

St. Max falls just short of YRAA football Championship



By Jake Courtepatte

The St. Maximilian Kolbe Mustangs were riding a high heading into the York Region Athletic Association championship weekend on Saturday, after a string of strong starts made them a contender in only their fifth year.

The fourth-ranked Mustangs got to play in front of a raucous home crowd in Aurora, taking on the second-ranked St. Joan of Arc Thunder for the Tier II YRAA Championship.

The first real scoring opportunity of the game favoured the Thunder, late in the first quarter in the red zone.

However, an interception in the end zone gave the momentum back to the Mustangs after a scoreless first quarter.

After another interception at the St. Max thirty-yard line on a tipped ball, the Mustangs slowly moved the chains for a first down on the opponent's twenty.

After a dropped pass, the Mustangs moved to first-and-goal on a completed pass by Ben Langlois.

The first score of the game came on the next play, a five-yard reception by Jacob Fenchak for the major to put St. Max up 7 ? 0 heading into halftime.

After a third-quarter rushing touchdown by the Thunder tied the game at seven, the Mustangs looked to close out the game in regulation time.

St. Max tried to get into field goal range with under a minute to go in the fourth, but a string of penalties pushed them back to force a punt.

The Mustangs won the coin toss in the overtime period, electing to go on defence first. Starting from their own 35-yard line, the Thunder moved the chains enough to kick a field goal, forcing St. Max to match or better their score on the next drive.

More penalty trouble put the home team in a third-and-long situation, when a long bomb by the quarterback to the three-yard line went incomplete to end the game.

?Overall, a great game played by our boys. We only had four grade twelve's on this team, and only two playing in this game. We're

obviously a very young team, so our future is very bright," said Coach Joe Gaudio.

"We're a little on the small side, and a little inexperienced, but we got better and better each week."

With more experience came a more confident football squad.

"We corralled that and went in strong into the playoffs."

The Mustangs were faced with a difficult challenge in the playoffs right out of the gate, meeting the top-ranked Markham Marauders in the semifinal matchup. The unbeaten Marauders squeaked out a 14 - 13 victory over the Mustangs in the regular season's final game.

After allowing a touchdown on the game's opening drive, St. Max then rallied for a flurry of points to dominate the game 29 - 7.

Gaudio claims the youthfulness of his team may have helped them overcome any intimidation they may have felt facing the powerhouse Markham team.

"Sometimes when you go into big games like that when you're so young, you don't fear very much," said Gaudio. "There weren't many expectations for us at the beginning of the year, so the kids showed a lot of guts making it this far."

In the offseason, Gaudio and the program are looking for assistant coaches to help field teams at both a senior and junior level. In the meantime, St. Max's young team can only gain more experience after a successful season.

"Our future looks very bright in football here at St. Max."