

## Local girl, 8, wins NFL game contest

Written by Deborah M. Marko

Oct. 31, 2013 |

thedailyjournal.com

Pleased with the prototype, Sarah packed it up and her mom mailed it to the NFL.

“She always comes up with good ideas,” Cheryl Hullihen said. “She’s creative.”

Sarah was feeling confident.

“She wrote in her journal that she entered this contest, followed by ‘I might win the grand prize’ ” Cheryl Hullihen said. “She’s just a character.”

A few weeks ago, the NFL contacted Sarah to invite her to New York. As one of the three finalists, she was asked to pitch her idea to a VIP panel.

Sarah’s dad drove her up to New York, leaving Sunday.

“He knows more about football than I do,” Cheryl Hullihen said, joking she didn’t want to be in a position where she didn’t recognize someone famous.

On the day leading up the presentation, the father and daughter spent time visiting the Central Park Zoo, Times Square and Toys “R” Us. On Tuesday, it was Sarah’s time to shine.

Finalists were called into a room to present their concept to a panel of judges that included Johanna Faries, NFL director of Fan Strategy and Marketing.

Cheryl Hullihen, a science teacher at Absegami High School, was in her classroom while her daughter was making her mark.

“I was pretty nervous for her all day. I knew she was going to do fine,” Cheryl Hullihen said.

Sarah admitted she’s pretty good when it comes to public speaking. When making her presentation, she asked for a volunteer to play the game with her. She got New York Jets wide receiver Santonio Holmes, who drew a card that had him doing squats.

Presentations were limited to a quarter-hour but Sarah didn’t need that long to sell her idea.

“Fifteen minutes is a long time to talk,” she said.

Waiting for the judges to deliberate, Sarah said, “I knew I would win.”

When the finalists were called back in the room, she decided to hedge her bet.

“I crossed my fingers behind my back,” she said.

When her name was called, she bounded across the room and jumped into her father’s arms.

Sarah plans to use her prize money to take her family to Punta Cana. Her mother laughed, noting Sarah will likely book the trip on the Internet and have a car pull up to whisk the family to the airport.

The NFL plans to stay in touch with Sarah as they consider producing the game and taking it to market.

Cheryl Hulihan called the experience an amazing one.

“I was just trying to keep her busy during the summer,” she said.

Sarah’s applying her Make it to the Top game title to her professional life as well.

What’s next for this ambitious young lady?

Throwing arms out wide, she said, “Mayor, governor, congresswoman and then the first female Jewish president of the United States.”