or searing will be dealt with through warning, penalty or reduced playing privileges.

#### Alcohol/Drugs:

Zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs. Any player involved in any use of alcohol or drugs during a Spears game, practice or outing will be terminated immediately.

#### Theft:

Any player found or seen taking other players' belongings or Spears property without permission will be terminated immediately.

#### Grievances:

Any player who feels he has a legitimate grievance will approach:

1st his positional coach, 2nd coordinator, 3rd head coach, 4th Governor in a professional manner outside of the game time. The player will not complain to team-mates during games or practice. The issue will be dealt with one on one with the appropriate party. Complaints Officer is also available as a last resort.

#### Cell phones:

No use of cell phones or any other electronic communication device will be permitted during practice or games, unless authorized by the head coach.

#### Transportation:

##### Away games:

All players are to arrive at the bus pick up (Seymour Hannah Sportsplex- just out front of the Kiwanis Field) 30 minutes prior to departure. All players must travel with the team on the bus to the game wearing the provided team polo, and the team designated short color. No hats are permitted unless it is a NIAGARA SPEARS team hat. Players may make other arrangements for their travels home only after confirming with and signing the alternate transportation form with the Team Manager. Misconduct (swearing, littering and vandalizing the bus) will result in penalty, and or reduced playing time. Team Captains are responsible to see that the bus is left in appropriate condition.

##### Home Games:

Players are to arrive at the field 2 hours prior to game time wearing the provided team polo and the team designated short color. No hats are permitted unless it is a NIAGARA SPEARS team hat.

Unexcused lateness – any player who arrives after designated meeting time with unexcused lateness will not play in the first half of that game. Excused lateness – any player who arrives after designated meeting time with excused lateness will need to inform the Team Manager 24 hours before the game.

#### Game Day:

##### League Rules

1. Helmet is the only headwear you are allowed to wear. No other headwear (do rags or head bands)
2. Helmets on during handshake
3. Jerseys not to be taped up at back
4. All equipment (knee,hips and tails) must be on during game.

5. Only clear eye shields are allowed to be used. No tint is allowed unless a note from a ophthalmologist (notes from optometrist are not accepted)
6. No metal spikes
7. Any combination of 3 Objectionable Conduct (OC) or Unnecessary Roughness (UR) means you are gone for the rest of the game you are playing in as well as the next one.
8. No Fighting.

#### SPEARS Rules

1. Any player who gets any combination of 2 OC's or UR's is gone for the rest of the game they are playing in.
2. Any excessive lack of discipline (fighting, challenging opponent's bench, challenging or disrespect of coaching staff or support staff, verbal abuse of officials) will result in suspension from game and or team.

#### Social Media – Players and Parents

The use of SOCIAL MEDIA including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snap Chat, All Canadian Gridiron in any form of negatively towards the Spears Organization, players, parents, Board of Directors, OSFL and any other teams or players within the OSFL will be dealt with in accordance to the Misconduct Policy.

Practice Attendance: Will be taken at each practice

Lateness: all players late for practice will do penalty endurance work during practice. It is hard to run a practice with players being late.

Persistent lateness: will result in a reduction of playing privileges.

Poor Attitude and Effort: will not be tolerated! Warning, penalty and/or reduced playing privileges. Missed

Practice: for every missed practice, you miss a quarter, players must attend all practices to start in the following game.

Unexcused Absence: one unexcused absence will result in suspension for the first half of the following game.

Two unexcused absences will result in suspension of the following game. Players need to contact the team Governor when going to be absent from a practice/ game by text, phone call, Facebook or email no later than 1 hour before the start of the practice. Players who are unable to practice due to injury must attend practice and must report to Head Coach and Therapist with a doctor's note. Players who fail to do this will have playing privileges reduced.

Misconduct in Practice: Any misconduct in practice toward a coach or staff member could result in one of the following

1. Warning

2 Endurance work

3 Player being dismissed from practice which will be treated as an unexcused absence from practice 4 game suspension

5 dismissed from team

Sidelined Players at Practice: Require a doctor's note. Players will stay with their unit during practice. Player will stay in designated area during contact drills and 12 on 12. Player will take mental reps and will not be disruptive.

## Equipment:

With the exception of cleats, most football equipment is provided (Players electing to wear any of their own equipment require advance inspection/approval of coaching staff). With each set of equipment valued at over \$800, we expect that appropriate respect will be shown regarding its care and maintenance. Players/parents are responsible for keeping equipment tight, and for bringing problems or deficiencies to the attention of coaching staff. A post-dated (September 1, 2019) cheque for \$400.00 is required before equipment will be released to a player. A detailed inventory will be signed by each player. All Spears equipment will be handed in following the last game of the season –no exceptions. The Post- Dated cheque will be returned or destroyed once the equipment has been handed it. Players/parents will be responsible for equipment that is lost and/or damaged through negligence.

