

# Saunders anchors title win

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Ryan Saunders would be the first to admit he wasn't at his best in last year's Varsity 1 15-14 championship game victory over Stamford.

The six-foot, 210-pound middle linebacker tore the MCL in his left knee in the third game of the season and never did return to full health.

"When I got the OK to play -- or sort of the OK to play in the championship game -- I went in and played defence," the 18-year-old said. "I gave it my all, but I don't think I was 100%."



It was a different story Friday in the championship game rematch at Stamford. The Grade 12 student led his team in tackles and blocked well at fullback, helping the Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs build a 28-1 half-time lead en route to a 49-22 triumph. It was the St. Catharines school's third straight Varsity 1 crown.

"Three in a row. I guess it doesn't get any better than that unless we would have won all five years I was here," Saunders said with a laugh.

For Bulldogs coach Peter Partridge, defensive players don't get much better than Saunders.

"He had a phenomenal game," he said. "This is his third year as captain and he's been a leader for a long time.

"The team rises around him and he's an anchor back there at middle linebacker."

Longtime Bulldogs assistant coach Steve Cook called the 2009 Churchill defence the best he's ever coached, and the statistics back it up. Heading into Friday's final, the Bulldogs had held opponents to an average of 5.9 points a game while their potent offence scored 38.5 a game.

That defence was on full display in the first half of the championship game, holding the Hornets to three first downs and 58 net yards of offence.

"I thought we had a great second half, but the first half killed us," Hornets coach Brad Martin said.

"They have a great O (offensive) line and a great D (defensive) line, and that was the difference in the game."

The Hornets hurt themselves in the first half with penalties that made first downs hard to come by and stalled drives.

"The first half, I think we just put them on a pedestal," Hornets running back Robbie Farquharson said. "We came into the game thinking they were better than us and we got down early.

"It was tough to come back."

The 5-foot-9 185-pounder, who finished the game with 29 carries for 233 yards, scored on electrifying touchdown runs of 80 and 45 yards in the second half to help Stamford record the biggest points total allowed by Churchill all season.

"We came out really focused and played extremely well on defence," Partridge said. "Robbie Farquharson is a great player. What can you do?"

"They made some adjustments, he found some holes and when you give him an inch, he's gone." Martin described Farquharson as one of the best players he has coached.

"He's unreal. He's a very special athlete with a bright future and we will miss him," Martin said. Farquharson will move on to university football and he departs Stamford with no regrets.

"This is a great way to end," the 18-year-old said. "We knew it was going to be a tough season and it would be tough to get here.

"Second place isn't bad in this division."

Martin expects to field an excellent team next season and his young squad will lose just four or five players.

The Bulldogs will also be strong. They will lose several key players, including Saunders, but will be anchored by the return of receiver Max Cameron (seven catches for 118 yards and two TD receptions), running back Alex Christie (125 rushing yards and three majors) and Grade 11 quarterback Andrew Krzeczkowski.

"We have some big building blocks, but it will depend on if some of our big linemen come back and if the young kids work hard in the off-season," Partridge said.

The Bulldogs have the possibility of returning upwards of 60 players, but will likely return 40 or so for a run at a fourpeat.

It would be wise not to bet against them.

"It's the commitment the coaches show and the players, too," Saunders said.

"Once you have a winning program, all the kids want to come here to play."