



# Blue Devils' Gamble pays off in CPSL final

*Local striker nets golden goal to clinch crown*

By Jon Kuiperij  
BEAVER SPORTS EDITOR

When Ryan Gamble joined the Oakville Blue Devils, he simply wanted to be part of the Canadian Professional Soccer Club's inaugural season and help bring the team's young players along.

He certainly ended up contributing a lot more than that.

Gamble scored in extra time of Monday's CPSL final at Esther Shiner Stadium in North York, lifting the Blue Devils to a 2-1 win over the Vaughan Shooters and giving the first-year squad the league championship.

"Oakville is such a soccer community and... it makes it even more special that I live in Oakville and could help the team by scoring a very important goal," said the 32-year-old Gamble, who immigrated to Oakville from South Africa when he was eight years old. "I've had a few (golden goals) but it was probably the biggest golden goal I've ever scored."

Gabriel Pop, the league's second-leading goal scorer this season, set up the play with a pass just outside the 18-yard-box. Gamble blasted a shot past Shooters keeper Brian Bowes and into the top-left corner of the net.

"I think it was very fitting for Ryan. He's been a model professional and an inspiration to our younger players," Blue Devils coach Duncan Wilde said. "You couldn't write the script any better for a local boy who came in once we had the squad in place and said 'If you'll have me, I'd like to be part of this and maybe I can help you.' It was a great moment for him."

Making the goal even more special for Gamble, is that it came in the final game of his 14-year

CPSL career. The striker, who has had knee surgery four times in his life, recently told Wilde that he would not return to the league next year.

"It's bitter-sweet but there's nothing better than going out by scoring a golden goal to win a championship for your hometown," Gamble said.

The league championship capped off an emotional week for the Blue Devils. Oakville appeared to clinch the Western Conference regular-season crown last Sunday (Oct. 2) with a 0-0 tie against the Hamilton Thunder at Bronte Athletic Field, but unknowingly used an ineligible player that game and was given a forfeit loss several days later by the league.

That meant the Blue Devils had to play a quarter-final game against the Windsor Border Stars (a game they won 3-1), then face Hamilton in the semifinal (a game they won 2-0) to reach the title match.

"I told the guys to look at it as a positive thing. It was a blessing in disguise, it put a flame underneath us," said Oakville captain Phil Ionadi. "I honestly believe that was the ignition for us to go and show why we should be champions. Against Windsor, we probably played our best game of the season."

The Blue Devils carried that momentum through to the semifinal, where they dominated the Thunder, and into the championship game against the favoured Shooters. Vaughan finished 13 points ahead of Oakville in regular-season play, boasting a record of 16-3-3.

Stalin Cardenas gave the Shooters a 1-0 lead in the final, scoring from 30 yards out in the 37th minute, but Sergio De Luca replied for Oakville three minutes into the second half.

"We changed a couple of personnel and tried to play a little higher up the field," Wilde said of his team's halftime adjustments. "I thought we were inviting them upon us... and knew if we went down 2-0 it would be difficult to come back

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WILLIAM MEIJER / SPECIAL TO OAKVILLE BEAVER

**OUT OF MY WAY:** Paul Daccobert of the Oakville Blue Devils (in blue) fends off the challenge of Vaughan Shooters' Danny Sanna during Monday's Canadian Professional Soccer League championship game at North York's Esther Shiner Stadium. The Blue Devils' Ryan Gamble scored a golden goal 10 minutes into extra time, giving Oakville the championship in its inaugural season of CPSL competition.

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