Belt – \$10.00

Tail Pad – \$10.00

Hip Pads- \$10.00

Knee Pads -\$10.00

Helmet - \$300.00

Jersey (Each) - \$115.00

Shoulder Pads - \$200.00

Pants - \$65.00

## Practice Uniform and Equipment

Players must not wear any game uniform attire during practice (jersey – pants) Practice jerseys must be worn along with practice pants during the practice. All equipment (knee, thigh, hip, tailbone, shoulder pads, helmet and mouth guard) must be worn during practices If the above points are not followed: players will not practice in contact drills, the player will do endurance work while rest of team is doing contact drills and the player will be considered not participating at practice and will miss the first quarter of the next game.

Nothing is more important than the safety and well being of our players. The Niagara Spears have extended the OSFL rule which ensures qualified medical personnel at each home and away game to include practices, as well. It is the responsibility of parents and players to ensure that a player's health card (or copy) is available at all practices and games. We want nothing to compromise a player's ability to receive immediate care. Completion in full of a Spears medical history form is mandatory. Please advise the Head Coach, Team Manager and member of our athletic therapy staff ASAP of any urgent medical concerns/issues

League insurance (that is obtained through the OFA's National Registry) may cover some or all of the cost of some treatments and/or prosthetics/braces. Players should also be aware that the leagues we participate in have committed to the implementation of a drug testing program for both performance-enhancing and recreational drugs. While the League has yet to inform teams as to the start date for random testing, more information will be provided as it is received from the League. Any player getting injured during a practice or game will have to follow the directive of the Trainer or Therapist. These directives may include the request of a doctor's visit and or note, and the inability to participate in practices and or games. Any player getting injured outside of practice or game time will be required to report to the Head Coach, Team Manger plus the Trainer and/or therapist to discuss treatment requirements. Full co-operation with the directives of the Trainer and /or Therapist is also required.

## Spirit Wear

Official Niagara Spears Spirit Wear is available through The Niagara Spears, any Spirit wear produced without the approval of the Niagara Spears Board of Directors is PROHIBITED

## Sponsors

As an organization, we would not be able to offer our players all that we do, while keeping costs reasonable, without the generous support of our community partners. Some of this year's sponsors have been with us since the beginning. We have appreciated those family members who have either sponsored or referred us to potential sponsors. We have a variety of mutually beneficial sponsorship packages available to promote businesses from across the Region. We are currently offering our Spears Sponsors Program which is designed to promote the Spears Football Organization within the Niagara Region while at the same time, earning dollars off your registration fees.

## RECAP

Niagara Spears Team Rules Together we stand Together we fall

Above all, we encourage the players to try their BEST and have FUN. Be it in football or in life, you'll enjoy it best, if you always give it your best.

1. Players who quit the team are responsible for notifying the head coach and team manager.
2. Show Respect to your Coaches, Team Manager, Medical Staff, Executive and your fellow teammates.
3. Proper Language at all times.
4. Practice is necessary for Team and individual success, players are expected to attend every practice on time unless they have contacted the head coach prior to that practice.
5. Report any injury of any type to your positional coach, who will notify the head coach, and report to Therapist.
6. Proper Dress for all away and home games Team Polo and black pants or shorts. No baseball hats.
7. Players are to report to all away games 30 minutes before the time indicated. The bus will leave on time and there will be no stopping for pickups.
8. The Team uniform is to be worn for all games, shirts tuck in and game socks pulled up.
9. Team uniform is to be cleaned for all games.
10. Respect is a must during all Spears outings.
11. Captains are to ensure that the bus is clean at the end of the trip.
12. Captains are to ensure that at the end of the game the change room is clean and all items are accounted for.
13. No doo rags or skullcaps this is an OSFL rule.
14. If you miss more than one practice in a week, you will sit the next game.
15. No derogatory posts on social media- be mindful that once you post something it's there forever, Post Secondary Schools and Employers check.
16. If you are unable to play / practice, you must still participate in the game / practice by staying near your positional coach to hear what he has to offer to the team.
17. Any player who is caught with Alcohol or Illegal substance will be asked to leave the respected team.
18. You must eat and hydrate well.
19. During games (including halftime), please remain on the spectator side of the field; please stay off of the concrete area in front of change rooms and by bathroom, this area needs to remain clear in case of emergencies.
20. Check the website and communication groups daily for updates on practices and other important info; if a practice is canceled it will be posted there. Please don't message us asking, we will let you know as soon as we know!

FEAR the SPEAR

Cheer loudly, but verbal/physical abuse of officials, players or coaches will not be tolerated;



I hereby acknowledge that I and my athlete have read and understand the 2019 Player and Parent Handbook. I understand that by signing this by myself and my athlete will adhere to the rules of the Niagara Spears.

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Parent Signature

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Player Signature

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Team Manager Signature

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Date